POST-COLD WAR RUSSIAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY UNTIL 2018

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Abstract

This article outlines the main course of action in Russian foreign policy following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The article especially focuses on post-Soviet countries and bilateral relations with Russia, applying realist and liberal analyses of Russian struggle for regional hegemony.

Keywords: foreign policy, Russia, neighbourhood.

Introduction

Mankind has witnessed one of the most shocking events of the human history in 1991. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a superpower, had gradually sacrificed its satellite states to the West and calmly gave a way to its collapse. In Henry A. Kissinger's words "I thought I would see the collapse of the satellite empire. I did not think the Soviet Union would collapse or the Soviet system would collapse…"[1] Disintegration has occurred in a period when the attitude towards the USSR and its leadership on the part of a significant portion of elite and public opinion in the West was more favorable than ever due to the domestic and foreign policies of Gorbachev. As a result of the smooth collapse, fifteen new republics have emerged out of Soviet ashes being so neophyte to the capitalist world order. As part of the Soviet Union, those fifteen countries were tightly woven into a single system in all sectors ranging from production to security[2]. These interdependencies had been difficult to unravel, causing further misery and impoverishment in the post-Soviet states.

However, one particular post-Soviet state, namely Russian Federation felt most humiliated in the face of Western 'victory'. Even though Russia inherited all positions (i.e. UN Security Council permanent membership) left from the USSR, it lost its former power and honour, during 1990s, mainly because of the transition period to capitalism that characterized by economic struggle within the country (i.e. high inflation rate, deterioration of quality of life, product/supply shortages etc.). Russia under presidency of Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) went for privatization of state companies, especially for energy liberalization. However, Russia failed to achieve growth for consecutive 6 years in which GDP decline ranged between 3.0% and 14.5% annually. In 1994 the adjusted Russian GDP was US$ 4,573 per capita, approximately 19% of that of the United States[3]. Moreover, from about 1991 to 1998 Russia lost nearly 30%

[1] "Henry A. Kissinger Looks Back on the Cold War." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 4 Nov. 2014.
[2] Ciprian, Bordei. "Russian neighbourhood policy" *Center for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning,* 2013, pp. 5.
[3] "Economic History of the Russian Federation." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 23 Sept. 2018.

of its real GDP.[4] In 1993, constitutional crisis, on the other hand, occurred in Russia between Boris Yeltsin and Soviet style Russian Parliament that led to Yeltsin's consolidation of power through a new constitution in which strong presidential system was introduced. While Russia was going through economic and political difficulties, the first Chechen War (1994-1996) erupted plunging Russia's Caucasian borders into insecurity, meanwhile adding up another threat to the national security.

It was not until the presidency of Vladimir Putin that Russia started to experience a rapid economic growth thanks to the policies carried out and Putin's vision. Putin believed that in order to be a major power, state must have a stable source of budget which then seen to be the energy (carbohydrates: gas, oil etc.). Putin aimed at consolidating state ownership of shares of the major energy companies such as Gazprom, Rosneft and Transneft to increase government revenues which was further achieved by global surge of energy prices in 2000s. In 2015, 30% of the RF consolidated budget revenues and over 50% of the federal revenues fall to the share of oil and gas revenues.[5]

By looking at domestic setting/situation during 1990s, it is discernable that why Russia fell short of playing as a major power in international relations through actively participating in and funding alliance creation which became the case in the following decades.

Continuous Russian Interest in the post-Soviet Space

All Russian prominent figures, even liberal and Western-centered Andrei Kozyrev (former Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1991 and 1996), converged on the idea of inviolability of Russian interests in near abroad (post-Soviet countries) and idea that Russia shall play a leading global role in the post-Cold War environment. Perception of the ideal world order (multi-polarity) and the West, and situation in post-Soviet countries have intensified the formation of the assertive Russian foreign policy towards the near abroad. In the post-1991 period, Russia's way of dealing with its immediate neighbors was part of a greater picture which is characterized by ambition of establishing itself as a major international player[6]. The meaning of the former Soviet Union Republics (FSURs) was different to Russia than the Central and Eastern Europe. Even though, Soviet Russia directly intervened in its satellite states as in the cases of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), the Soviet Republics were its integral part and under its direct authority. Thus, Moscow was utmost concerned to retain

[4] Ibid

[5] Sabitova, Nadia, and Chulpan Shavaleyeva. "Oil and Gas Revenues of the Russian Federation: Trends and Prospects ." ScienceDirect, 2015, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212567115010163. pp. 425.

[6] "Chapter Six: Back on the Offensive? The Former Soviet Union." Russian Foreign Policy: the Return of Great Power Politics, by Jeffrey Mankoff, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009. pp. 242.

a presence and prevent the West from taking over what until so recently had been part of Russia's imperial pale.[7]

However, the fall in Russia's strategic and economic fortunes, after the collapse of the USSR, resulted in a marked neglect of relations with the former Soviet states. In addition, Kozyrev by turning face to the West and Western (US) partnership failed to put the post-soviet countries in a priority in the foreign policy agenda. Kozyrev regarded sheer concern for the FSURs as a 'centrism' which he defined as the attempt to 'drive Russia back into Asia'. However, concrete developments in international arena proved Westernism to contradict with Russian interests, and urged Russia to create a strong zone of influence in Near Abroad instead to ensure its interests. Those developments were Bosnian crisis in 1994–95, NATO enlargement that absorbed satellite and Baltic states of former USSR (Warsaw Pact) which is interpreted as a betrayal and US breaking its promise, American/British bombings of Iraq, and the NATO military operation against Slobodan Milosevic in 1999[8]. Another factor that made Russia to pursue rather independent and strong regionalist policy was the divergence over the Chechnya problem. West interpreted the Chechnya War rather through the lens of human rights abuses, failing to recognize Russian security concerns despite Russia's emphasis on the security aspect.[9] Russian skepticism increased towards 'others' as a result of lack of solidarity displayed by the West.

First initiatives that really demonstrate Russian multipolarism effort, characterized by approaching FSURs, can be seen in the doctrine of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Yevgeny Primakov (1996-1998). Nevertheless, he had well realized that it is not feasible to integrate all FSURs to the Russian influence zone at the same time, but rather Russia should set up different integration speeds for every Soviet region and form a high level cooperation organization that would integrate FSURs, gradually, one by one.[10] For this purpose, different organisations have been established that will be discussed under the next heading. Putin has adopted similar doctrine and emphasized bilateral and multilateral cooperation with FSURs in his 'Russia at the turn of the millennium' speech.

Regional Organizations: Institutionalism?

Major goals of the regional organisations such as Union State (Union State of Russia and Belarus created in 1996), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Union (EurAsEC), CIS Free Trade Area and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) are politico-economic coordination and

[7] "Recasting the Ideological Debate." Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking, by Bobo Lo, Palgrave, 2002. pp. 48.
[8] Ibid, pp. 25.
[9] Ibid, pp. 165-166.
[10] "Rossiya i Mir: Ot Gorbacheva Do Putina." Politika v Sovremenniy Rossii, by Vladimir Nikonov, 2005.

integration, and creation of a common policy towards internal (i.e. terrorism) and external threats. However, members of the aforementioned organizations differ considerably, thus lack comprehensiveness that would embrace all the post-Soviet space. Furthermore, Baltic States have totally isolated themselves from those regional organizations through aligning with European Union and NATO.

CIS, established in 1991, is considered as a highly voluntary organization and a sheer talk shop that does not yield a real cooperation. Putin described the organization as a forum where the problems following the collapse of the USSR and possible integration processes are discussed in a civilized manner.[11] As an option, Russia has consistently sought to elevate the prestige of the CSTO, in which she is unquestionably the lead country. The CSTO is structured as a military organization providing security framework in the post-Soviet space and is based on the Russian military system in which member states participate in some joint trainings, and use Russian weapons.[12] However, the SCO has emerged as a potential opponent to Russian led CSTO. In the SCO, members, including China, also work to form collaborative policies addressing issues such as instability, extremism and terrorism. It is believed that Russia's concern that China is the dominant partner in the SCO makes Russia abstain from further developing the organization into the cooperation in economic sphere.[13] On the other hand, EurAsEC being established in 2014 is based on previous customs union and is the most ambitious project under Russian leadership that targets free movement of goods, services and labour (EU-model integration). The members are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

Functioning of the regional organizations can be questioned, except EurAsEC, since their actual exercises are mostly limited and they lack deep strategic cooperation. Moreover, many former Soviet Republics are very selective and skeptic in becoming member to those regional organisations, except Belarus, which renders the organisations unable to be umbrella formations in which Russia can take the lead. It can be claimed that those organisations are perceived to be potential tools for Russian hegemony in the region. Thus, countries such as Georgia, Ukraine, and Baltic States have straightforwardly refused to be a member to those organisations, after confrontation with Russia, despite the cost of possible disconnection with rest of the region in the organizational level. Russian leadership efforts further undermined by other regional organisations such as GUAM which became a forum where Russian sanctions and policies were condemned and settlement of frozen conflicts were discussed without a Russian presence.

[11] Khachatryan, Arutyun. "Putin: SNG Malo Chem Otlichaetsa ot Politicheskogo Diskussionnogo Kluba" Eurasianet, 6 Apr. 2005.
[12] "Chapter Four: Russian Foreign Policy." Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications, by Olga Oliker, RAND, 2009, pp. 102–103.
[13] Ibid, pp. 104.

Main Security Areas in Russian Neighbourhood Policy

One of the provisions in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved in 2016, relates to "pursuing neighbourly relations with bordering states, and assist them in eradicating the existing and impeding the emergence of the new hotbeds of conflicts on their territory". This illustrates the willingness of Russia to be an actor in solving security related conflicts/wars in its neighbourhood that would render other major power involvement unnecessary.

Politically, Russia is interested in addressing regionally frozen conflicts (i.e. Karabagh) and terrorism that may directly threaten Russian borders which were once susceptible to the dissidence (i.e. Chechnya War, rise of Islamism). Russian perception that Russian frontiers start, indeed, further in post-Soviet Republics makes Russia to internalize the security of Central Asia, Caucasus, and Eastern Europe fearing the spillover effect of instability. Thus, Russia, since the 2000s, has been especially preoccupied with shaping the regional politics (i.e. relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan); offering a security umbrella; impeding the U.S. and NATO from establishing strategic positions in the post-Soviet space; and with balancing the influence of neighboring countries like China, Turkey, and Iran.[14] Furthermore, in the economic sphere, Kremlin attempts to expand its share of energy supply and intermediacy, trade, and investments to deepen interdependence (or rather dependence), thereby achieve slowing down of the drift of the post-Soviet states from Russian orbit towards the other neighbouring regions such as South East Asia, Europe etc. In sum, consolidation of political and economic influence is instrumental in facilitating the achievement of major security issues which are political-economic stability and absence of foreign major power.

Russian Hard and Soft Power Tools in the Near Abroad: A Realist Russia

Russia has mostly relied on bilateral relations with its post-Soviet neighbbours, alongside the involvement through regional organisations. Bilateral relations are seen as a 'senior-junior partnership' by Russia where Russia always assumes position of the senior. Russia has been bold in asserting control in relations with the former Soviet republics and with major powers when the neighbourhood is at stake, sometimes through implementing military means and economic sanctions. Before moving on to explaining Russia's 'conventional geopolitical' tools implemented in post-Soviet Region, it will be useful to cluster post-Soviet countries taking their relation to Russia as a reference. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldavia (debatable) are in a state of conflict with Russia, while Belarus, Armenia and Tajikistan can be classified as closely partnering with Russia in a more patron-client manner. Azerbaijan and Central Asian Turkic states form another dimension in Russian relations that is determined by energy/natural resources vector.

[14] Russia and Its Neighbors. Carnegie Endowement, YouTube, 9 Mar. 2016.

Ukrainian efforts to build closer relations with the West and desire for membership to NATO have seen to be main source of dissatisfaction in Russia. In return, Russian policy towards Ukraine was constant threat to cut off supplies and natural gas. However, tensions have dramatically escalated after 2014 crisis when pro-Russian president Yanukovych was removed from his position. Same year, allegedly, Russian-supported formations and political figures captured the administrations in Crimea and Donbass region (Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts) igniting separatist movements in Donbass and leading to annexation of Crimea by Russia. It was ultimatum to the West that Russia is prepared to mobilise any means to act against any defection of the post-Soviet states in favour the West. Russian leaders perceived the events in Ukraine through the lens of geopolitics, and interpreted the West-supported demonstrations as part of a broader campaign to undermine Russian influence across the former Soviet Union and contain Russia.[15] Georgian case, on the other hand, was a clear illustration of Russian aggression in the face of Georgian non-obedience to the Russian guaranteed status-quo in the country and idea of joining NATO. In response to an attempt to restore Georgian authority in the autonomous republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russian military intervened in Georgia and rendered the Georgian action ineffective. Meanwhile, Russia achieved to paralyse Moldavian economy after sanctioning Moldavian products, especially wine, as the biggest trading partner of Moldavia.

When it comes to the second cluster, Belarus features as the most pro-Russian. Two states have had the highest level of political and economic integration of any two countries in the CIS.[16] Moreover, Russia has been the main guarantor of Belarusian dictatorship that favors Russia to the Western countries. Russian-Armenian relations have been relatively stable, as well. Armenia sees Russia as a reliable partner in the face of Turkish-Azerbaijani threat and sanctions. In order to closely follow regional trends and increase reaction speed to threats, Russia keeps presence in countries, namely Belarus, Armenia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan based on the consent given by those countries.[17]

Before the profound energy trade relationship between Russia and Central Asia-Azerbaijan, the Central Asia came to the brink of terrorist war (actions of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). It was a good opportunity for Russia to penetrate into the region again after the Soviet collapse. However, Russia had to accommodate the U.S. presence also in the region, because Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan requested the same help from the U.S., seen as a continuum measure to the Afghanistan campaign of 2001 (after 9/11 event). So, Russia approved the American action instead of opposing which offered Russia international role/opportunity (fighting terrorism) and depicted Russia selfless who agreed to cooperate with

[15] "Chapter Six: Back on the Offensive? The Former Soviet Union." Russian Foreign Policy: the Return of Great Power Politics, by Jeffrey Mankoff, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009. pp. 249-250.
[16] "Chapter Four: Russian Foreign Policy." Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications, by Olga Oliker, RAND, 2009, pp. 98.
[17] "Map of Current Military Installations (Excluding Crimea)." *List of Russian Military Bases Abroad.*

U.S. to save the Central Asia and Afghanistan. Putin justified the cooperation, in the words of Gleb Pavlovsky, by saying that "it is better to have Americans in Uzbekistan than to have the Taliban in Tatarstan."[18] However, after defeating terrorism, Russia sought to gain further influence by undermining possible U.S. or Chinese presence. Russia came with energy security proposal that promised to transmit Central Asian oil and gas to the West. As a means of asserting influence, Russia started to control pipelines that soak Central Asian energy and ship it to other regions under Russian supervision.[19] Even though Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have substantially achieved diversification of the shipment of energy, Russian pipelines still play a major role.

Russia also possesses soft power in the post-Soviet region. Ethnic Russians still make up a significant minority across all post-Soviet countries. According to the 2007 estimates, only in five Central Asian countries, ethnic Russians accounted to 5,5 million.[20] The highest number of ethnic Russians lives in Ukraine (above 8 million). They are seen as a bastion of Russian culture in those countries who also help to improve bilateral relations with Russia and integrate those countries. On the other hand, Russia is an attractive place for migrant workers coming from post-

Migrant workers and remittances from the six Eastern Partnership states

	Russia	EU	Estimated annual remittances (2008)
Belarus	300,000–700,000	60,000-70,000	$2-3 billion
Ukraine	2 million	3 million	$8.4 billion
Moldova	344,000	350,000-500,000	$1.6 billion
Georgia	1 million	50,000	$1 billion
Armenia	2.5 million	150,000	$1.5-2 billion
Azerbaijan	2 million	100,000	$1-1.5 billion

Soviet countries. By referring to the graph above, it can be said that for many post-Soviet country citizens Russia is the economic heaven where they can earn more money compared to their respective countries especially through small scale businesses.[21] Migration factor creates

[18] "Chapter Six: Back on the Offensive? The Former Soviet Union." Russian Foreign Policy: the Return of Great Power Politics, by Jeffrey Mankoff, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009. pp. 267.
[19] "Chapter Six: Back on the Offensive? The Former Soviet Union." Russian Foreign Policy: the Return of Great Power Politics, by Jeffrey Mankoff, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009. pp. 277-278.
[20] Peyrouse, Sebastian. "The Russian Minority in Central Asia: Migration, Politics, and Language" *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, 2008, pp. 4.
[21] Popescu, Nicu, and Andrew Wilson. The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood. European Council on Foreign Relations, 2009, pp. 34.

leverage for Russia which is important during negotiations with neighbouring countries. It is worth to mention that visa-free regime between Russia and post-Soviet Republics can be characterized as a soft-power tool as well. Moreover, Russian culture, music and lifestyle are on the rise again thanks to the popular/mainstream media that creates the image of civilized Russian culture and strong Russian state. Thus, the state-controlled media in Russia are supposed to disseminate ideological and political information targeting foreign audiences through media as a channel of propaganda (traditional instrument of information geopolitics).[22] Last, but not least, Russian language is a strong soft power too. Russian is still the single lingua franca in the post-Soviet space. Knowledge of the Russian language helps millions of workers from the "near abroad" to find jobs in Russia, politicians to come to a better mutual understanding with their Russian counterparts, and so on.[23] In addition to this, Russophone elite still occupies a substantial component of the political, cultural class in the post-Soviet countries. Potential of the above mentioned soft-power tools can be assessed in one example (Turkish example). After collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey attempted to bring Turkic states under its sway. Turkey sponsored creation of Turkic-speaking economic zone and offered financial aid packages.[24] Notwithstanding the Turkish efforts and common Turkic background, Russian language, culture etc. still impact post-Soviet Turkic states far beyond, Azerbaijan being an exception as Turkish influence in Azerbaijan is equally prominent.

Conclusion

Russian attitude and influence are truly hegemonic in character on the issues regarding post-Soviet space. The premise that every country strives for at least regional hegemony can be confirmed by Russian foreign policy action which is assertive, aggressive, and patriarchic towards neighbours. After Putin's coming into power Soviet nostalgia and patriotism have risen which could have been result of economic boom in the country (especially between 2001-2009). It is true that right after the Soviet collapse, Russia started to pursue the policy of keeping the CIS under Russian leadership which was formulated in the famous Near Abroad Doctrine, issued in 1993.[25] In this Russian version of the Monroe Doctrine, it is stated that Russian interests and priorities in the post-Soviet states shall be respected. When it comes to the reaction of Russia toward influence of other great powers in the region, it can be said that Russian perception is still predominantly governed by 'zero-sum' mentality. Russia rarely tolerates United States, EU or China in the region.

[22] Rukavishnikov, Vladimir. "Chapter Four: Russia's 'Soft Power' in the Putin Epoch." Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 81.
[23] Ibid, pp. 79-80.
[24] Şener Aktürk (2006) Turkish–Russian Relations after the Cold War (1992–2002), Turkish Studies, pp. 6.
[25] Ibid, pp. 10.

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15. Şener Aktürk (2006) Turkish–Russian Relations after the Cold War (1992–2002), Turkish Studies, 7:3, 337-364, DOI: 10.1080/14683840600891034.