

DISINTEGRATION OF USSR, EMERGENCE OF RUSSIA AND INDIA'S RESPONSE

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Abstract

The relationship between India and the USSR was based on a number of common factors. India having won freedom from the British, the anti-imperialism ideology of the Soviet Union compared well with each other. That is why, in India, there was skepticism and often rejection of Western-inspired fears about Soviet designs and objectives. India's relationship with the erstwhile Soviet Union and the Russian Federation is founded on trust and mutual interests. In the early years of this relationship, India greatly gained from the Soviet Union in developing its core industries and laying the foundation for future growth. After disintegration of the USSR Russia became the successor of Soviet Union and simultaneously all the powers from Soviet transferred to Russian disposal. Initially, both the countries face towards West for meeting the necessary requirements.

Objectives

1. To overview the background of Indo-Soviet ties that arose as a bridge between latter's successor Russia and India.
2. A point of view on their hindrance; policy and drawback.

Proposed Methodology During the Tenure of the Research Work

The research is based on analytical and historical bases to study the proposed Research problem. With my best efforts the data source are both primary as well as secondary.

Introduction

By the early '80s there were clear indications that the Soviet economy was running out of steam. It was also becoming almost rudderless and in a state of drift. Once young and action oriented-leaders began to resemble a gerontocracy. The most guarded state secret was the health of the leadership. Within the span of less than two and a half years, from November 1982 to March 1985, there were three changes in the top Soviet leadership, compared to the same number of changes in the preceding six and a half decades. We witnessed a series of funerals – of Brezhnev, followed by those of Andropov and Chernenko, before Gorbachev assumed charge. We were probably the first embassy in Moscow with confirmed information of Brezhnev's death. We were one of the first to know with certainty that Andropov was seriously ill. Of course anyone watching television knew that Chernenko would not live long and that Gorbachev would be his successor.

“The succession process itself confirmed the ossification of the Soviet system. Virtually all major decisions were put on hold. As a result, the Soviet economy was already facing a severe crisis when Gorbachev took over as General Secretary of the CPSU CC. He had privately conveyed this to Rajiv Gandhi, with whom he enjoyed a good personal rapport. Later Rajiv Gandhi had observed that his discussions with Gorbachev did not seem to be filtering down the line. His observation was prescient. Gorbachev's attempt to reform the communist system from within, with glasnost preceding perestroika, was clearly encountering some resistance within the CPSU CC. By 1998 we began feeling these tremors, including unusually erratic defense supplies. From subsequent conversations, it appears that somewhere down the line Gorbachev lost control of the forces he had unleashed. Yeltsin was determined to seize power, if need be by breaking up the Soviet Union in the process. He was a charismatic leader with extraordinary courage. It was, however, doubtful if a free and fair referendum would have endorsed the breakup of the Soviet Union. The Baltic States had already asserted their independence, but the outcome elsewhere was far from certain. Yeltsin decided to present the Soviet people with faith accompli, when he and his Ukrainian and Belarusian counter-parts signed the Belavezha accords pre-emptively dissolving the Soviet Union, and replacing it with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in December 1991. The fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) left in its wake a weaker Russia and a new global dynamic that

significantly altered that relationship. The Soviet Union offered relatively high technology weapons and equipment on very favorable terms without many of the strings of western suppliers. Until the 1990s, the USSR held the upper hand in the bilateral relationship—it had military equipment India needed, was willing to give India favorable terms (sometimes in the form of barter), and India had limited options for supply; but India had some leverage in being a significant component of Soviet defense exports. Once the Soviet Union broke up, the situation began to reverse. Russia faced the challenge of restructuring industries that were now spread across several independent republics. The new Russia and its defense industry were plagued by increasing costs, a loss of many important scientists and engineers, and increasingly poor quality of its products. Its only deliveries to India in the mid-1990s were from orders originally placed with the Soviet Union.

“In the initial post-Soviet period, bilateral relations in the 1990s went through a period of uncertainty when Russia was preoccupied with domestic economic and political issues, and with its relations with the USA and Europe. Now India had to deal with a new Russia which was Eurocentric, economically dependent on the West, and neither had the interest nor the resources for Third World regimes.” “The 1990s also saw India begin discarding the “anti-Western” political impulses that were so dominant in the world view that shaped Indian diplomacy right up to 1991. Rejecting the “anti-Western” mode of thinking was the important transition of Indian foreign policy. As the world’s largest democracy, India was the most committed to Western political values outside the Euro-Atlantic world. Yet the Cold War saw India emerge as the most articulate opponent of the Western world view. A strong anti- Western bias crept into Indian foreign policy supported by the left as well as the right and underwritten by the security establishment. The disappearance of the Soviet Union and China’s rise as a great power demanded that India to break the decades old anti-Western approaches to foreign policy.”

“Under President Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999), Russia adopted a conciliatory approach towards the West and coined the term ‘pro-American’ or ‘Atlanticist’ policy. The primary reason was to create a non-threatening external environment that would be most conducive to Russia’s internal economic and political development. This focus on domestic development reflected a foreign policy of ‘accommodation’, ‘retrenchment’, and ‘risk-avoidance’.” “In 1993, then Russian foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev followed the US line on nuclear non-proliferation and Kashmir. Yeltsin complied with US wishes and refused to supply India with cryogenic technology for its civilian space programme.” “President Boris Yeltsin, during his visit to Delhi in 1993, tried to recreate the spirit of old friendship with a new Treaty of Friendship to replace the old India-Soviet 1971 treaty. However, the fundamental character of the Treaty was transformed and in case of any threat to peace, the new Treaty vaguely called for regular consultations and co-ordination. Although Yeltsin described India and Russia as ‘natural partners’, he was careful not to give the impression of a ‘special relationship’. Although relations were restored to respectable levels, the early years (1991–96) of ‘benign neglect’ of India by Russia left a deep mark on Indian policy-makers”

However, it was with Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s visit to Russia in June 1994 that Indo-Russian ties were put on a firm foundation. “*The Moscow Declaration on the Protection of Interests of Pluralist States*” signed by India and Russia has become the bedrock of the relations. The Declaration drew attention not only to the nature of the challenges faced by the two countries, but also focused attention on the source from which this threat emanated for both. It also reiterated support of the signatories for each other’s territorial integrity. This is highly important given the fact that India and Russia were battling with these challenges in Kashmir and Chechnya, respectively. In the changed context, it was the space that lay between India and Russia that acquired significance. Once again, it was the commonality of their geopolitical interests that paved the way for the relationship to become strong and stable. Later, India and Russia backed opposition to the Taliban that had crystallized into the Northern Alliance. On the issue of religious extremism and terrorism, India and Russia share many commonalities: the source of tension, funding, training, etc. India and Russia wanted a secular Central Asia working towards a democratic setup. From this perspective, stability and security were important. Instability hampers growth and helps in sustaining extremism and terrorism to an extent. Consequently, India and Russia have established institutional linkages to strengthen this aspect. To date, this commonality has not diminished. Russia views India as a major regional power whose involvement in international politics would make a positive

contribution. The unfolding developments in Europe, Eurasia, and the energy security issue were reminiscent of the Cold War mind-set. Its response was the propagation of the idea of a multipolar world. In this regard, a historic agreement with China on a “*Multipolar World and the Formation of a New World Order*” was signed in Moscow in April 1997.

This was the beginning of a partnership with China. *A multipolar world is an order that is just and fair and democratic in which all nations are considered as equals and more importantly, enjoy equal security. It is a world order in which there is no place for hegemony. In this order, the UN would occupy a position of centrality.* On its part, India upheld that the world order was not a unipolar one, as new centers of power and influence were emerging. While acknowledging the need for a multipolar world, the Indian approach was not in terms of blocs, but the need to maintain a balanced and stable world order. Since a unipolar world could lead to instability, there was a need for a balancing force.

Among the other initiatives taken by Russia is the idea of an *Russia-India China strategic triangle*, coming together in the interests of the challenges faced by them in the region. During Primakov’s visit to India in December 1998, he proposed at an informal level that India-Russia- China should come together and forms a strategic triangle in the interests of peace and stability in the region. The initial response of India was one of caution that could be explained by the fact that a strategic triangle implied common perceptions and convergence of interests vis-à-vis a common threat. Similarly, China expressed no opinion on this idea. One of the impacts of the events of 9/11 has been that China has developed a positive attitude towards the idea of trilateral cooperation. Possibly, the renewal of Pakistani-American cooperation could have had an impact on Chinese strategic thinking. It was perhaps with the idea of furthering the cause of trilateral cooperation that President Vladimir Putin embarked on his Asian tour by visiting China and later India in December 2002. In a TV interview, Primakov said, “It is shared interest in maintaining security and stability in Central Asia and Afghanistan that may give flesh and blood to the idea of a Moscow-Beijing-Delhi triangle.”

From 1991, the launch of India's economic liberalization programme and the consequent opening up of its economy was increasingly turning the developed world's attention towards this major country in Asia. India's annual growth rate of around seven per cent, its vast resources both natural and human, it being acknowledged the world's largest democracy, its huge pool of technically trained man-power, its burgeoning middle class and the fast expanding market, its highly developed banking system, stock markets and the service sector, and the rapidly growing IT industry coupled with fluency in the use of the English language were all major attractions for potential investors and the flow was fast gathering momentum.

True, the 1990s witnessed a major setback to India-Russia relations. Trade dwindled. The Rupee-Rouble arrangement was gone. Economic cooperation slowed down. Even the crucial and carefully developed and nurtured defense sector was a victim of delays, sub-standard or down-right stoppages of supplies. Partly, all this was attributable to the ‘decade of chaos’ in Russia and partly, due to the turning off of the tap of political good will on the part Moscow. India- Russia relations appeared to have got down-graded in the eyes of the new rulers in Russia, India’s old friend were either gone or no longer mattered. So were the experts on India. Russia’s now ruling elite had its focus elsewhere, and India had to wait. From India’s point of view, all this was naturally most upsetting. For thirty years, India had invested heavily in its relations, friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union. In corporate sector terms, this huge investment, which for long had brought India rich dividends, was virtually collapsing now. What, partially at least, saved the situation for India was its own rapidly changing and improving economic scene, thanks to its reforms and the opening up of its economy. This was to slowly throw open to India new possibilities and options. In any case, even in the days of its close ties with the USSR, its links with the West had never been neglected, including when it came to the acquisition of heavy defence equipment. After all, the Jaguar and Mirage fighter aircrafts, the West German submarines and the *Before guns*, to give a few illustrative examples, had all been inducted into the Indian system when the Soviet Union was still very much there. Therefore, if Russia was now changing its attitude, India at least need not feel totally helpless. Its economic

growth, its new economic sex appeal, its increasingly comfortable foreign exchange reserves position ensured that there was no dearth of suitors. But its keenness to maintain its strong ties with Moscow never dwindled. It was a practical necessity too, particularly in the crucial defense sector, where a complete switch over was neither easy nor desirable. Hence, a policy of looking at other options while still trying to restore relations with Moscow to their former glory and level, at least to the extent possible, without forgetting the vast change of scene in Russia, in India and world at large.

Conclusion

To conclude, we must confess the fact that Soviet Union was the India's most preferred partner in terms of technology, economy, and military after its (USSR) disintegration and the collapse of the socialist system had made India a dependable ally as she was heavenly dependent on erstwhile Soviet Union economically as well as politically. Moreover, when Soviet Union broke up, she was the source of 70% of India's defence supplies: The Soviet Union exported India heavy industrial products in exchange for consumer goods. After the disintegration of USSR, India had learned to live with soviet support which on many issues in the past proved to be very crucial for India. In the post- soviet phase India had to turn her head towards USA as USA was remained the only sole super-power in the world, she(India) had to adjust her foreign policy with USA.

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