

Foreign Policies of India and Russia: Before and After 1991

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Brief Summary: “Foreign policies of India and Russia are time tested and have traditionally been characterized by continuity, trust and mutual benefit, oriented for international peace, security and peaceful co-existence. Being the supporters of liberal democratic values in the present world scenario, both are deeply committed to the establishment of more democratic world order based on multi-polar world”.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy of a country is conducted in a manner to defend its national interests or core values. It is determined by internal and external factors, by regional as well as well as global factors. The determining factors for relations between the two countries is the extent to which the national interests of each, such as security, peace, defence and development are promoted. All the above factors and determinants affected the foreign policies of India and Russia just after the disintegration of the Former Soviet Union. This disintegration of USSR and the liquidation of the world's first and most developed socialist system have important implications for world politics¹. The end of the cold war not only affected international politics but it gave birth also to the geo-economic thinking “competition-co-operation.” Now, just after the demise of the Soviet Union, the economic sphere became the basic determinant of relations among the countries. World power structure also changed and USA became the major leading power in world politics. The non-aligned India became a major influencing developing power in the Changed global milieu. Therefore, the economic sphere is likely to be the “hallmark” of the changed global milieu. Global warfare has also been replaced by rising regional and local conflicts & terrorism².

All these changes in the international scenario deeply affected the national and international policies of India and Russia. It is clear that in a rapidly changing world situation, no country, big, medium or small, can afford to follow a rigid posture. One has to develop linkages and increasing areas of understanding with other states. The same procedure was followed by India and Russia just after 1991. Both the countries established friendly relations with USA and also with other western countries for the fulfillment of economic interests. However after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a perceptible change was apparent in India's relations with Russia because these countries have re-structured their foreign policies in the changing international policies.

II. PAST HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the past, just after independence in 1947, India adopted the policy of non-alignment but it did not cut itself off from all the world affairs and always took part in the major international problems with peaceful efforts. In the early 1950's, Moscow's policy towards India and other independent non-aligned countries was not good and it condemned the government of newly independent non aligned countries including India as “reactionary” and “pro-western”³. This rigid thinking was an obstacle in Indo-Soviet relations during that period.

On the other hand India's decision to remain a member of British Commonwealth, also made some bitterness in Indo-Soviet relations. But soon Moscow understood Indian foreign policy and India's relations with USSR became friendlier than USA. From very beginning USA had always followed a policy, which was pro-Pakistan and anti-Indian. India and the Soviet Union have always been committed to the policy of peaceful Co-existence and both the countries opposed all type of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism. India in the leadership of Nehru, tried to make a socialist form of society at home. Thus having common goals, India and USSR opposed imperialism, capitalism and colonialism.⁴

From the very beginning the western imperialistic activities were directed towards the ‘Kashmir issue’. It was only in 1952, that the USSR for the first time indicated that it will favour India's position on this issue, When Y.A. Malik charged the USA and UK as the main obstacle to Kashmiri settlement. By 1955, Soviet Union, had clearly taken a pro-Indian stand on Kashmir issue and declared openly that Kashmir is an integral part of India. At the end of 1955 Soviet Prime Minister Bulganin and Secretary to the communist party, Nikita Khrushchev, declared in Srinagar on 10 December, 1955, “The question of Kashmir which was created by some

colonial power, had been solved only by the people of Kashmir in their decision to join the Indian Republic and the Soviet government has accepted this position.”⁵

Not only on Kashmir issue but in Goa problem (1961) too, the Soviet foreign policy supported India’s point of view. Again the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation (1971) was a good combination of the foreign policies of India and Soviet Union. During Bangladesh crisis, When Washington and Peking indicated that, they would continue to support the aggressive military regime, Islamabad threatened India with war. The Formation of Sino-American-Pakistani axis upset the balance of power situation in the sub-continent. To redress the balance of power, India looked to Moscow for support and that is how the two countries signed a twenty year treaty of peace, friendship and co-operation on 9 August, 1971, for the mutual fulfillment of interests⁶. Moreover in December 1971, the Soviet Union voted against three Security Council resolutions on the third Indo-Pak war. Needless to say, all these resolutions were prejudicial to the national interests of India and that is why USSR voted against these resolutions.

Indira Gandhi government in India, Followed the foot-print of Jawaharlal Nehru regarding foreign policy issue towards Soviet Union. But until the mid of 1980, a new paradigm based on new thinking, started in Soviet foreign policy to the end of 1992. But there occurred a doctrinal change in Soviet policies in the decade of 1980s towards the third world⁷. There were economic, political and social problems in the Former Soviet Union which became obstacles in maintaining unity in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s policies of perestroika and Glasnost and liberal point of views of the communist countries led to the end of the cold war. Communism as a threat, disappeared and the end of the cold war as Gorbachev put it, means shift from “balance of power” to “balance of interests.”⁸ This balance of interest further became a foundation for the mutual fulfillment of the various interests of India and Russia.

III. CHANGES AFTER 1991

Without going into the details of how and why the Soviet Union was disintegrated, it is appropriate to say that with the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia has not only acquired a significant position in the CIS, but has also inherited numerous problems. This process is having serious bearings on Russia’s foreign policy projections towards the outside world. Russia adopted a process of liberalization, democratization and market oriented reforms and these policies replaced geo-strategic considerations by geo-economic thinking. Because in the changed global milieu the thinking of “co-operation-competition” in the economic sphere is likely to be the ‘hallmark’ in the present times⁹. Hence, because of the economic crises, Russian foreign policy constituted a continuation and broadening of the new-thinking paradigm. Russia, now turned towards the USA and other western countries and started co-operating with them. This new thinking, became the declared goal of the New Russia and Boris Yeltsin gave much preference to this market-oriented thinking. Moreover, Yeltsin emphasized on “strategic partnership”, economic and military ties with the United States of America and Russia turned to the USA and other countries for economic and other help¹⁰.

On the other hand, because of India’s unique relationship with USSR and economic bonds with the members of the socialist block, just after the demise of Soviet Union, India faced contradictory situation. It has to restructured its domestic and international policies according to changed global milieu. After the disintegration of USSR, India’s policy of non-alignment was questioned, If it was relevant or not and what was the utility of the Treaty of 1971? It was argued, what type of relationship will New Delhi have with Moscow, when there were economic crises in Russia? Needless to say that Narasimha Rao’s government in India have adopted liberal economic policies in a changed global milieu. In the market oriented and globalised era, India was of such a point of view that it should adopt the capitalist way and open-up the gates of its market to the west without any reservation¹¹.

Such economic interests of both the nations, further made a good-matching in their foreign policies. Now economic development is the most pressing need of both countries and both look to the west for economic aid. Unlike the Soviet Union, Russia will not offer India aid but rather co-operation and ‘partnership’ based on mutual interests. India realizes that its economic strength will determine its international status. Now India will benefit from good relations with America. In spite of this the countries like Canada, Japan, Germany, China will be best sources of investment. Today both India and Russia are dependent on western countries for economic aid¹².

Of course, a wave of political and economic reforms is sweeping through the vast continents of Latin America, Africa and Asia, India welcomes the resurgent democratic spirit and as the largest democracy of the world, It has whole-heartedly welcomed this trend of economic and political reforms¹³. Thus in changed global milieu both India and Russia have turned towards liberalization, globalization and co-operation with USA and other western countries without compromising their sovereignty and self respect and independent foreign policies. The non-alignment, which was questioned after the demise of the Soviet Union, was replaced by new-non-alignment and its aim are just like NAM and IBSA forum represents the “New Non-Alignment”:. IBSA (India, Brazil South Africa) Forum is a strategic-partnership between three geo-politically located and

economically emerging powers to make globalization a positive force for development in the developing countries; and to make international system multi-polar¹⁴. Needless to say Russia is fully supporting this Forum, because it is oriented for international peace, equal development and for a multi-polar world.

IV. SIMILARITIES AND MUTUAL INTERESTS AFTER 1991

Today Russia and India have developed new approaches in regard to their foreign policies in a changed global milieu. The internal circumstances, nature of national interests, desire for liberalization of policies, made certain changes in the foreign policies of both the countries. Geo-strategic considerations have now been replaced by geo-economic thinking "Co-operation-competition". Today Russia and India have changed their foreign policies in regard to this new geo-economic thinking. The fundamental changes in the world balance of forces have a direct bearing on Russian-Indian relations. Both the countries should have to take in to account the radical changes that have occurred in the international system¹⁵.

Yet India, recognized all the 15 Republics of The Former USSR as sovereign independent states and Russia as a successor state to the Soviet Union and this was a signal for friendly relations between India and Russia. Hence there were many problems in the emerging new world order which bound India and Russia into closer association with each other. Despite, Russia's new "pragmatic and geo-political" calculation, India was an important country positively affecting Russia's foreign policy towards the outside world.

However before describing another issue, it is significant to mention here, that what were similarities between the national interests of India and Russia, which further strengthened their relations. First, there has never been a conflict between India and Russia. They have no territorial dispute either on land or in oceans. Second, both in a changing global milieu were dependent on western countries for economic aid. Third, American thrust for a Uni-polar world comes in to conflict with the national interests of India and Russia. They are struggling to build a multi-polar world, which bring them closer to each other. Fourth, both are exporters of raw material and importers of manufactured goods. Hence, their similar economic interests bring them closer to each other. Fifth, the situation of terrorism in Chechnya and Jammu & Kashmir, being a common factor, brings them closer to each other¹⁶. Sixth, Russia is biggest supplier of military equipments and technology to India. This makes them 'strategic partners'. Seventh, major international problems, just as the issue of democratization of U.N.O. or the issue of USA's interference in other's internal affairs and such others, also bring them closer to each other. All these and other factors combined together have brought about a major change in Russia's foreign policy, it's policy towards India in particular¹⁷. This was reflected during Rao-Yeltsin summits and also in the Trendy of friendship and co-operation in January, 1993¹⁸.

Today Indo-Russian bilateral co-operation is multi dimensional in character and encircle all areas including political, economic, commercial, defence, scientific, technological and cultural spheres. Many visits by various leaders of both countries to each other, strengthened these relations more but the visits of Russian Presidents Vladimir Putin to India on Oct., 2000, Dec., 2002 and Dec., 2004, played unique role for Indo Russian ties.

During the visit in October 2000, Russian President Putin put his special stamp on Indo-Russian "Strategic-partnership"¹⁹. He said that terrorism is a common factor in Indo-Russian relations. In spite of this, both countries strengthened mutualities in various other sectors also. During his visit to India in Dec., 2002 President Putin declared in New Delhi "Our two countries share common views on the important issues of international politics." Both India and Russia have common policies regarding democratization of UNO, international terrorism, USA's policies" of "world-policeman" and regarding other international issues also. Moreover, Russia wants to see India as a global and nuclear power in the world. Russia gave the powerful diplomatic support to India regarding democratization of U.N Security Council. This was clearly declared by Russian President Putin during his New Delhi visit on December 4, 2004²⁰. On the other hand USA and China have not yet cleared their policies regarding India's permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

Besides these similarities there have been a little pessimistic note and some dissimilarities in Indo-Russian relations. In the early 1950's Moscow's policy towards India and non-alignment, was not very good and warm. The Soviet Union under the leadership of Joseph Stalin adopted the policy that those countries that were not communists, were against the Soviet Union. This rigid thinking of Stalin was an obstacle in Indo-Soviet relations during that period. It was due to the failure of the Soviet leaders to understand the new India²¹. On the other hand Soviet Union was strictly following a rigid ideology of communism and India as a non-aligned country was favouring an independent policy of peaceful co-existence. Particularly Soviet Union was the second ideological block based on Communism. The primary objective of that communist block was the absolute opposition of capitalistic block. Besides, India's decision to remain a member of British Commonwealth also made some bitterness in Indo-Soviet relations. But all these dissimilarities vanished due to the positive thinking of both sides and mainly due to the contribution of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Hence, Indo-Soviet co-operation and friendship remain a rare example in world politics till the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991.

As there was some coolness in Indo-Soviet relations after India's independence in 1947 the same coolness appeared in Indo-Russian relations after 1991. India's relations with Russia started on a pessimistic note due to its support to Pakistan and sudden shift on the Kashmir Issue. Russia not only assured Pakistan for supplies of arms on request but also offered a treaty of friendship with it. This made some concern for India. However, Russia soon realized and established good co-operation with India. The issue of Rupee-Ruble convertibility also made some coolness in Indo-Russian relations but this issue was resolved to the satisfaction of both countries during President Boris Yeltsin's visit to India in January 1993. It not only removed the future trade barrier between them but also proved a turning point in Indo-Russian relations²².

Therefore, despite the post cold war changes there was a vast scope for co-operation between India and Russia. Russia needed tea, consumer durables, textiles, light engineering goods from India, then the latter required oil, defense equipments and supply of technology for its space programmes from Russia. The area of co-operation increased largely in various other sectors also due to the policy of continuity and change in India's foreign policy, which matched fully with that of Russian Federation²³. India's unclear tests in 1998 were condemned by Russia and it made some bitterness in Indo-Russian relations. Russia, however did not allow the bilateral relations between the two countries to suffer²⁴. On the other hand USA imposed many sanctions against India. Hence, this incident was not a dissimilarity in Indo-Russian foreign policies because Russia supports India's nuclear policy also. Again, Russian President Vladimir Putin's three visits to India in four years since 2000 and Russian stand on its "traditional all weather strategic partnership" with India, only prove the existence of special relations. Today, the areas of convergences are huge. Both countries are victim of terrorism and both are in favour of the democratization of UN Security Council and its functioning. Both are favouring a multi-polar democratic world-order²⁵. Defence, economic, technological and energy co-operation are another similarities in Indo-Russian relations. Hence, there are vast similarities in Indo-Russian foreign policies regarding international organizations, international politics and problems, domestic issues, particularly Asian issues and problems.

V. A LITTLE FOCUS ON MODI-PUTIN MEETINGS

Again analysing India-Russia ties during Narendra Modi's Era, we may argue that just after starting of Modi's period, Russian President Putin again visited India on 15th December 2014 and it was a visit for maximizing the political ties of both countries. Putin visited India at a time when Russia's economic troubles, symbolized by a falling trouble and oil prices in the face of tough western economic sanctions imposed in Protest against Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in March 2013. At that time if Russia was facing economic decline, India by contrast, Russia's Partner in BRICS, was widely perceiving as likely rising power under Modi. Russia wants BRICS to work against American world domination. But Modi on another hand, established good ties with US also. But it does not mean India favours American hegemony, but that it has much to gain economically, militarily and diplomatically by keeping on good terms with the US²⁶.

Again P.M. Narendra Modi visited Russia in Dec 24, 2015 and established Indo-Russian ties with new perspectives. India-Russia decided to expand cooperation in various sectors as they signed 16 pacts, including one on joint manufacture of 226 military helicopters and another on construction of 12 atomic plants with the involvement of local companies in India. Both leaders, Putin and Modi underlined the need for the world to unite against terrorism without distinction and discrimination between terrorist groups and target countries. Besides, Putin conveyed Russia's "Strong-Support" to India's bid for permanent membership of the U.N. Securing Council²⁷.

Concludely, during Modi's short starting period, both countries again showed firm determination for similar national interests and good willing for common footing to face national and international problems.

VI. CONCLUSION

Therefore we can conclude that both the countries turned towards the west for economic and technical aid. On the one hand India opened its doors for foreign investment due to needs of economic development, started co-operating with the western countries as well as with the Asian countries also. Hence economic conditions and need as well as changed global milieu, provide vast similarity to the foreign policies of India and Russia after 1991. Foreign policies of both the countries are time tested and have traditionally been characterized by continuity, trust and mutual benefit, oriented for international peace, security and peaceful co-existence. Being the supporters of liberal democratic values in the present world scenario, both are deeply committed to the establishment of more democratic world order based on multi-polar world. From the present co-operation, one can go to conclusion that Indo-Russian relations have bright future.

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