

**RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA  
DURING YELTSIN'S PERIOD, 1991-1999**

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the award of the degree of

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that the dissertation entitled **RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA DURING YELTSIN'S PERIOD, 1991-1999** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

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**CERTIFICATE**

We recommend that this dissertation may please be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*Dedicated*  
*to*  
*My Parents*

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## PREFACE

The discipline of international relations in the new millennium is redefining and reorienting both its scope as well as its objects of study. So any area studies must have to address such dynamics and ever changing contours of international politics. So the present research work will help in understanding this dynamics especially in the context of disintegration of erstwhile Soviet Union and emergence of unipolar world in the post cold war era. Russia was the successor state of erstwhile Soviet Union and hence it has been playing a very important role in Central Asia since 1991. Therefore Russian Foreign Policy towards Central Asia during Yeltsin's period from 1991-1999 can give us a picture of the state of relations during this period with its varied shades.

The dissertation is divided into 5 chapters. In chapter I a general introduction of the topic will be made. It will give a synoptic view of the whole research purpose and will throw a light upon some major developments in Russia-Central Asia relations since 1991. In chapter I, I have tried to introduce the whole research study to have a synoptic view of the whole exercise of research and analysis. In this chapter I titled 'Introduction' I have tried to acquaint ourselves with relevant questions like what was the impact of Soviet policy in Central Asia? Has there been any significant change in the basic paradigm and direction of Russia's Foreign Policy? If at all, What were they been? How have they impacted Russia's overall status in international relations? What had been the gains and losses-for Moscow in the new scenario? What are the implications-both short term as well as long term-of these changes for Russia and Central Asia?

In chapter 2, the historical background will be analyzed under the title 'Soviet Policy in Central Asia'. It will fulfill the objective of studying the past with its impact on the Yeltsin's Foreign Policy. Since the Russian Federation had been recognized as the successor state of the erstwhile USSR, it is inevitable to look into Soviet Policy in Central Asia. In chapter 2, I have tried to highlight the main features of Soviet Policy in Central Asia. It included the historical background of Tsarist's Russia-Central Asia relations; then Bolshevik Revolution and formation of Soviet Union in 1917 under the leadership of Lenin.

In chapter 3, the evolution of 'Trans Atlanticist' vision will be analyzed. It is titled as 'Russian's New Policy: Years of Inactivity'. It will mainly deal with its impact on Russia-Central Asia relations. Chapter 3 deals with Russia's foreign policy towards Central Asia from 1991-1995. It was Yeltsin's first Presidentship term of Russian federation. He had to work on the relics of erstwhile Soviet Union-with an imperial past and uncertain future. The present was not in any way a pleasant moment as Russia was suffering both from economic crisis as well political dislocation of Central authority. It had lost its superpower status but not ambitions and had to face the new realities of post cold war era with a new foreign policy agenda.

The next chapter 4 will deal with the causes and consequences of the policy shift from 1996-1999. Now Russia embarked active & assertive foreign policy towards Central Asia under the 'Eurasian' policy vision. This chapter is titled as 'Russian Policy of Active Engagement'. The fourth chapter deals with the policy shift in the Russian establishment in the form of ascendance of Yevgeni Primakov as the new Russian foreign minister in January 1996. It marked both the end of 'Trans Atlanticist' vision and the beginning of 'Eurasianist' foreign policy orientation. It was a great policy-shift because Russia in the post cold war era, began its external dealing with an explicit preference for the western powers-US in particular. But this honeymoon with US was over very soon and the memories were also not very pleasant.

The last chapter 5 will conclude the whole research study and will try to summarize the Geist of the previous chapters. The objective of highlighting the effects of the past relation on the Yeltsin's foreign policy were analyzed in the chapter 2 of 'Soviet Policy in Central Asia' The second objective of introspection of the evolution of Russia-Central Asia relations during the last decade of 20th century is tried to be covered under the two policy versions of 'Trans Atlanticist' vision and then its mirror image of 'Eurasianist' vision which became dominant from 1996 onwards in chapter 3 and 4. The third objective of locating determinant actors and factors as illustrated by the research were US, China, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey as prime actors, Domestic factors like economic crisis, nationalists, reformists and communist pressures etc. were also key determinants. Also external factors like problems of Russian minorities, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, NATO's eastward expansion etc. shaped the Russian

foreign policy towards Central Asia from 1991-1999. It will also test the hypotheses in the light of objectives and the actual findings of the research work. The research methodology will include both historical and analytical method. It will be based on the study primary and secondary sources with the necessary of technology in the form of internet. Due care will be given to the analytical part and providing a comprehensive view in the context of various politics-economic development occurred in this vibrant region from 1991-1999.



## Acknowledgement

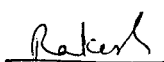
I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my Supervisor Sir. **Prof. K. Warikoo** for his sincere guidance, useful criticism and continuous encouragement throughout my work. His deep insight on the subject and sustained guidance throughout the course of this research enabled me to complete this research work successfully. Therefore, I deeply acknowledge his support and academic expertise on the subject that has enabled to enrich the research work.

I would also like to thanks Dr. Mondira Dutta and Dr. Ambrish Dhaka respected faculty members of my division for their invaluable cooperation and useful suggestions during my work. I would like to thank all the staff members of the JNU Library, Institute Of Defense and Strategic Analysis (IDSA), staff members of the Embassy of Russian Federation in New Delhi, Embassy of Republics of Central Asia in New Delhi, Teen Murti Library, and Sapro House for their valuable material inputs.

I am indebted to Mr. Nadeem of Farahi computers, Abhay, Yuvraj and Jyoti (research scholars of Jawaharlal Nehru University, School of International Studies, New Delhi), for their constructivist criticism valuable suggestions, encouragement and understanding to finish my work in the stipulated period. I would also like to thank my brother Vijay and sister Priyanka, who have always encouraged me and provided me with moral and mental support in completion of my research work.

Date: July 26, 2006

Place: New Delhi

  
**Rakesh Jain**

**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER-1

### INTRODUCTION

The sudden demise of the Soviet Union is an unprecedented development of our times and as such, it has rightly attracted attention all over the world including researchers and scholars. Russian Federation is the successor state of the erstwhile Soviet Union. The behavior of new Russia in international politics is of great importance for understanding the post-cold war international politics. This study is a modest attempt at probing Russian behavior towards its Central Asian neighbors which forms the erstwhile post-Soviet space during the last decade of 20th century.

On the eve of Soviet disintegration and in the period immediately following it, Russian thinking and policy towards Central Asia was marked by a mixture of condescending feeling of a big power towards its smaller and weaker neighbors, a desire to get away from the Central Asian problems. Yet there was a strong underlying belief that these new Republics<sup>1</sup> would not really break free from the apron-strings of Moscow and that Russia would retain its power and influence in the former Soviet space. Russia happens to be the largest, dominant and advanced of the former Soviet Republics. Russia has nearly three-fourths of the Soviet territory and more than half of its population. It is estimated that Russia accounts for 75 per cent of the GDP of the former Soviet Republics. Russia and other former Soviet Republics inherited the legacy of seventy years of 'socialist integration' which resulted in intricate weaving together and inter-dependence of their economies. Russian language still remains the lingua franca in the former Soviet space as well as the language of higher studies and research, although the study of English and other foreign languages has been encouraged. Each of the new Republics has declared its respective Republican language to be the state language in which all work is to be conducted.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Kaser. "Economic Transition in Six Central Asian Economies". *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.16, no.1, 1997, p.5.

Independence was rather thrust on the Central Asian Republics for which they had neither striven, nor were they really prepared. In fact, on the eve of the Soviet collapse a move was made to form a confederation of the three richest and the most advanced Slavic Republics of the Soviet Union—Russia, Belarus and Ukraine—to the exclusion of others, the more independence-minded Baltics, ‘troublesome’ Transcaucasians, and the more ‘backward’ Central Asians. This move did not materialize and others joined in—the Central Asians et al, to form a loose Commonwealth of Independent states (CIS) through the Alma-Ata Declaration on December 22, 1991 signed by 11 of the former Soviet Republics in place of the USSR.

## **POLITICAL DIMENSION**

It is widely agreed that immediately after the Soviet break-up the entire orientation of the Russian policy was towards the West, Which is known as ‘Trans-Atlantist’ version of Yeltsin’s foreign policy. Russia hoped to become a prosperous liberal democracy based on the Western model with generous aid and assistance from the west. Moreover, preoccupation with her own political and economic turmoil did not allow Russia to pay much attention to the other former Soviet Republics. Russia’s pro-Western Foreign Minister at that time, Andrei Kozyrev, was believed to be ready to accept the independence of the new republics. Keeping in line with this newly emerging view, Eurasian approach as the main Russian Foreign policy plank<sup>2</sup>. Despite initial problems and teething troubles, the new Republics proceeded to cement their new-found independence by establishing diplomatic, political and economic ties with the outside world. It seemed that the interests of Yeltsin government in Moscow and those of the ruling elites in the new Republics tended to converge. President Yeltsin appeared to be the best guarantor of the independence of the new Republics. They feared the return to power of the Communists and the ultra-nationalists, who wanted to resurrect the Soviet Union.

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<sup>2</sup> Kemal H. Karpat. “*The Socio-political Environment Conditioning the Foreign Policy of the New Republics*”, in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (ed.) *The Making of Foreign Policy of Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York), ME SHARPE, 1995. p.182.

In the immediate post-Soviet period ideological and political vacuum was created in the Muslim majority Republics of Central Asia. The Islamic countries like Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia saw in it an unprecedented opportunity to enhance their own influence in the region. Much was written at this time about Iranian and Turkish rivalry for influence in the region. The West energetically advocated the secular and pro-Western model of Turkey for the Central Asian Republics in contrast to the radical Islamic model of Iran.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union did not lead to the change of regimes in Central Asia. The old Communist nomenklatura continued to rule in these states after renouncing Communist ideology and adopting pragmatic nationalism as the new guiding principle. Despite their authoritarian rule, the then regimes in Central Asia were opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. They also stood for status quo and maintaining present state borders. In their list of priority, regime protection, maintenance of ethnic peace and economic development come first rather than immediate introduction of Western-type democracy. They also promised to provide security to the large Russian diaspora in the region. The protection of the rights and legitimate interests of the ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers has been a particularly emotive issue in Russia.

Moscow regarded it as its duty to protect the rights and interests of the ethnic Russian minorities in the new Republics. Of the 25 million Russians that remained in other former Soviet Republics after the fall of the Soviet Union, nearly 11.7 million happened to be in Central Asia. Out of the total 55 million population of Central Asia, the Russian Diaspora constituted the second largest ethnic group after the Uzbeks<sup>3</sup>. The largest concentration of Russians was in the northern industrialized part of Kazakhstan bordering on the Russian Federation. Russians in Kazakhstan constituted nearly 35 per cent of the population. The second highest concentration of Russians was in Kyrgyzstan where they constituted around 20 per cent of the population. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan the number of Russians was estimated to be 8 and 9 per cent respectively. In Tajikistan that witnessed a

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony Hyman. "Russian Minorities in the Near Abroad" *Conflict Studies*. 299 May 1997. p. 15.

bloody civil war the number of Russians declined from 400,000 in the year 1990 to just 70,000 in 1996<sup>4</sup>.

The Russians in Central Asia were generally highly qualified and skilled professionals. The Central Asian regimes are interested in their continued stay for the benefit of the economies of their states. Moreover, they have been generally interested in maintaining ethnic peace and do not want to exacerbate relations with Moscow. However, Russians in Central Asia found it difficult to adapt to the new changes and local languages and see little future for themselves and their children, which had resulted in steady out-migration of the Russians from Central Asia. However, the situation is rather complex as going back to Russia in the bleak economic situation has not been a very attractive alternative either. There have been also reports of those who had left earlier having returned back to Central Asia.

It is generally agreed that as a consequence of growing disenchantment with the West and increasing nationalist sentiment in the country, the Pro-West or the 'Trans-Atlanticists' in the Russian foreign policy establishment lost their dominant position in 1993-94. On the ascendance now were the 'Eurasianists,' the 'geo-politicians' and the nationalists' among the various schools of foreign policy thought in Russia. Yeltsin-Kozyrev team adopted some of the positions of their Communist and nationalist critics. Russian policy became more assertive in the 'near abroad' (comprising of the former Soviet Republics). Russia claimed a special peacekeeping role in various conflicts waging in the former Soviet Republics<sup>5</sup>. It claimed a right to intervene in the new Republics in the name of protection of the ethnic Russian minorities there. Through its Military Doctrine of November 1993, Russia took upon itself the responsibility of protecting the external border of the CIS states.

Afghanistan factor in Tajikistan's crisis also played a crucial role in this 'Eurasianists' shift of Yeltsin's foreign policy in the second half of 1990s. Afghanistan is the cockpit of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Hannes Adomeit. "Russia as a 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Images and Realities", *International Affairs* (RIIA), Vol.71. No.1, January 1995. pp.46-47.

central Asia and hence this factor was very important in the rise of Islamic Militancy in Tajikistan. Soon after its independence in 1991 it was engulfed by political conflict and violent inter-group clashes between the pro communist and the opponent Islamist forces and their supporters. The trans-border infiltration of armed bands and smuggling of arms from Afghan border has been the main destabilizing factor. Beside this Afghan Mujahideen controlling the Afghan border had been actively involved in violent clashes with Russian and Tajik border guards. The establishment of Islamic government in Afghanistan led by Mujahideen in April 1992 gave a boost to Islamic fundamentalist forces in Tajikistan.

This export of Islamic militancy from Afghanistan to Central Asian Republics like Tajikistan invoked serious response from Russia. Though Russia was pre-occupied with its own domestic problems and obsessed with the Euro-centric approach by President Yeltsin in the initial period. But the events like attacks on ethnic Russian minorities and their continuing exodus from Tajikistan became important factor in determining Russia's active policy in this region. Thus Afghanistan factor in the form of Tajik-Afghan border clashes, rise of Islamic militancy and suppression of ethnic Russian minority played its due role in shaping this 'Eurasianist' shift in Yeltsin's foreign policy contrary to earlier pro-western foreign policy during Yeltsin's period<sup>6</sup>.

President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan played a central role in the signing of the Collective Security Treaty in Tashkent in May 1992 for the protection of the CIS borders. In August 1992 an agreement was signed by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan whereby a 25,000-strong Russian-Central Asian force was created to protect the Tajik-Afghan border to keep the Islamic militants at bay. Russia deployed its 201st Motorised Rifle Division in Tajikistan in 1992.

Uzbekistan—the largest of the central Asian state from the population point of view—was the only state in the region where there were no Russian troops. Uzbekistan had

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<sup>6</sup> Warikoo, K. Singh, Uma and Ray, A. K (eds),(1994). "Afghanistan Factor in Central and South Asian Politics". Himalayan Research and Cultural foundation, Occasional paper-I. NewDelhi. pp.8-11.

opted for relying on its own armed forces for the protection of the small tract of the border with Afghanistan (around 140 kms). Amu Darya or Oxus divides the border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. Soviet built Salang Highway connects the Uzbek border town of Termez with Afghanistan. Moreover, all the five central Asian states had decided to join the unified CIS air defence system, the agreement regarding which was signed at Kishinev in October 1997.

In June 1997, a peace accord was signed between the Tajik government and the Islamic opposition in the bringing about of which both Russia and Iran played a major role. In late 1997 there were reports of a move to reduce Russian border guards in Tajikistan in view of shortage of funds. But the opponents of the move argued that Russia should maintain its military presence on Tajik-Afghan border, where the border guards were doing a commendable job of keeping a check on the uncontrollable smuggling of drugs from Afghanistan. They were also preventing the export of 'instability' from Afghanistan. It was also argued that as the USA and NATO were evincing increasing interest in Central Asia, it was particularly important for Russia to maintain its military presence in central Asia<sup>7</sup>.

Along with the collective security arrangements with Russia, all the Central Asian states had also entered into bilateral mutual security arrangements with it for ensuring their security against outside threats. These arrangements were seen as having given Russia the right to oversee military policies in the region. This was also marked with greater emphasis in Russian Military Doctrine of 1993 in the early years of the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

From the very beginning Turkmenistan took a separate line from the other four CARs. Turkmenistan has a common border with Iran and Afghanistan and is regarded as the 'gateway to Central Asia from the south.' Turkmenistan declared itself to be neutral and did not sign the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty of 1992. Turkmenistan also kept away from all regional moves to promote cooperation among the CARs themselves.

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<sup>7</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. February 7, 1998.



Turkmenistan with a small population of over 4 million has the fourth largest gas reserves in the world. Under the Turkmen supremo Separmurad Niyazov, the country wanted to become another Kuwait. However, even Turkmenistan had thought it fit to enter into bilateral security arrangements with Russia. In fact, Turkmenistan was the only Central Asian Republic which has granted dual citizenship to the ethnic Russians. All other Central Asian states refused it for fear of dividing loyalties.

There were Russian troops present in four out of the five CARs. Besides Tajikistan, there were Russian troops in the Baikonour space station area of Kazakhstan which had been leased to Russia. In Kyrgyzstan, Russian troops were posted on the Republic's border with China. In Turkmenistan, they were deployed on the Republic's border with Iran. According to Alvin Z. Rubinstein, the military ties had enabled Russia to have important basing facilities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.<sup>8</sup>

Russia also sought to particularly cultivate Uzbekistan which was showing signs of moving away from Russia. Russia tried to tie Uzbekistan to itself through a tripartite union between Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan against Islamic fundamentalism and extremism. President Karimov conducted a concerted campaign against Islamic fundamentalism, particularly against Saudi-inspired Wahhabi Islamic elements entrenched in its eastern Namangan province and Fergana valley. Russia also showed sensitivity and understanding towards Uzbekistan's aspirations and major concerns in the region. In the joint statement signed on May 6, 1998 at the time of President Karimov's visit to Moscow, Russia "positively assessed Uzbekistan's significant role in Central Asia."

The joint statement also said that "Russia has taken into consideration Uzbekistan's position in advocating numerous alternatives in transporting oil and gas exports, including transit via Russian territory." On its part Uzbekistan, said in the joint statement

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<sup>8</sup> Alvin, Z. Rubinstein, "Russia in search of a new Role- Changing Geopolitical Compulsion in Central Asia". *World Affairs*, vol 1, No 2, April-June 1997, p.73.

that it “recognizes Russia’s strategic interests in the region and admits that Russia’s involvement enhances political balance, economic expansion, and regional security and stability.” During the visit the two Presidents instructed their respective governments to draw an economic cooperation plan for the next 10 years. Thus, Russia sustained its position in the strategic field in Central Asia fairly successfully. The same is not, however, true of Russia’s standing in the economic field. Here the role of U.S and China is also very important which also get actively engaged in this Central Asian region which signifies the beginning of new Great Game for the control over economic and natural resources of this region of the Post-Soviet Space.

### **ECONOMIC DIMENSION**

Owing to its persistent economic woes, Russia was neither willing, nor actually in a position to shoulder aid burden to the CARs and make sizeable investments in their economies. Soon after their independence, all the CARs, began to diversify their political and economic ties with the outside world. The geopolitical importance of these states and their abundant oil and gas reserves and other natural resources have been attracting the US and other industrialized countries that have surplus investible capital and technology eagerly sought by these Republics. The CARs have also been looking towards West-dominated multilateral financial institutions like the World Bank, IMF (International Monetary Fund), EBRD (European Bank of Reconstruction and Development) and Asian Development Bank, etc., for loans. Large US, European, Japanese and South Korean corporations signed big deals with the CARs for investment in their energy and infrastructure sectors.<sup>9</sup>

As the share of other countries in the economies of the CARs increased Russia was losing ground economically in these countries in the same measure. Russia’s share in the trade turn-over of the CARs started declining. For instance, the overall trade turn-over between Russia and Tajikistan was reported to have declined 14 times in the past five years

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<sup>9</sup> Bakshi, Jyotsna. “No Single Power or Power Centre can have exclusive sway over Central Asia:A Geopolitical Analysis”. *Strategic Analysis*, Vol XXI, no.1, pp.125-128.

relegating Russia to the fifth place in the Tajik foreign trade. It may be kept in view that Tajikistan, of all the Central Asian states, had the largest Russian military presence on its territory<sup>10</sup>.

Moscow sought to stem the tide of its declining position in the former Soviet space by seeking selective integration with the inner core of the former Soviet Republics, who, for various reasons, were more willing for such integration. On March 29, 1996 a Customs Union was signed between four Republics, viz., Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the last two happen to be Central Asian Republics<sup>11</sup>. Although President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan was deliberately following the policy of 'Kazakhization' of Kazakhstan by promoting Kazakh language and culture and giving top positions in the government to the ethnic Kazakhs, still because of its peculiar geographical and demographic position, Kazakhstan could ill afford to antagonize Russia.

Nazarbaev, therefore, was one of the enthusiastic supporters of Eurasian integration, while maintaining the independence of Kazakhstan. The other member of the Customs Union, tiny Kyrgyzstan had no borders with Russia and had perhaps more to fear from its more numerous Uzbek neighbor. It was decided to admit Tajikistan as the fifth member of the Customs Union and it became its full-fledged member by the end of the year. Thus, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were the two CARs that remained outside Russia-led Customs Union at the time of its formation.

At the same time it was felt in Russia that increased oil and gas deliveries from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to European markets may offer competition to Russia's own oil and gas export industries. It may be kept in view that Russia's own fragile economy at that moment was crucially dependent on these exports. The fall in world oil prices had badly hit Russian economy and precipitated the then financial crisis. Moscow called for economic integration of the CIS countries within the former Soviet space and ought integration with the global market jointly.

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<sup>10</sup> SWB. SU/3087G/3 November 27, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> *Izvestia*, March 31, 1996.

It was argued that if they seek integration in the global economy on their own independently then they would be placed on the periphery of the international markets as the developed countries did not want new competitors to emerge. Some analysts also observe that certain disenchantment has set in the new Republics regarding the West's sincerity and ability to really help them to come out of their current economic difficulties and bring about their smooth transition from command economy to market-oriented economy. They have come to realize that nothing was granted free. However, Russia's own economic troubles did not permit it to play the role of an engine for the economic regeneration of former Soviet space<sup>12</sup>.

Hence, it is clear that Russia began its foreign policy towards Central Asia with dominating imperialist past, ambiguous present and uncertain future. Its foreign policy was guided by geo-economic and geo-strategic interests. In the beginning Russia ignored 'Near Abroad' in favor of West (especially US). It was done under the influence of the 'Trans-Atlanticist' approach which was carried out under the supervision of Andrei Kozyrev. But, by the end of 1995, this approach proved to be a great failure. Now there was a complete disillusionment with the west. It led to 'rethinking' and 'rediscovery of Near Abroad' as a natural zone of influence. Now emphasis was put on strengthening Russia-Central Asia relationship. Russia adopted the policy of assertion and 'active engagement' towards Central Asia. This policy shift came to be known as 'Eurasianist' Vision. Its main protagonist was new Russian foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov. Hence Russian foreign policy underwent a series of changes-from 'years of inactivity' to policy of 'active engagement' during Yeltsin's Presidential period of 1991-1999. All these developments are analyzed in details in the coming chapters.

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<sup>12</sup> SWB.SU/3148 b/10 February 11, 1998.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SOVIET POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA**

## CHAPTER-2

### SOVIET POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA

This chapter on Soviet Policy in Central Asia provides a historical perspective as it does cast its shadow over the formulation of Russian Policy towards the newly independent Central Asian Republics. Russia's relations with Central Asia are older than the emergence of erstwhile Soviet Union on the world map in 1917. Together with Russia, Central Asia formed a part of single state system in the form of Tsarist Russian Empire for more than one and a quarter century.

With the accession of the Catherine II in 1762, Russia withdrew its policy of neutrality and the Empress persuaded an active foreign policy, which resulted in adding Central Asian territory to the Russian empire<sup>1</sup>. The economic and cultural links were older than the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the Russians were pushing from the north across the Steppes and deserts into the heart of Turkestan, Russia's defeat in the Crimean war in 1853 to 1856 only intensified Tsarist Russia's search for sphere of influence in the direction of Central Asia.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Pre-Soviet Russia's cultural relations with Central Asia date's back over a period of more than a millennium. Russian Orientalist, Lev Gumiliv visualized Russia as the single ethnographic region with the great Steppes<sup>2</sup> by the end of 12<sup>th</sup> century both regions developed a common culture and lifestyle over a period of time. By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century following the incorporation of the Caucasus and the Central Asian region, Russia under Tsarist regime became a poly-ethnic country with the population of 18 million

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H Donaldson and Joseph L Noguee, "*The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing System Enduring Interests*". New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998, p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Kaushik, Devendra. "Russia and Central Asian Relations: Assertion of Russia's Eurasian Identity", *Contemporary Central Asia*, Vol. 7, no1-2, April-August 2003, p.1.

Muslims. The prolonged war with Turkey from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries over Crimea was also motivated by the urge to gain access to the Black sea and the Caspian sea in order to eliminate the threat from the south. The merger of Central Asia in the Russian state had both negative and positive outcomes. The negative sides, was the absence of self rule and civil administration alongside the consolidation of feudalism in Khiva and Bukhara. The positive gains were end of feudal wars and economic development of this region. However, the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed “Great Game”-struggle for annexation of colonies for division of world between two Great powers of Europe namely Tsarist Russia and the Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> That is why the British geographer Halford J Makinder realized the importance of this vast Eurasian heartland and regarded it geographical pivot of world history at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. He viewed Russian and Eurasian Empire as a remarkable and unique institution due to its geographical and political structure.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, The Tsarist Russian Policy in Central Asia was generally marked by liberal spirit of non-interference in the national life of Central Asia. No efforts were made to convert the local Muslim population into Christianity. It also led to introduction of advanced Russian culture in Central Asia, which led to socio-political development in this region. When Soviet Union was formed in 1917, it was this historical background of Tsarist Period, which provided some basis for the Soviet policy in Central Asia.

## **FORMATION OF SOVIET UNION**

Many factors like impact of World War I, economic stagnation, Tsarist oppression and the victory of socialism led to the downfall of the Tsarist Empire under the leadership of V. I. Lenin after the success of October revolution of 1917. As this revolution was led by the Bolshevik Party so it is also called as Bolshevik Revolution. But the task of nation

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Changes and Military Conflicts From 1500-2000*, (New York): Random House Publication 1987, pp.230-241.

<sup>4</sup> Kaushik, Devendra. *The Past Soviet Central Asia and Russia: Emerging Contours of New Relationship*, in Warikoo, K. (ed.), *Central Asia: Emerging New Order* (New Delhi; Har Anand Publications, 1995), p.227.

building was very difficult and there was resistance from reactionary forces. The important stages of the formation of Soviet Union included the formation of various People's Republics which were later transferred into the federation of Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR).

Toward the beginning of 1917, when the authority of imperial Tsarist regime started crumbling down all over Russia, the situation in Central Asia had become highly explosive. By then a number of factors such as the loss of large areas of land by the natives, the war time levies and extortions, the high handed manner in which the rebellion of 1916 was suppressed, the semi-famine conditions etc. led the indigenous population to work for emancipating itself from the Russian tutelage. On the other hand, the immigrant Russian population which thrived on the land seized from the natives, on the privileged positions offered by the Russian colonial administration and on the trade and industrial monopoly it held in the region, contested the right of native people to self rule. This sharp divergence of interests and objectives of the two communities had a deep impact on all subsequent events, which took place in Turkestan. In Khiva and Bukhara, the discontent against the autocratic rule of the Khan and the Amir was mounting. The situation in these two native states had so much deteriorated that both the Khan and Amir in 1916-17 were forced to seek the help of Russian armies to suppress popular uprisings against their regimes<sup>5</sup>.

The events, which took place in post-February 1917 days, however, did not change in any way the political climate of Central Asia. The local Russian community continued to believe that the 'new order' was more relevant for the progressive Russian society, than for the politically immature and socially backward native population. A group of advocates from Tashkent cautioned Russian Prime Minister Kerensky that if the Muslims were granted the right of self-determination, there would be grim struggle for power among various native Central Asian tribes resulting ultimately in a bloody carnage. The

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<sup>5</sup> Vaidyanath R, "*The Formation of Soviet Central Asian Republics: A Study in Soviet Nationalities Policy 1917-36*". Peoples Publishing, House, New Delhi, 1976. pp.69-70.



provisional government also was averse to the idea of changing the status quo in Central Asia.

Before the October revolution in Central Asia, there did not exist an independent Bolshevik Party. The Bolsheviks were scattered all over the Turkestan region in little isolated groups. In Tashkent, Samarkand, Kagan and other cities the Bolsheviks functioned as a part of social democratic organizations which were under the predominant influence of the Menshevik and the socialist revolutionaries. Only, towards June 1918, an independent Communist Party of Turkestan was formed. Soviet writers usually assert that ever since the 1905 revolution, a separate, independent and well-integrated Bolshevik fraction existed in Turkestan and played an important role in the revolutionary movement in the region. Facts, however, did not wholly corroborate this view. Moreover there appears to be some truth in the statement that it was not a Bolshevik Party that created the Bolshevik power in Turkestan, but it was the Bolshevik power which created the Bolshevik party.<sup>6</sup>

In October 1919 by a joint resolution of the all Russian central executive committee and the Council of People's Commissars, a high power commission on Turkestan affairs was created. It was entrusted with the task of completely reversing the policies pursued until then by the government of the Turkestan Republic and bringing them on the line with the policies of the centre. To what extent this was to mean a departure from the earlier practices in Turkestan became clear from the wording of the resolution which brought the commission into existence. The resolution asserted that<sup>7</sup> –

“The self determination of the people of Turkestan and the abolition of all national inequality and all privileges of one national group over another constitute the foundation of all the policies of the Soviet government and serve as a guiding principle in all the works of its organs. It is only through such works that the mistrust of the native people of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Carr, E. H. “*The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*”, Vol. 1. London, 1950. pp. 42-50.

Turkestan for Russia bred by many years of domination of Russian Tsarism can be finally overcome”.

Thus, it is clear that Bolshevik revolution was a product of both internal as well as external factors. By this revolution, the medieval structure of Tsarist Russia crumbled and a new era began with the formation of first ever-Socialist government in any country. The formation of Soviet Union was a historic landmark and had far-reaching implications in the times to come.

### **RECOGNITION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONAL SELF DETERMINATION**

One of the fundamental principles of the Soviet policy in Central Asia was recognition of the right to self-determination and it was proclaimed by Soviet unions, Central communist party in one of its first decrees- the Decree on peace.<sup>8</sup> This principle had wider implications. It assured free development of the national minorities and ethnographic groups of the nationalities inhabiting the territory of Soviet Russia. It led to the formation of a single multi-national state, paving the way for federal polity structure of Soviet Union.

This Decree elaborated on the essence, content and sphere of action of the principle of self-determination. The Decree declared that this principle accorded not only with the sense of justice of the working people, but with justice of democrats in general. The slogan of self-determination was in-fact a part of the Bourgeois-democratic program. It also followed from the Decree that the degree of a nation's political, economic and cultural development cannot be used as a pretext to deny it the right to manage its own affairs. The Decree thus dealt a decisive blow to colonial allegations that they held other nations in bondage because they were incapable of governing themselves.

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<sup>8</sup> Kaushik, Devendra, *Central Asia in Modern Times* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), pp.130-131.

While the Decree on Peace proclaimed the principle of national self-determination primarily as a principle of international law, it was included in the Declaration of Rights of working and exploited people as principle of national development in the Soviet state. The Declaration of the Rights of people said that the Soviet government, implementing the resolution of the first and second Congress of the Soviets on the right of nations to self-determination, decided to make the following principles the basis of its national policy towards Central Asia<sup>9</sup>-

- a) Equality and Sovereignty of the people.
- b) Right of the people to self-determination upto secession and establishment of independent states.
- c) Annulment of all national and religious privileges and restrictions.
- d) Free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups.

These principles guaranteed the formally oppressed nations not only the freedom of secession, but also their free development in the event they did not want to secede. This explains why the absolute majority of nationalities decided to remain within the boundaries of Soviet Union. But while agreeing to be a part of single multinational state, they raised the question of greater guarantees for their rights. Hence the Communist Party of Soviet Union suggested the establishment of a Federation, meeting the national feelings of the people.

## **FORMATION OF SOVIET CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS**

In 1917 when Bolshevik revolution took place. Central Asia was divided into three states Units- Turkestan, Bhukara and Khiva. The formation of Turkestan autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was the first major step towards the creation of Soviet nationhood for people of Central Asia. The National State Delimitation Commission was formed in 1924. The delimitation plan proposed the creation of separate National Republic for each of the main nationality of Central Asia on the basis of principle of one nationality one

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.132.

state. This was devised to address the ethnographic divisive forces and the challenges posed by them to the nascent Soviet Union. The policy pursued by the Soviet government of Turkestan, Bukhara prepared the ground for the national delimitation by the creation of autonomous Oblasts, development of languages, literature and press of indigenous nationalities.

The national territorial delimitation of Central Asia which brought into existence several national Republics in place of the formal multinational political entities of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm had given rise to acute controversy between Soviet and non-Soviet scholars. Soviet scholars generally saw in this reform a second revolution and a beginning of Soviet nationalities policy in Central Asia. They claim that only as a result of the creation of nationally homogeneous Republics, peaceful and harmonious relations had been established among the different national groups of Central Asia in place of clan-tribal feuds and national frictions in the past. The non-Soviet critics of the reforms however thought it differently. Mustafa Chokaev alleged that the plan of the division of the Turkestan into tribal states was invented by the Bolsheviks at Moscow to counter the attempt made by the Muslim communists to secure the unification of all the Turkic tribes around the nucleus of Soviet Turkestan.<sup>10</sup>

### **NATIONAL DELIMITATION COMMISSION**

The necessity for undertaking such an extensive territorial reorganization of Central Asia arose from the desire to remedy the complex national tangle which considerably hindered the development of socialist order within the Central Asian region. The heterogeneity of national composition, the linguistic, economic and cultural affinities and differences of people of Central Asia had been discussed very widely by many scholars. In spite of the utter complexity of the national problem in Central Asia, no serious effort was made in the pre-revolutionary period to find out a remedy for this problem. On the contrary the demarcation of political and administrative divisions of the Turkestan region on the basis

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<sup>10</sup> Kaushik, Devendra, *Central Asia in Modern Times* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970). p. 151.

of only the military, strategic and political needs at the time of Russian conquest had increased the complexity of the national problem in Central Asia.<sup>11</sup>

Among the communist organizations of Central Asia, the Bukharan Communist Party took the lead in bringing up the national delimitation project for discussion. On February 25, 1924 a plenary session of central committee of Bukharan Communist Party after debating this issue adopted a resolution which stated that conditions within the Central Asian Republics were ripe for the division of their territory into a number of Republics on the nationality principle.<sup>12</sup> In Turkestan, the preliminary discussion on national delimitation was begun in March 1924. On March 10, 1924 a joint session of central committee of Turkestan Communist Party and the Presidium of the Turkestan central executive committee discussed the national delimitation question. Though at the end of the conference, resolution was adopted favoring the delimitation of the Turkestan Republics the discussion in this conference was characterized by acute differences of opinion.

The Central Asiatic Bureau began the work of compiling a systematic and comprehensive report on the proposed reform. To accomplish this work, the central Asiatic Bureau created a special commission on National Delimitation and also Uzbek and Turkmen National Commissions. The National Commission was asked to work out the details of national delimitation scheme concerning their respective state formations and to submit their reports to the National Delimitation Commission not later than May 9, 1924. The recommendations of National Commissions on the formation of future states of Central Asia were scrutinized by the National Delimitation Commission on May 10, 1924. The Commission favored the establishment of Uzbek and Turkmen Republics and Tadjik and Kirgiz autonomous Oblasts. The Commission however, rejected the recommendations of the Kazakh National Commission to merge the Kazakh inhabited areas of Turkestan with the Kazakh ASSR and to establish a Central Asia Federation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.155.

<sup>12</sup> Vaidyanath R, "*The Formation of Soviet Central Asian Republics : A Study in Soviet Nationalities Policy 1917-36*", Peoples Publishing, House, New Delhi. 1976. pp.166-167.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p 168.

The recommendations of the National Delimitation Commission together with the decisions of the Communist Party organizations of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm were embodied in the report forwarded by the Central Asiatic Bureau to the central committee of the Russian Communist Party. On June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 1924, the Polite Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party scrutinized this report. On June 12<sup>th</sup> 1924, the Polit Bureau adopted a Decree 'on national delimitation of the Republics of Central Asia (Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm)'. In this Decree, it was stated that-<sup>14</sup>

1. The proposals of the Central Committees of Bukhara and Turkestan be accepted in the following manner-
  - (a) To carve out the Turkmen parts of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm and establish independent Turkmen Republic,
  - (b) To carve out from Bukhara and Turkestan their Uzbek Areas and establish an independent Uzbek Republic,
  - (c) To retain the Khorezm Republic in its present form after separating it from the Turkmen areas,
2. To merge the Khirgiz (i.e the Kazakh) areas of Turkestan with the KASSR,
3. To create an autonomous Kara-Kirgiz (i.e. Kirgiz) Oblast and to include it within the RSFSR,
4. To carve out within the Uzbek Republic a separate autonomous Oblast of the Tadjiks
5. To conclude a treaty between the USSR and the independent Turkmen and Uzbek, Republics on their entrance into the Union in the forthcoming Congress of Soviets of the USSR.<sup>15</sup>

The main significance of the national delimitation of Central Asia lied in the fact that it enabled the unification within the framework of nationally homogeneous Republics of the different segments of the Uzbek, Turkmen, Tadjik, Kirgiz, Kara-kalpak and Kazakh

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<sup>14</sup> Zafar Imam, "*Soviet Foreign Policy 1970-1990*". (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1991), pp. 14-18.

<sup>15</sup> Kaushik, Devendra, *Central Asia in Modern Times* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 152.

populations which were previously scattered over the territories of the Republics of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm.

### **ELEVATION OF TADJIKISTIAN, KARA-KALPAKIA AND KIRGIZIA TO HIGHER FORM OF STATEHOOD**

Barring the reorganization of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast into an Autonomous Republic in 1926, the political setup which emerged in Central Asia as a consequence of national delimitation, did not undergo any major changes until 1929. But beginning from 1929, the political setup of some states began to undergo significant changes following the introduction of number of reforms. In 1929, the Tadjik ASSR was separated from the Uzbek SSR and raised to the status of a Union Republic and was included directly within the USSR. In 1932 the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast was detached from the Kazakh ASSR and was elevated to the status of an autonomous Republic. It was included within the RSFSR. Four years later it was once again separated from the RSFSR and was included within the Uzbek SSR. In 1936, following the adaptation of a new constitution of USSR, the Kyrgyz ASSR was separated from the RSFSR. It was raised to the status of a Union Republic and was included directly within the USSR.<sup>16</sup>

While evaluating the Soviet nationalities policy in Central Asia between 1917-1936, one cannot fail to notice two broad trends which were, firstly the application of a policy of extreme centralization which subordinated the regional interests to the interests of the union. Secondly, the encouragement and promotion of national, ethnic and linguistic distinctions of the peoples of Central Asia within the overall socialist setup. The results achieved in establishing the Soviet institutions in the forms which were consistent with the national and linguistic distinctions of the peoples of central Asia were very impressive. While the establishment of the national Republics of Central Asia enabled the Uzbeks, Turkmens, Tadjiks, Kirgiz and Kara-Kalpaks to consolidate their nationhood and

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<sup>16</sup>Vaidyanath R, "*The Formation of Soviet Central Asian Republics: A Study in Soviet Nationalities Policy 1917-36*", Peoples Publishing, House, New Delhi. 1976. p. 235.

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to overcome the national and tribal feuds and frictions of the past, the economic policies which subsequently pursued in relation to Central Asia, conferred upon these local nationalities substantial degree of material prosperity.

## SOVIET CULTURAL POLICY

During the seven decades following 1917, the discussion of international affairs was confined within the framework of an elaborate structure of ideas concerning Soviet Union's role in the world-as the champion of international progress and proletariat revolution.<sup>17</sup> This was very clearly highlighted by Lenin under his notion of permanent revolution in contrast to the revolution in one country, thus Lenin published 'Imperialism: The highest stage of Capitalism'. This work was a new attempt to justify Marxian internationalism, at the same time recognizing the revolutionary potential of nationalism in less developed areas. Hence the Soviet policy in Central Asia should be seen in this wider ideological framework which the Soviet government strived to achieve.

The cultural and linguistic heterogeneity together with religious and geographical differences created the problem of reconciliation of the question of nationalities and local identities with that of national identity and unity. This task of national integration in the context of cultural differences was taken up by the National State Delimitation Commission formed in 1924. This Commission delimited various territorial units in Central Asia based on the concentration of various ethnic nationalities.

Initially, the two Republics namely the Uzbek SSR and the Turkmen SSR were formed as Union Republics within the USSR. On the other hand, the Tajikistan became an autonomous SSR within the Uzbek SSR. The Kazakh areas of Central Asia became united as Kirghiz autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within RSFR and Kara-Kalpakia became a part of the Kirghiz ASSR as an autonomous oblast. These National Soviet Socialist Republics and autonomous Oblasts united the substantive peoples of Central Asia into their national forms for the first time in history. Thus we find the ethnographic

<sup>17</sup> Zafar Imam, "Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1990". (New Delhi. Sterling Publishers, 1991), pp. 18-31.



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map of Central Asia more justly drawn after the national delimitation by removing the old ethnographic anomalies. Thus a better solution of the national problem in Central Asia was found by 1924 delimitation. By removing grounds for national friction, it enabled the people of Central Asia to be drawn into the task of building National Socialism.

The cultural policy of Soviet Union in Central Asian region was clearly related to the question of nationalities. For any newly formed federation cultural unity and solidarity is an important part of nation building. It became extremely important if we take into consideration the pre-Soviet feudal background of Central Asia. Any sort of Cultural Revolution in such circumstances will necessarily involve ideological struggle between various class interests. Culture implies languages, literature, belief system, norms, customs, national icons etc but also represent a society with its ideological, material and socio-economic priorities. It also reflected the level of maturity of political establishment in terms of political culture-either of parochial or participant type.

Hence, after October revolution of 1917 the Soviet Union government attempted to change the cultural affinity of the people of the Central Asian region in the name of modernization of native culture. The important goals of the Soviet region in particularly Central Asia were socio-cultural and ideological transformation with a view to completely change of identities of native people. These were most challenging aspects of Soviet cultural policy towards Central Asia. An important part of the policy was to implant a Soviet or national identity over the local nationalities and their native cultural belongings.

The astonishing feature of such cultural policy was that the native people had little voice in setting the cultural goals and devising the means for the development and modernization of their own society and culture.<sup>18</sup> At the beginning Lenin took some measures for the purpose of uniform system of governance. Priority was given to the

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<sup>18</sup> Rahul, Ram, "*Central Asia: A Text Book of History*". (New Delhi. Munshi Ram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2000), pp. 22-26.

fundamental matters of prevailing systems of family, religion, language, literature, education etc. To meet these goals Soviet authority applied several means to liquidate the traditional culture of Central Asia to effective cultural isolation. The Soviet regime brought some major changes in the region. The most critical component of Soviet culture and religious policies towards Central Asia consist of following elements:<sup>19</sup>

Complete domination of political and military power by the Russian Bolsheviks  
Large scale economic extraction as well as creation of end fostering of long-term economic and technological dependency upon Russia and Russian language (Russification)  
Systemic liquidation of traditional institution and native culture of the Central Asian region.  
Building of a new Soviet society and culture to replace the old and native local culture.

Bolsheviks declared their policies towards Central Asian states in “Proclamation to Mohammedans of Russia and the Orient”. This policy was basically addressed to the Muslims of the region especially Tartars, Kirghiz, Turkestan, Turks and Chechens. They tried to make Central Asian people believe that Muslims beliefs and customs, institutions and cultural identities were free and inviolable. Thus this declaration raised the hope of the native Central Asian masses who were simultaneously assured of the right to self-determination. However, this cultural policy was unbiased only in theory. In the long term the operative part of their cultural policy presented quite a different picture. It represented the totalitarian and centralized nature of Soviet states monocultural likening. Also it shows the states sponsored coercive techniques adopted to impose cultural homogeneity over the otherwise multicultural, polyethnic nationalities of Central Asia.

This view is strongly supported by the fact that there were many local uprisings both during and post Stalin era. The native forces were very much instrumental in bringing down the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991. However, some scholars like Roger.E.Kanet<sup>20</sup> and Susanne.M.Birgerson have argued that in the beginning there was

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<sup>19</sup> Phool Badan, “*Dynamics of Political Development in Central Asia*”. (New Delhi) Lanchers Books, 2001. p.32.

<sup>20</sup> Roger E Kanet and Susanne M Birgerrson in *Communist and Post Communist Studies*, Vol 30. no4, pp.335-336.

not as such a domestic political pressure especially during Stalin period. It was only during Gorbachev's reform program of Perestroika and Glasnost that the growing challenges were presented to the leadership and virtually all of its policies under Gorbachev's regime. They have made this observation in their study of nationalist influences on Russian foreign policy.

The Marxist ideology led Soviet leadership to believe that the nationalist sentiment and identities in the absence of Capitalist exploitation would naturally give way to a collective identity based on class solidarity.<sup>21</sup> But when this concept of 'Homo-Sovieticus' was put into practice it gave unexpected outcomes. The question of nationalities remained subsumed during Stalin's oppressive and evil empire era. But it came to surface as soon as state of Soviet Union lost its control over the events.

Another scholar Zbigniew Brzezinski also puts it another words. "The Soviet Union became political expression of Russian nationalism" with complete state control over all means of socialization; the predominantly Russian leadership in Moscow tried to 'Russify', and 'Sovietise', the various ethnic communities in order to create a loyal citizenship of the new Soviet state. Of course, ultimately this too failed.

According to French scholars Helene.Carrere d' Encausse and Alexander Benningsen, though Soviet authorities tried hard to cultivate an image of Soviet men among local nationalities by suppressing pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism the local customs and traditions, the homo-Islamicus emerged like phoenix from the ashes. Michael Rwykin in his work *Moscow' Muslims challenge* (1982) hinted at the existence of growing racial antagonism between two non-integrated communities in Soviet Central Asia.<sup>22</sup>

Notwithstanding the observation that Soviet cultural policy has great fallacies both at the theoretical as well as operative level, the positive outcome cannot be overlooked. When

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<sup>21</sup> Shearman.Peter(ed). "*Russia's Foreign Policy Since 1990*. Boulder" (West View Press),1995.p.5.

<sup>22</sup> Kaushik Devendra. "Russia and Central Asian Relations: Assertion of Russia's Eurasian identity", *Contemporary Central Asia*, Vol 7, no 1-2, April- August 2003, pp.4-5.

we analyze the success and failure of cultural policy of Soviet Union during 1917-1991 we have to keep in mind the history of emergence of USSR over the ashes of Tsarist Russian Empire. The main objective of any cultural policy is to bring out a sort of social cohesion and national sentiment. Judged by this criteria and also taking into consideration the role played by reactionary forces and external powers like Britain, France and US, it can be said that this cultural policy was succeed in achieving the task of state building and national consolidation in the initial formative years of Soviet Union.

Here it should also be pointed out that Central Asia prior to implementation of Soviet cultural policy presented a picture of backward region across various indicators such as mass illiteracy, poor public health, low level of women position in the feudal Central Asian society. One of the major achievement of the cultural policy of the Soviet regime in Central Asia was the success of mass literacy campaign. It was launched in 1929. Millions of peasants were taught how to read and write in the hinterlands of vast Central Asian region. The Central Asian languages were reformed on the basis of Latin alphabet, which were more convenient and easier than the prevailing old Arab alphabet.

There are many illustrations, which show the success achieved in terms of mass literacy level in Central Asia. For example by 1958 there were 72 times as many people studying in Central Asia in 1917. it can also be inferred from the increase in number of public schools, libraries, institutes of higher learning, museum, heritage sites etc. over 70 percent of students in these higher institutes of education came from local nationalities.<sup>23</sup> Soviet government allocated large sum for the development of the national press and the printing industries in Central Asian region.

Development of Russian language as 'linguafranca' was another major revolutionary steps taken by Soviet cultural policy by Central government in Central Asia. This process of Russification gave great impetus to sociopolitical modernization and urbanization of

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<sup>23</sup> Kaushik. Devendra, "*Central Asia in Modern Times*" (Moscow: Progress Publishers. 1970), p.247.

the prevalent feudal Central Asian society. Together with this it also led to techno-economic development of this backward region. Also great achievements were seen in the field of literature. Due to efforts of Soviet government many regional literary organizations and institutes were established. They did tremendous work in development of regional literature.

Another important dimension of Soviet cultural policy in Central Asia was the objective of realizing the goal of women emancipation. It was a very important task because women were given lower status in the Central Asian society due to prevailing feudal mindset and practices. As a reform, measures were given land ownership rights, which was a very radical reform. It not only gave equal status to women in society but also gave them economic independence and self-reliance.

Another major policy initiative was to increase women literacy level. The work of women education was given high priority. By 1950s the good work done by mass literacy campaign started showing fruitful results. For example, by 1959, the number of women workers in the field of education, scientific research and public health exceeded that of men. Socialist pattern of industrialization and the policy of collectivization and cooperative farming also helped in empowerment of women in the economic sphere.

One of the major achievements seen in socio-cultural sphere was the increasing level of urbanization and emergence of newly and well-planned cities. The modernized capital cities like Tashkent and Astana together with Samarqand etc., which show the high level of socio-cultural modernization and economic development. They could be compared with any of the major European cities of their time.

Thus it can be said that cultural policy of Soviet Union in Central Asia gave mixed outcomes of both success and failure. It failed at the level of bringing a type of cultural homogeneity in the name of Russification and Sovietization. The local nationalities remained dormant beneath the garb of supra-ethnic Soviet identity or so-called national identity. But the success of Soviet cultural policy lies in bringing out socio-cultural

transformation. This policy transformed the feudal Central Asian society into modernizing and forward looking society. It brought them to the level of prevailing ideas of contemporary modern European society.

## **ECONOMIC POLICY**

Soviet Central Asian region was socially and economically backward on the eve of October revolution. It was predominantly an agrarian economy.<sup>24</sup> Handicraft units largely characterized industrial sector and primitive rural industry intended to meet local requirements only. Since the early 1920's several efforts were made by Soviet leadership to develop the industrial sector of Central Asian region on modern lines. But this approach has limited success in meeting the demands of the people. Lack of skilled workers was a constraint in managing the new industrial units. Hence a large number of workers were sent to Petrograd and Moscow for training in modern industries. Industrial growth in Central Asia received a great boost with the launching first five-year plan in 1928.

A number of modern factories were set up using local materials and labor resources. Among them cotton ginning mills, oil extracting units were more prominent. In other words agro-based industries were set up in the first phase of industrial development planning. Subsequently industries contributing to the input of agriculture (mainly cotton cultivation) such as chemical and fertilizer units, agricultural machineries, especially for cotton cultivation and harvesting, irrigation and equipments for cotton production were developed.<sup>25</sup>

However, the critics like G.Wheeler have criticized their policy of nationalization and central planning. He has tried hard to draw attention towards colonial character of Central Asian economy during Soviet period. He referred to the export of 90 percent of Central

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<sup>24</sup> R G Gidadhubli. "Soviet Central Asia: Socioeconomic Challenges to Development " in Warriko,K and Norbu. Dawa (ed). Ethnicity and Politics in Central Asia (New Delhi) South Asian Publishers, 1992, pp.131-133.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 131.

Asian cotton as raw fiber to the other parts, which were industrially well developed of the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> He had cited the report of economic commission for Europe's, regional economic policy in Soviet Union published in 1957 in order to refute the achievements of the five year plans towards bridging the gaps in the level of development of Central Asian region and other industrial developed regions of Soviet Russia.

But this criticism cannot be held correct if seen in the light of existing realities. The rapid modernization and economic development is very much evident from the rise of per capital national income during Stalin era. The policy of Socialist industrialization had transferred the agrarian economic structure into an industrial one. Though there were regional disparity and imbalances, but policy can ensure hundred percent-balanced growth during such a turbulent and transitory phase. In agriculture also reforms were initiated their aim was to put an end to feudal land and water ownership existing in most of the parts of Central Asia. The agrarian policy persuaded by the party and the Soviet Union in Central Asia was bitterly opposed by local elites like Kulaks, Bais and moneylenders

But these reform measures of the Soviet government intended to improve the lot of small peasants did not radically altered the situation in the countryside.<sup>27</sup> Hence there was a policy reversal and now large mechanized highly productive forms were given priority over development of small land holdings. This was carried in the form of collective farming. The cooperatives of the simplest type were popular among the small peasants. It was in those years too that the first agricultural cooperatives of still a higher type-the collective farms first appeared in Central Asia. Soviet government in this region carried out intensive collectivization.

Mass collectivization was opposed very strongly by the hostile classes. The Bias and Kulaks of Uzbekistan and Tazakistan openly came out with arms against Soviet power. Apparently it was clear that this collectivization was leading to dekulisation. However, at

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<sup>26</sup> G Wheeler, "*The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*", (London, 1964), p.161.

<sup>27</sup> Kaushik, Devendra. opt..cit..p.234.

these initial stages several problems broke out among them important ones were unhealthy competition between different regions, wide gaps between policymaking and policy implementation, irresponsible and inapt state machinery and most importantly the use of force and not consent of the local peasants. It led to policy rethinking and now the focus was shifted towards voluntariness of the peasants. This initiative paid rich dividend. The reorganization of party and Soviets in villages and formation of party units in state forms, collective farms, machine, and tractors led to a big increase in the size of collectivization movement. For example, in 1932 collective farms in Uzbekistan united 74.9 percent of the peasant families. By the end of 1932 the share of socialist sector in cotton growing rose to 50 percent and the work of collectivization of farming was almost completed in the cotton cultivating areas of Uzbekistan.

The position of other areas was also somewhat similar of the rest of the Central Asian parts. In Turkmenia, Kirghizia and Tazakhstan the task was all the more difficult because in comparison Uzbekistan these republics had greater feudal and tribal composition. Also another big problem was that a large section of its population was still nomadic. Thus it implied not only transformation in agriculture structure but also simultaneous changes from nomadic life to settle life in a large section of Central Asian society.

The end of second five-year plan completed the collectivization of agriculture in these republics. This was a very important step for the ultimate solution of national question in the Soviet Union. During the short period of two decades the erstwhile oppressed and backward sections of Central Asian people completely changed their economic position of dependency. Now they obtain legal equality. But more important than this they obtained real economic equality. It could be acknowledged by the level of mechanization of agriculture in Central Asia as illustrated in table No.1



<b>Table No.1: Number of Tractors per thousand hectares of areas</b>			
<b>(in terms of 15 hp tractors)</b>			
Region	1940	1953	1960
Russian Federation	4.55	7.88	9.78
Uzbek Republic	6.96	9.79	8.98
Kirghiz Republic	7.80	16.49	23.01
Tajik Republic	5.87	9.16	14.46
Turkmen Republic	10.95	21.85	33.10

**Source:** Devendra Kaushik, *“Central Asia in Modern Times”*, Moscow Progress Publishers 1970. p-243.

Thus a preliminary investigation of the above table reflects that with the passage of time there was increased mechanization of agriculture and Soviet policy was to use science and technology for the advancement of agrarian economy. It was very relevant because in the initial years of its formation Soviet Union was suffering from the problem of mass hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. At that time availability of food grains was very low and famines, droughts were rampant. This problem was solved with increased mechanization and collective farming. Now Soviet Union transferred itself from net importer to exporter of food grains.

Hence, it can be concluded that economic policy of Soviet Union in Central Asia served the twin objectives of the development of agriculture and modernization of industries. This policy not only created self-sufficiency in food grains but also created the military industrial complexes (MIC). Thus the economic structure of Central Asian region changed under the effect of such policy, which was in turn a great source of superpower status of Soviet Union at the international stage.

## **IMPACT OF SOVIET POLICY ON CENTRAL ASIA**

It is evident from the analysis of the Soviet Union's economic, socio-cultural and nationalities policy that it had three main objectives-

- a) Expansion of ideology of proletarian internationalism,
- b) National Consolidation and integration,
- c) Economic and social development of Central Asia.

The other consequences of this policy were also very profound. It not only brought political unification but also led to development of national identity. It transcended the local nationalities and parochial sentiments of the native Central Asian people. The impact of Soviet Policy can be explained within the following broader chronological framework.<sup>28</sup>

- i. Formative phase, 1917-1924
- ii. Period of normalization, 1924-1929
- iii. Search for security, 1930-1941
- iv. The Cold War phase, 1945-1962
- v. Towards Détente, 1963-1971
- vi. Period of Détente, 1971-79
- vii. Gorbachev's New Thinking, 1980-1991

### **i) FORMATIVE PHASE, 1917-1924**

During this phase soviet policy was marked by the need of national integration, and consolidation of October revolution of 1917. It also wanted to suppressed the reactionary forces both internal and external powers. The main leader of Russian revolution Lenin highlighted the first priority of political stability and economic growth. Thus due to the need of establishment of a central power and spread of revolution, it was clear that Soviet

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<sup>28</sup> Zafar Imam, "*Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1990*". (New Delhi. Sterling Publishers, 1991). pp.14-42.

Union had to adopt a policy of tolerance and non-interference with the issues of local nationalities.<sup>29</sup>

After the revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks due to external factors were forced to strengthen the state that their theoretical assumptions had predicted would wither away. So during this phase the main task was political unification. And in Central Asia also it gave priority to the involvement of nationalities into the socialist ideal of proletariat state. Here Lenin's dictates of Bolshevik party as the vanguard party of revolution came into play. It leads to creation of local Soviets (representative units) in the Central Asian region. Also reactionary elements were also very active in this phase particularly when civil war broke out in 1918, they incurred heavy losses- civilian, economic etc in Central Asia.

The civil war which broke out in 1918 also had a devastating impact on Central Asian region. At the same time there was an ideological struggle going on between the followers of Socialist revolution which were mainly labors and peasants and their counterparts of local elites like Kulaks and Bais. At the same time, the newly formed Soviet Union was preoccupied with its problems of external threats like white army. Hence, not so much attention was paid to other internal matters particularly in the economic sphere. In this way during this phase the impact over Central Asia was mainly the political one and as we can see that it was in the Stalin Period that the full implication of Soviet Policy in Central Asia came to the fore.

#### **ii) PERIOD OF NORMALIZATION, 1924-1929**

The second stage of Soviet foreign policy was a period of normalization. During this phase priority was given to domestic problems, especially economic problems were given major attention. Now Stalin became the President of Soviet Union and started working on his policy of "socialism in one country". This policy was implemented in the form of new economic policy (NEP) 1924. The main thrust was on collective and cooperative way of

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<sup>29</sup> Shearman, Peter(ed). *Russia's Foreign Policy Since 1990*. Boulder (West View Press), 1995, pp.3-5.

reorganizing the economic life of central Asian people. Great attention was given to the development of agriculture to satisfy the primary need of food security of larger section of population.

By the end of 1924, the Bolshevik party gained full control over the political authority. It was the period of beginning of what is called 'Stalin era'. The most important event, which had the greatest impact on Central Asia, was constitution of National Delimitation Commission in 1924. It was given the task of addressing the problem of local nationalities and recommend measures for territorial delimitation. Accordingly, its recommendations led to the formation of Soviet Central Asian Republics, which remained the territorial mode of organization of federation of USSR. Also in 1928 began the first five-year plan, which led to the commencement of planned economic development of Central Asian SSR's. Now onwards political Soviet state started deviating its resources towards betterment of economies of Central Asian region.<sup>30</sup>

The internal problems of economic stagnation due to droughts and famines, social strifes, regional and local uprisings led to increase and concentration of state over at the hands of central authority .Stalin gave the new policy of centralized economic planning. Due to this Central Asian Republics were merely reduced to the status of territorial subunits. They lost their relative autonomy in economic sphere. The public opinion was suppressed by totalitarian Stalin regime. Now Russification became the official state policy.<sup>31</sup>

Stalin tried hard to address the question of "nationalities" by propagating the notion of 'Soviet man" and the creation of a soviet supraethnic identity. This was very much in contrast with the multi cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual Central Asian society. In this way their cultural diversity was subsumed under the name of national mono culture or soviet nationality. It had serious consequences, it gave rise to powerful reactionary

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<sup>30</sup> Donaldson & Noguee Donaldson, Robert H. and Joseph L. Noyee, *The Foreign Policy of Russian – Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, (New York : M.E. Sharpe, 1998).pp.38-41.

<sup>31</sup> Leo Cooper, "*Russia and the World: New State of Play on the International Stage*", (London, Mac Millan Press Ltd. 1999), pp.16-22.

forces, and secondly the local elites (Kulaks) tried to raise the popular aspirations of different nationalities to serve their vested interests.

Stalin tried to contain their move by organizing State Delimitation Commission (1924). It was constituted to satisfy the regional aspiration of self-determination and autonomy of People of Central Asian region. By 1929, however, Stalin took the control of whole state machinery effectively and the now the writ of state administration ran large over the vast territory and people of Central Asian region. Now the road was ready to carry out the radical reforms and its impact will be analyze in the subsequent parts.

### **iii) SEARCH FOR SECURITY, 1930-1941**

The beginning of 1930s coincided with the beginning of five year planning system for the rapid economic development of the Soviet Union under the slogan “Socialism in one country”. The five year plan certainly kept the Soviet Union preoccupied with internal matters. By 1950s, the success of planning system was seen on the Central Asian economy. Great achievements were made in the development of rural economy of Central Asian region.<sup>32</sup> Thus, it can be said that during this phase there was economic development but politically there was decay because politically power was totally concentrated at the hand of authoritarian Stalin Regime.

This period of 1930s witnessed the rise of the Nazism in the neighboring Germany. So Stalin further consolidated the security arrangements. He gave priority to administrative reorganization in Central Asia. By this, he was able to address the security threats and could also carryout his economic policy of planned development. Heavy industrialization & collective farming greatly changed the economic structure of Central Asia. During this time security for the Soviet leadership became utmost priority when the world war II began in 1939 with Germany’s attack on Poland. So under such situation Central Asia saw threat of external aggression and in response to extreme internal Centralization.

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<sup>32</sup> Kaushik, Devendra, *Central Asia in Modern Times* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), pp.219-222.

As Soviet Union joined with Allied powers against the Axis powers of Germany, Japan and Italy, the Central Asia also had to face the effects of this imperialist war. It cut down on its economic resources and military operations badly affected the civilian life of people of this region. But before the beginning of World War II in 1939, high level of growth was attained by Central Asia on various fronts. It was due to mixed outcomes of the first three five years plans.

During this phase Central Asia witnessed unprecedented growth. The level of industrialization and intensive agriculture started matching their European counterparts. The women and other marginalized sections of rural Central Asian society also got equality of status not only in formal sense but on substantial basis.

#### **iv) THE COLD WAR PHASE, 1945-1962**

Post-World War II saw emergence of Soviet Union as superpower and its rivalry with the west led by another superpower U.S. During this phase Soviet Union's external engagements increased and after the demise of Stalin, U.S gained a lead in superpower rivalry. Due to its technoeconomic superiority, U.S compelled Soviet Union to adopt the policy of third world support. Hence, it saw the Soviet Union turned its eye from its own backyard. Khrushchev succeed Stalin and during late 1950s, Soviet Union gave active support to the liberation movement of various colonies in the third world.

It is great paradox that its own nationalities were denied the right to self expression in the name of loyalty to the state.<sup>33</sup> Of course rapid industrialization was carried out in the economic sphere which led to the development of the military-industrial complex (MIC). The demographic composition of Central Asian Society also changed. It became an increasingly urbanized society, which was due to the Soviet policy in Central Asia during this period.

This was a phase of extreme hostilities between two super powers, that severely effected what could be termed as 'social and economic reconstruction' of Central Asia. It was

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<sup>33</sup> Phool Badan, opt.cit.pp32-36.

because of the fact that USSR had to mobilize its vast resources towards what was called 'imperial overstretch' or to incorporate more and more 'third world' countries into its 'sphere of influence'. Central Asia was Soviet Union's soft underbelly, so external forces like US tried to invoke internal disturbances in this region.<sup>34</sup>

After Stalin's death there were some policy-reversals at Central level. It affected Central Asia because now local problems were started giving new attention, though it was partial. Khrushchev tried to solve problems of regional imbalances particularly in economic sphere, which were a legacy of acute Centralization of Stalin's period. The military industrial complex (MIC) was fully developed. Among them, various units lied in the territorial region of Central Asia. For example: Baikanour Space Centre in Uzbekistan. They fuelled the cold war and in this way Central Asia was an active participant in the cold war. The Soviet policy of rapid industrialization in Central Asia also contributed to the cold war at multiple levels.

#### **v) TOWARDS DÉTENTE, 1963-1971**

In this period, the intensity of Cold War was reduced and a sort of balance of terror was achieved based on the premise of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). During this period, Central Asia was given attention on socio-cultural front. Various states sponsored programs like mass literacy campaign public health programs etc. were initiated. They brought about a great change in the life of people of Central Asia.<sup>35</sup> It brought them into the mainstream of Soviet Unions socio-cultural life. This was a great contribution to the people of Central Asia.

During the years of Leonid Brezhnev's rule, the new political landscape of the 1970s emerging global tripolarity, Soviet military parity and stagnation of the Soviet economy necessitated a new thinking of Soviet foreign policy. The policy adopted by Brezhnev and his colleagues went beyond earlier practices of 'peaceful co-existence' and it

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<sup>34</sup> Zafar Imam, "*Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1990*". (New Delhi. Sreling Publishers, 1991), pp. 29-33.

<sup>35</sup> Kaushik, Devendra, *Central Asia in Modern Times* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), pp.245-251.

included avoidance of war and relaxation of tensions with the west to include active collaboration in such areas as arms control, trade, crisis management and science and technology. In the west, the resulting relationship was labeled 'détente' a French term for "relaxation".<sup>36</sup>

#### **vi) DÉTENTE PERIOD, 1971-1979**

But as the decade of 1970 approached its end, there were signals of what can be called as beginning of 'second cold war'. Afghanistan invasion (1979) by Soviet Union formally ended the détente period. This 'Invasion' had serious repercussions on Central Asia. The Muslim population of Central Asia was against this Soviet act of aggression in Afghanistan. The rise of 'Islamic Fundamentalism' in Central Asia was one of the major fallouts of this misadventure. The price paid by the Soviet Union for Afghanistan was much greater than anticipated.

During the Brezhnev years, people were being constantly bombarded with the claim that "life is improving" even while they were surrounded with abundant evidence that the country was falling apart. The result was this sharp disjuncture and the search for 'private solutions' which for many citizens meant the black market, and for others meant 'dropping out through alcoholism', drug abuse and other deviant behavior.<sup>37</sup>

This was the period of cold peace and during this period, the superpower rivalry was subverted to the need of containment of rising China and other geopolitical consideration. So with less activity on the external front, this period shows the rise in domestic problems which were ignored during the heydays of cold war. There were problems of regional imbalances in terms of economic development, Russian predominance over other local identities and also Marxist Utopia started losing its charms when it came face to face with the harsh realities of the rising expectation of the people from the different states.

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<sup>36</sup> Buzynski, Leszek. *Russian Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, Connecticut (Praeger) 1996.pp. 63-69.

<sup>37</sup>Zafar Imam, "Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1990". New Delhi. Sterling Publishers, pp.18-31.



These culminated in the wave of rising local demands in Central Asian region. More enabling atmosphere for such local uprisings was provided in 1980s when Gorbachev came to power in 1985.

#### **vii) TOWARD NEW THINKING, 1980s**

Michael Gorbachev came to power in 1985. He initiated a series of reform in the name of 'Glasnost' (openness) and 'Perestroika' (restructuring). In the domestic front. On the foreign policy front he adopted "New Thinking" which meant coexistence with U.S and not confrontation, that is an end to superpower rivalry.

However, his domestic initiatives of political democratization and economic restructuring did not work well. It opened floodgates for a series of problems. Gorbachev made his direct contribution to the souring of Central Asian people's relations with Russia through his actions. The leaders of Central Asia widely opposed isolationist and separatist approach, which was joint by the representative of Baltic Republics.<sup>38</sup> Most significant, however, was Gorbachev's decision in early 1988 to end the Soviet Union's costly war of Afghanistan. Gorbachev committed the USSR to a phased withdrawal of its troops. By January 1989, after 10 years of occupation all forces of the USSR were withdrawn. On Central Asia, it had profound impact. Firstly, it created a political vacuum in the neighboring Afghanistan that led to the rise of 'political Islam' with militant Islamic fundamentalism. Secondly, the rate of social crimes increased in Central Asia like drug trafficking, money laundering, illegal supply of weapons etc. Lastly, it exposed the vulnerability of central authority, which in turn gave rise to an increase in secessionist tendencies in Central Asia.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kausik, Devendra. "Russia and Central Asian Relations :Assertion of Russia's Eurasian Identity. *Contemporary Central Asia*, vol 7,no1-2, April-August 2003. pp.5-6.

<sup>39</sup> Dawisha, Adeed and Dawisha, Koreon (ed.). *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York : M.E. Sharpe. 1996).pp.36-42.

In later Perestroika period in June 1989, inter-ethnic clashes among the Central Asian Muslims occurred, when the Uzbeks attacked Turks and also clashed with Kyrgyz. Posters appeared in Ferghana Valley carrying slogans like “Russia must answer for everything” “And Uzbekistan for Uzbeks”. It also led to a wave of Russian emigration from Central Asian region towards Russia.

It finally led to collapse to Soviet Union itself. It gave rise to formation of 15 independent Republics. It includes 5 independent Central Asian Republics (CARs) - Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Russia became the successor state of erstwhile Soviet Union. The next two chapters will deal with Yeltsin Foreign Policy towards Central Asia against this background. Thus, impact of Soviet policy in Central Asia can be summarized as a transition from construction, stabilization and then destruction. It all began with Bolshevik revolution, then establishment of Soviet Central Asian republics, which then witnessed a series of socio-cultural transformation under planned economic development especially during Stalin’s era. However in the late 1970’s Central Asia witnessed both political decay and economic stagnation. It rose to its height in 1980’s under Gorbachev’s reformist zeal. Ultimately, after seven decades, Soviet Union collapsed and emergence of independent five Central Asian Republics was its immediate fallout.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RUSSIA'S NEW POLICY: YEARS OF INACTIVITY**

## CHAPTER 3

### RUSSIA'S NEW POLICY: YEARS OF INACTIVITY

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

One of the significant consequences of the sudden collapse of USSR was the emergence of its 15 constituent republics as independent and sovereign states. None of these states was however as important as the Russian Federation. It is recognized by the comity of nations in the international sphere as the successor state of the former USSR. New Russia under president Yeltsin had to redefine its relationship with the outside world and to organize its foreign policy in the post-cold war era. In other words it had to develop a framework for playing its new role in international politics when it lost its super power status. At the end of the 1991, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) replaced the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

While different members of the Russian foreign policy making community had different objectives and approaches, most decision makers including President Boris Yeltsin himself who became independent Russian Federation's first President in June 1991 agreed at the beginning of 1992 that Russia's foreign policy should be designed to promote close ties, particularly economic and military between Russia and the former Soviet Republics, to transfer strategic nuclear elements of the former Soviet nuclear arsenal to Russia. It also included to stop a Yugoslav-style collapse along the periphery of the Russian state, as well as to prevent existing local conflicts from spilling over into Russia and to protect the rights of Russian speaking minorities living in the 'near abroad' which includes the 5 Central Asian Republics (CARs).<sup>2</sup> It would prevent political instability and economic crisis which was looming large on this Central Asian region.

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<sup>1</sup> The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created on Dec. 21, 1991 in Alma Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan. It represented an expansion of a commonwealth of Slavic states composed of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, Founded on Dec. 8, 1991, the date of the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union. The three Baltic States (whose independence had been recognized by the Soviet government in August 1991) and Georgia refused the membership in the beginning. Since then Georgia had joined and Azerbaijan rejoined the CIS. Currently Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are CIS members.

<sup>2</sup> Shearman, Peter (ed), *Russia's Foreign Policy Since 1990*. (Boulder: West View Press 1995), pp.13-16.

During the seven decades after 1917, the discussion of international affairs in Moscow was confirmed within the constructing framework of an elaborate structure of ideas concerning Soviet Union's role in the world— as the champion of international progress and proletarian revolution. The crumbling of the Soviet Union was accompanied by the collapse of this whole structure of ideas. Shock waves traversed the field of discussion of foreign policy in Russia. A tendency of swing from one extreme to another developed yet there also emerged a clear underlying trend, a flight from what is described as 'ideology' and a 'pragmatic' concern with what writers refer to as the concrete national interests of the new Russian State.<sup>3</sup>

The first phase which got under way well before 1991 was dominated by a wholesale reaction against traditional Soviet foreign policy. It had two aspects. The twist was a rejection of Stalinist militarism and economic isolationism. It culminated in the endorsing of visions of a new, peaceful and increasingly economically integrated order. This had a dramatic effect on the Soviet Union's international image and they helped to ease Soviet acceptance of the international retreats and climb down of 1990 and 1991.<sup>4</sup>

The second aspect of reaction against the pre-existing Soviet doctrine was the swing towards an almost unconditional Westernism. This became more evident from the Russian Foreign Ministry in the first months of foreign policy of Russia that it is intended to enter the club of the most developed democratic countries, and that it was the lost link with the democratic 'Northern Hemisphere' and that it was about to return to Europe and so on.

This change in the trend of foreign policy however did not mean that Russia had totally broken away from the legacy of the Soviet Union. The foreign policy of Yeltsin continued to be influenced by the legacy of the USSR. Its self proclaimed status as the legal successor of the Soviet Union binds it to all the international commitments entered by the former regime, not least in the sphere of nuclear and conventional disarmament and military withdrawal from former sphere of influence. Russia had the choice of either continuing or forsaking the options pursued, but not

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<sup>3</sup> Dawisha, Adeed and Dawisha. Koreon (ed.), *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York : M.E. Sharpe, 1996), pp.73-76.

<sup>4</sup> Neil Malcolm. "New Russian Foreign Policy", *World Today* (London) February 1994, p. 329

necessarily completed, in the latter period of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, issues like abandonment of Third World allies had been of topical concern to the Russian leaders. Moreover while Russia had succeeded to the borders of the USSR in their entirety where frontiers had coincided, it inherited a number of unresolved issues which the new foreign policy establishment of Yeltsin had to address. Against this background,<sup>6</sup> Yeltsin had to move ahead in his external relations with five CARs under the name of 'new thinking' of Russian foreign policy which was the legacy of Gorbachev's regime, of course the path of Yeltsin was not an easy affair. In external sphere it had been the task of reconciliation of the sweet memories of erstwhile super power state to that of a struggling state power on various fronts.

### **DETERMINANTS OF YELTSIN'S FOREIGN POLICY**

The newly independent states of Central Asia—Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan—lacked a history of independence. Since the eighteenth century the peoples of this vast region were governed by the Tsars, and after them, the Soviets. One scholar described the independence of these states in 1991 as an "unsolicited gift".<sup>7</sup> These countries share a Muslim religion and historico-cultural heritage and—with the exception of the Tajiks, who are of Iranian origin—have a common Turkic ethnic origin. National identities in this region were not strongly established.

In Gorbachev's 1991 referendum on the future of the union, the strongest support in favor of preserving the USSR came from the votes of the five Central Asian Republics. One reason was the high degree of economic dependence of the region on Moscow. Both the August coup and the Soviet collapse in 1991 confronted the Central Asians with unpopular choices. They were unprepared for independence, and they welcomed admission to the CIS as founding members.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kanet, Roger E. and Kozhemiakin, Alexander V. (ed.). *The Foreign Policy of Russian Federation* (London : Macmillan Pres Ltd., 1997), p.28.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 32-33

<sup>7</sup> Hunter, Shirin.T.. *Central Asia Since Independence*. London(Washington Papers,168.Praeger),1996. pp.62-69

<sup>8</sup> SWB/SU/1306 C1/1 17 February 1992.

Another important factor linking the new states to Russia is the large Russian minorities living in some of them. According to the 1989 USSR census, in Kyrgyzstan 21.5 percent of the people were Russian. Kazakhstan's population was 37.8 percent ethnic Russian, almost equal in number to the indigenous Kazakh population.<sup>9</sup> It was thus not surprising that Nursultan Nazarbaev, Kazakhstan's President, was an outspoken advocate of keeping the Union together and, when that proved impossible, of integrating the CIS as much as possible. Even those regional leaders who advocated independence for their countries acknowledged that close cooperation with Moscow was a necessity for survival. And yet, as weak and dependent as they were, the leaders of Central Asia Republics soon acquired a taste for independence and a determination not to be mere puppets of Moscow.

Russia's vital interests in Central Asia were both political and economic. In a general sense Moscow has sought to maintain its influence over the entire region, an equivalent of the US's Monroe Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, the parallel was made directly in an article by Andranik Migranian, then a member of Yeltsin's Presidential Council.<sup>10</sup> A major consideration behind such thinking was security. Moscow wanted to deploy its troops in the "Near Abroad" and to maintain an air defense system that would cover not just Russia but the outer borders of the former Soviet Union. Moscow was also concerned about the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia and its possible spread to the Russian Federation itself.<sup>11</sup>

Instability in Central Asia also posed the danger of encouraging the migration of large number of ethnic Russians or Russian language speaking people back to country then unprepared to absorb them. According to the 1989 census, some 9,500,000 Russians were living in Central Asia.<sup>12</sup> Even though many of these Russians came originally as colonizers, they were not as discriminated against in Central Asia as in some other parts of the former USSR, such as the Baltics. But the fact that on average only 3 percent of the Russians knew the titular language of their country of residence

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<sup>9</sup> Shearman, Peter (ed). *Russia's Foreign Policy Since 1990*. Boulder (West View Press), 1995, pp. 139-143.

<sup>10</sup> Dawisha, Adeed and Dawisha, Koreon (ed.). *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York : M.E. Sharpe, 1996). p.170

<sup>11</sup> SWB/SU/1814 G/5 08 October 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Kaushik, Devendra. "Russia and Central Asian Relations : Assertion of Russia's Eurasian Identity," *Contemporary Central Asia*, vol. 7, no 1-2, April-August 2003, pp. 1-11.

indicated a less than complete level of assimilation and the ever-present possibility of a migration back to the mother country.

Indeed, there was a substantial migration of Russians from Central Asia, notwithstanding that none of the states in the region denied Russians the rights of citizenship. But with the exception of Turkmenistan, which had a small Russian population, the Central Asian states rejected the Russian demand that Russian speaking people be given the right to maintain dual citizenship.

Economic objectives also played a role in Russia's relations with Central Asia. For a time an effort was made to keep these countries in a "Ruble zone" so as to maintain a measure of fiscal control over them;<sup>13</sup> but a dead-lock in negotiations in 1993 forced the states to rely on their own resources and their own currencies. Independence did not bring economic prosperity to Central Asia—just the opposite. For the entire region the post-Soviet period has been one of economic hardship. The reasons are several, including the economic incompetence of Central Asia's governing elites. But adding to their woes was the end of Russian subsidies and Moscow's pursuit of policies almost exclusively to Russia's own advantage.<sup>14</sup>

Those countries possessing abundant natural resources, such as Kazakhstan, were pressed to share them with Russia. For example, Russia insisted that the Tengiz oil field in western Kazakhstan be open to Russian participation before the government of Kazakhstan was able to mobilize a consortium of foreign investors. In short the relations between Russia and Central Asia in the years following independence can be described as 'uneasy cooperation.'<sup>15</sup>

Another pervasive factor was that of the problems of Russian speakers and Russian citizens living in the near abroad. In 1989, some 73.7 million Soviet citizens lived in national territories of ethnic groups other than theirs. Russians constituted the largest proportion—some 25.3 million Russians (17.4 percent of all Russians) lived outside the

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<sup>13</sup> Buzynski, Leszek. *Russian Foreign Policy After the Cold War*. Connecticut (Praeger) 1996, pp.23-25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp.29-33

<sup>15</sup> SWB/SU/1627 B/1 3 March 19993.



Russian Republic in 1989.<sup>16</sup> Of these, around 45 percent lived in Ukraine, where they made up 22 percent of the population; 37.8 percent lived in Kazakhstan. The remainder were scattered across the former Union, with the lowest concentration in the Caucasus. In addition, ethnic Russian soldiers, posted to non-Russian Republics by the Soviet military, populated strategically significant military bases across the territory of the former Union. Prior to the dissolution of the Union, the Russian republic government had repeatedly expressed its concern for the fate of Russian speakers outside the Russian Republic's borders. Russia hoped that bilateral treaties signed with the other Republics in the course of 1990-1991 would provide a legal basis for the protection of Russian minorities; use of force, it stressed was not a realistic option.<sup>17</sup>

Russian governmental involvement in securing the welfare of both civilians and military personnel stemmed from a number of concerns. The first was a desire to secure the physical safety of both civilians and military personnel. This desire did not stem from purely humanitarian concerns-the Russian economy could not absorb a huge flow of refugees, or even the abrupt return of large numbers of servicemen, due to a lack of housing and, in the case of civilians, high unemployment.<sup>18</sup> And second, the right of Russians and Russian speakers, and of the Russian military, to remain unmolested in the territory of the former Union was a key emotional issue for those Russians who questioned whether the collapse of the USSR was necessary, avoidable, or reversible. In addition to being concerned about the human rights of Russians in the near abroad, the latter group also expressed fears that a withdrawal of military forces would reduce Russia's ability to intervene in strategically important areas.

The Russian government has been forced to respond to three basic categories of problems-those of Russian-speaking civilians demanding integration into new societies, those of Russian-speaking civilians demanding some level of autonomy from new states, and those of Russian servicemen stationed abroad.

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<sup>16</sup> Kaushik, Devendra. "The Post Soviet Central Asia and Russia: Emerging Contours of a new Relationship" in Warikoo, K. (ed.) *Central Asia: Emerging New Order*, (New Delhi: Har Anand Publication, 1995), p.236.

<sup>17</sup> SWB/SU/ 1613 C2/1 15 February 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Crow, Suzanne. *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia under Yeltsin* (Munich : Radio Free Europe : Radio Liberty, 1993). pp.29-33

## EVOLUTION OF 'TRANS-ATLANTICIST' VISION

Yeltsin and his foreign policy administration were thus faced at the beginning of 1992, with the task of devising an effective foreign policy that would be beneficial to Russian state interests. The conception of the national interests for president Yeltsin and his foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev (who became foreign minister in October 1990 before emergence of independent Russian Federation on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1991) was determined in large part by the necessity to deal with the severe economic needs of the Russian state.<sup>19</sup> Economic factors are critical in any state's ability to operate effectively in the international environment.

It was this economic imperative with an economy in crisis and a state unable to penetrate the global markets successfully that formed the key ingredient in the initial post-Soviet Russian foreign policy. The focus of policy for this reason was on the wealthiest, western, capitalist states in an attempt to gain economic assistance and to facilitate Russia's integration into the global economy.<sup>20</sup> It was recognized that the state power was increasingly being calculated in economic terms with an overblown military capability acting as a brake on development and undermining Russian state as a world power.

The 'Trans Atlanticism' or 'western orientation' of Yeltsin's foreign policy was mainly shaped by his pro-west foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev. His basic premise was that the new democratic but still fragile Russian state could survive only if it immediately became an integral part of the European community.<sup>21</sup> The option of Russian membership in NATO was openly raised. Yeltsin committed Russia to pull all of its troops out of the European continent and sign a major partnership agreements with the west.

The idea of 'Trans Atlanticism' initially found support broadly among the reform-elements of the communist elite, intelligentsia, large part of urban population and the liberal mass media. Given the total lack of political idea and tradition on which Russia could build its post-communist future, integration with the west was considered a

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<sup>19</sup> SWB/SU/1549 A1/1 27 November 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.A1/1

<sup>21</sup> Chenoy, Anuradha M. *The Making of New Russia* (New Delhi:Har Anand Publications,2001), pp.240-241.

logical aim. However by the end of the first year of Russia's newly achieved independence this approach of Yeltsin's foreign policy began to face growing opposition.

During 1992, arguments tended to centre around the question of geographical priorities. Critics of Russia's foreign policy argued that far too much attention had been paid to the "Far Abroad" and not enough to the "Near Abroad" i.e. the countries which had emerged from the former Soviet Union. Sergei Stankevich, a senior foreign policy advisor to President Yeltsin declared in March 1992 that Russian policy makers should focus on the developing crisis in their own backyard. Russia should avoid being drawn in North South anti Islamic confrontation in which it would suffer disproportionately because of its geographical location and its own demographic composition of substantial number of Muslim minority population.

Despite this immediate dissenting public opinion, Yeltsin and his team acted independently and differently at first. During 1992-93 Russia was working hard through what was bound to be a long process of changeover to a new type of statehood. The scramble for political power going on in this context and the confrontation of the old and the new forces (those in the making, to be exact) were still far from their final and logical conclusion. Hence the strategic instability of Russia's foreign policy, frequent zigzagging and discordance, and conflicting statements and moves appeared during that period.<sup>22</sup> In the long run, foreign policy always depends on domestic policy.

On foreign policy front, Andrei Kozyrev deemed to be almost exclusively emphasizing on Russian solidarity with the West. This infact was an extension of the policy pursued in the last two years of Gorbachev's rule over erstwhile Soviet Union. Originally labeled the "new thinking" this proclaimed that the USSR would not challenge but would work in cooperation with the US.<sup>23</sup> It stressed right of each state to choose its own path of development, called for the 'deideologisation' of foreign policy and urged the substitution of ethical norms and the recognition of mutual security interests for the use of force in international relation. In the midst of these

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<sup>22</sup> Dawisha, Adeed and Dawisha, Koreon (ed.), *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York : M.E. Sharpe, 1996), pp.93-96.

<sup>23</sup> Bowker, Mike *Russian Foreign Policy and the End of Cold War* (Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing Company Ltd., 1997) pp.46-49

bureaucratic and ideological battles, Yeltsin was for the most part the final arbiter of Russian foreign policy.<sup>24</sup> Throughout 1992 and 1993, Yeltsin took personal initiative in building relations with the near abroad and acted to pull compromises out of the decision-making turmoil.

By April 1992 when the sixth Congress of People's Deputies meet, Yeltsin was openly challenged. He was brought to the realization that political leadership must accommodate the interests and views of the dissenters too. Foreign policy itself became more coherent in 1993 as the foreign ministry itself became much more coherent in 1993 as the foreign policy sought to build on a wider domestic policy base.

As far as policy towards the Central Asian Republics was concerned, the changes have been cautious, a matter of tone and detail, a sharper focus on security and economic together with strategic issues was marked.<sup>25</sup> Already in the summer of 1992 the Deputy Foreign Minister began to work on a new and more active strategy and his report argued that Russia must win international role as the leading force in ensuring stability of the former Soviet Union space. Yeltsin also announced that Russia was going to push for greater integration with the CIS and that it would not neglect its special peace-keeping responsibilities.

Yeltsin-Kozyrev term appeared to intensify their process of bridge-building with internal critics, even at the cost of a certain cooling of relations with the West. Russian dominance in the CIS was asserted even more vigorously.<sup>26</sup> Later on Yeltsin unsuccessfully demanded recognition of its special security role in the Central Asian region as a condition for adhering to NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP).

Also economic factor starting assuming prime importance. Russia realized the importance of a strong base for Russian Foreign Policy. As Churkin observed "of course foreign policy does not hang in the air. The problem lies in the fact that we are

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<sup>24</sup> Wynhe Russel "Russian Relations with the "New Abroad" in Peter Shenmen, (ed), *Russia's Foreign Policy Since 1990*, Boulder(West View Press),1995.p. 63

<sup>25</sup> Neil Malcolm, "New Russian Foreign Policy". *World Today* (London) February 1994, p. 329

<sup>26</sup> First Deputy Russian Foreign Ministry V. Churkin argued that the basis for a broad consensus on foreign policy had virtually been arrived.

conducting our foreign policy in conditions of well known economic difficulties, when our economic mechanism is in despair. This obviously has an effect on our economic relations with practically all our foreign policy partners.”<sup>27</sup>

Foreign policy guidelines drafted by Kozyrev towards the end of 1992 suggested priority for relations with the western nations- particularly of that of Europe and US. It resulted in years of inactivity in Central Asia under Yeltsin’s Presidency. In this context formation of CIS was very important. It was in the beginning perceived as tool of Russian foreign policy agenda in its ‘Near Abroad’ which includes Central Asian Republics. However with the passage of time this objective remained elusive.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the pro-cooperation rhetoric on issues like military cooperation, economic ties, border dispute resolution by peaceful means and safeguarding the right of national minorities through the instrumentality of CIS, co-operation was infact not forthcoming on most issues. In some cases the administrators of the new bureaucracies showed a tendency to simply substitute ‘CIS’ for ‘Soviet’. In many respects the prospects for cooperation were hampered by the member governments’ unwillingness to diminish their newly won sovereignty in any way.

In their haste to set up the commonwealth, its founders-most of whom were relatively inexperienced had not taken adequate heed of their immensely disparate interests or of their very different visions of organization’s functions. Russian and Central Asian leaders looked forward to a lasting association. The implicit expectation of Yeltsin’s foreign policy regime appeared to be that a forthcoming CIS superstructure would suffice to Russia’s relations with Central Asian Republics by putting bilateral disputes in a multilateral context. Not only was a CIS structure slow in coming but bilateral disputes also persisted.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to point out here that the destiny of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) lay with Russia. Russia was the dominant country in the region in terms of size, natural resources, economic strength and military power. Russia comprised 50

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<sup>27</sup> SWB/SU/1548 A1/2 26 November 1992

<sup>28</sup> Umnay, Alexander. “Central Asia in Russia’s Post Soviet Policy”, *Contemporary Central Asia*. Vo.II. No.3. December 1998. pp.39-43.

<sup>29</sup> Lukin, Vladimir P. “Our Security Predicament” *Foreign Policy* (Washington) no88. Autumn 1992. pp67

percent of the former USSR's total population and produced 60 percent of its GDP. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russian military forces numbered 2.8 million. It inherited 70 percent of Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal and 80 percent of its air force and navy.<sup>30</sup>

Initially, Yeltsin appeared to take relatively little interest in the Central Asian region. This foreign policy gesture of 'passive spectator' was however not fulfilling Russia's vital national interests in this post-Soviet space. This region was becoming the hot bed of what can be called as the beginning of a 'New Great Game'. So Russia had to respond accordingly to this changing geopolitical dynamics of Central Asia. The foreign ministry set up a department to deal with CIS (including CARs) countries in the autumn of 1992. In January 1994 a separate ministry for the CIS was created which was also provided the task to look after the Central Asian affairs. A high ranking minister was appointed to this newly formed separate ministry in the following November.

The Russian Foreign Ministry drafted the blueprint of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation which it tabled for debate and ratification at the Congress of People's Deputies. The foreign policy blueprint of the Russian foreign ministry was a fairly voluminous document of 58 closely written pages, a document many of whose points merit separate mention and commentary.<sup>31</sup> To get down to basics, firstly, Russia's foreign policy was determined not by the Foreign Ministry but by the Russian President on the basis of the Russian constitution. In practice, this policy was pursued, again, by the president and the government under the supervision of the Supreme Soviet. The Foreign Ministry took charge of the coordination of all the various external links with the most varied departments and so on. In brief, the Foreign Ministry was a coordinating body only.

In all points of this blueprint, the main thing was adherence to the criterion of conformity to Russia's national interests. In this connection, it was appropriate to dwell on relations with the neighbouring foreign countries-the CIS countries, especially the CIS countries. The fact was, in the former republics of the Soviet

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<sup>30</sup> Webber, Mark. *The International Politics of Russia and the Successor States*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press), 1996, p. 175

<sup>31</sup> SWB/SU/1549 A1/1 27 November 1992

Union, crisis phenomena of the post-totalitarian period directly affected the security of Russia itself, as well as the speed and prospects of overcoming the economic and social crisis in the Russian state. Even if the most acute forms of the crisis and the national-territorial conflicts which feed it were overcome, it was obvious that in these countries of the CIS, the transition to democracy and to a healthy market economy had been painful and protracted.

The fact was that the drafting of the foreign policy of some CIS states was affected by something characteristic of the period of the establishment of independence, what one might call influenced from Russia which was caused by nationalistic and territorial disputes, including territorial claims on Russia, and even a kind of allergy to anything that might remind one of the previous dependence on union structures. Unfortunately, again people did not immediately realize the reality that reliance on relations with a renewed Russia also would facilitate the resolution of purely internal ethnic problems.

As for Russia itself, without establishing economic and transport links on new foundations, without settling conflicts and achieving stability along the borders with the former Soviet republics, Russia would not be able to either develop normally or pursue its foreign policy with the distant foreign countries. In brief, according to the text of the blueprint of the Foreign Ministry, Russia's relations with the group of countries should be brought up to a level of full-fledged interstate relations ensuring full cooperation with them in all fields on the basis of mutuality.<sup>32</sup>

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF 'TRANSATLANTICIST' POLICY AND ITS IMPACT**

In the years 1991-1995, three issues or aspects of Yeltsin's foreign policy towards Central Asia demands utmost attention and analysis from the view of both implementation and their consequences. They are:

- (1) Security and Military Aspect
- (2) Problems of Russian minorities living in Central Asia
- (3) Economic policy

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<sup>32</sup> SWB/SU/1609 A1/1 10 February 1992

## (1) SECURITY AND MILITARY ASPECT

The collapse of Soviet Union was the most important event of the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of its biggest fallouts was the concerns regarding a central disintegration of the Soviet military forces. However it was argued in December 1991 that states could form their own national armies and in 1992, Russia under Yeltsin decided to form its own military and ministry of defence. The failure to create a unified military force was finally recognized by the leaders of the region. The heads of states formally agreed to abolish the joint command of forces in September 1993. Although some coordinating structures continued to exist, the abolition effectively served to emphasize Russian military dominance on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Moreover Russia established itself as the legitimate guarantor of military and political stability in the post Soviet space. This included Russia's assumption of special security responsibility in the post-Soviet Eurasia, through the regional leadership of conflict resolution, peace keeping operations and border security. Finally Russia had to play an 'enlightened' post-imperial role in the Central Asia particularly in unstable and unpredictable areas.<sup>33</sup>

To address the issue of security and military disputes, a Collective Security Treaty was signed in Tashkent in May 1992. Article four of the treaty (CST) sanctioned the use of military assistance by participating states if one of them was subjected to an act of aggression. However, this treaty was not as effective as NATO. Only six states signed up. By February 1994 their number increased to nine. Ukraine, Turkmenistan and Moldova remained outside the agreement.

Russia also developed security ties with a core group of allies-Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia and Armenia but only bilaterally and interest specific. The CIS summit of October 1994 discussed the idea of United CIS air defences and a coordinating committee on the subject was created under the council of CIS Defence Ministers. Russia thus had to address its security interests in this region with great cautions. CIS was unable to achieve its objectives in its initial years of formation. Another important dimension was transfer of nuclear arsenals, which was a legacy of

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<sup>33</sup> Shahrani, Nazif "Central Asia and the Challenges of Soviet Legacy" *Central Asian Survey*, 1993, vol 12, no 2, pp131.



Soviet Cold War years.<sup>34</sup>

These nukes were scattered around the post-Soviet space and imposed a great security risk. This problem was addressed at a greater pace owing to the pressure of US and Europe and also due to volatile situation of newly emerged Central Asian Republics. Another important development was that by now Yeltsin became steadily more vocal in his support for Russians abroad. In October 1992 he gave the Russian Foreign Ministry a dressing down in which he accused it of displaying “the imperial syndrome in reverse” in relations with the ‘near abroad’-of being too shy in speaking about national interests for fear of being accused of ‘great power chauvinism’. He ordered the ministry to uphold more actively the interests of the Russian speaking population abroad, especially in Central Asia and said that the world community should be urged to defend of Russian speakers’ rights.<sup>35</sup>

Yeltsin's creation, in December 1992, of a Security Council commission on foreign policy was instrumental in bringing some degree of coordination into Russian policy toward the near abroad. While a November 1992 Presidential Decree gave the Foreign Ministry the responsibility for coordinating Russia's foreign political and economic activity, the ministry was subordinated in its turn to the Foreign Policy.

Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev had accepted from the beginning the need for a coordinated foreign policy, and by the end of 1992 he appeared to have accepted the domestic political imperatives for a policy that took into account conservative concerns; in his report to the Supreme Soviet's international relations committee in January 1993, he indicated that Russia's top foreign policy priorities would be closer CIS integration and the protection of Russians abroad. The ministry also announced in early 1993 its intention to create a special envoy for the protection of rights of Russians living abroad. Kozyrev's new approach won over former opponents such as Ambartsumov, who said in March 1993 that Kozyrev's approach had changed sufficiently to make him retract his calls for Kozyrev's resignation.

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<sup>34</sup> DASH, P. L. “Central Asia: Different Times, Different Relations”. *Dialogue*, Vol.3, No.4, April-June 2002. pp.67-82.

<sup>35</sup> SWB/SU/1557 A1/1 17 December 1992

- One of the indicators of this sea change in the Foreign Ministry was the much-discussed draft of Foreign Ministry Concept of Russian Foreign Policy of February 1992 at the behest of critics of Yeltsin's and Kozyrev's foreign policy. In effect, the Concept of Russian Foreign Policy was to play the role close to that of Bolshevik ideology in Soviet foreign policy-to offer a generally recognized basis for action enshrining a particular intellectual approach to foreign policy problems. Successive Foreign Ministry drafts were rejected by the legislature over the course of 1992 as being insufficiently strong on the defense of Russians in the near abroad.

Finally, a draft drawn up by the Security Council Foreign Policy Commission on the basis of a Foreign Ministry draft was approved by the Security Council in March 1993. The Concept of Russian Foreign Policy listed as Russia's most important foreign policy tasks in the near abroad of the curtailment and regulation of armed conflicts around Russia and the guarantee of strict observation in the near abroad of human and minority rights, especially of Russians.

Virtually all Russian leaders now accepted the notion that Russia must play leading role on the territory of the former Union. Yeltsin publicly called for Russia to act as guarantor of peace and security in the former Union's territory. Yeltsin and other leaders argued that Russia must be acknowledged by the West as having special interests in the territory of the Union and have suggested to the United Nations that Russian troops be given special peacekeeping responsibilities on the former Union's territory. Kozyrev pressed for the recognition of the CIS by the United Nations and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as a "regional" or "international" organization that would have the right to mount peacekeeping operations on the territory of its members without UN or CSCE consultation.<sup>36</sup>

Thus it can be concluded here that in the initial years, though Russian foreign policy under Yeltsin was undermining the importance of Central Asia under the effect of 'Trans Atlanticist' approach, the military and security imperatives compelled Yeltsin not to ignore its "Near Abroad" for long. Though CIS as an institutional arrangement failed in its initial years of formation, still it provided much needed platform which was vital for any common security dialogue between the member states.

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<sup>36</sup> Donaldson, Robert H. and Joseph L. Noyee, *The Foreign Policy of Russian – Changing Systems, Enduring Intrests*. (New York : M.E. Sharpe, 1998).pp. 76-79

## (2) PROBLEMS OF RUSSIAN MINORITIES LIVING IN CENTRAL ASIA

The second pervasive problem was that of Russian speaking population living in the post-Soviet space. In 1989, some 73.3 million Soviet citizens lived in national territories of ethnic groups other than theirs. Russians constituted the largest proportion, some 25.3 million Russians (17.4 percent of all Russians) lived outside the Russian republic in 1989. Therefore, the issue of the Russians in the 'near abroad' had a pernicious effect on Russia's relations with the Central Asia States. Moscow's concern had been with the ethnic Russians living in the near abroad as a product of nationalist accusation that they had been rejected. Russians had become used to a privileged status in these Republics during the Soviet period.<sup>37</sup>

Within Central Asia, the governments had introduced the policies promoting positive discrimination and designated indigenous languages as state languages for administrative purposes. For example in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the emigration of Russians was stimulated by local nationalism and new language laws. In Tajikistan, political instability According to the 1989 census there were more than 8 million ethnic Russians in Central Asia. The number was much higher for the Russian-speaking population. As a Russian scholar, Konstantin Syroezhkin has aptly observed, "historically, in terms of civilization and geopolitics, this territory had become rooted to Russia. To sever its links would be dangerous for Russia itself because it could be the first step on the path to its own complete destruction as a federation."<sup>38</sup>

TABLE -1

### Ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers in Central Asia, 1989

Country	Ethnic Russians	Russian-speakers
Kazakhstan	623000	7800000
Kyrgyzstan	916000	1090000
Tajikistan	388000	495000
Turkmenistan	333000	421000
Uzbekistan	1650000	2150000

Source: Vishnesvky, A., "Migration in the ex-USSR within new geographical context", *Eurasian Community: Economics, Policy, Security*, Nos. 6-7, (1995), p. 78

<sup>37</sup> Buzynski, Leszek. *Russian Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, Connecticut (Praeger) 1996, pp. 96-98

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 13

**TABLE-2**

**Immigration to the Russian Federation from Central Asia, 1996**

Country	Ethnic Russians	Russian	Share of Russians in total (%)
Kazakhstan	172860	123627	71.5
Kyrgyzstan	18886	13301	70.4
Tajikistan	32508	16413	50.4
Turkmenistan	22840	14689	64.3
Uzbekistan	49970	30653	61.3

**Source:** *Russian State Committee on Statistics, Chislennost I Migratsiya Naseleniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii v 1996 g.* (Numbers and migration of the population of the Russian Federation, 1996), Goskonstat: Moscow, 1997, pp. 33, 42.

Russian migration to Central Asia which increased during the Soviet period due to various reasons, such as famine, collectivization and growing industrialization of Central Asia, started declining beginning with the late 1970s. In post Soviet Central Asia both ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking population who felt concerned about their security against the backdrop of increasing inter-ethnic conflicts and were worried about prospects of their social and professional promotion on account of the new language laws, started migrating to Russia. The closure of industrial plants and factories, and the consequent unemployment also induced an outward migration.

Some formal measures taken in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan to prevent the discrimination against the Russians and the Russian speaking population through amendment to the laws on language and citizenship, failed to produce the desired result. All this led to migration of the Russian on a large scale.<sup>39</sup> To the growing number of Russians and Russian-speaking population desiring to migrate to Russia were added a sizable number of native Central Asians who also followed the trail to Russia.

<sup>39</sup> SWB/SU/2357 B/13 17 July 1995

Yeltsin promoted the notion of 'Dual Nationality' for the Russians in the "near abroad" as a guarantee of their protection. The rationale had been that with this obvious reassurance from Russia emigration from Central Asia would be reduced considerably and these states most concerned about the loss of qualified Russian technical personnel would benefit accordingly Moscow's demand that a provision for dual nationality be included in separate bilateral treaties with the CIS states met with various reactions. Most of them regarded the demand as a blatant effort to perpetuate the privileged status of Russians and a threat to their sovereignty. Those Central Asian Republics which were more dependent on Russia were more accommodating.<sup>40</sup>

Moscow signed its first treaty on 'Dual Nationality' with Turkmenistan on 23 December 1993 and Yeltsin upheld it as a model for relations with other CIS states. This idea was rejected by most of the states in Central Asia. Nevertheless, in 1994 Russia moved to strengthen relations with Russians in the 'near abroad' in various ways. The Foreign Ministry proposed that bilateral treaties be negotiated with Central Asian states to define the political and economic rights of the Russians on the basis of dual nationality.

The Foreign Ministry outlined a special programme of assistance for Russians in the Central Asian Republics (CARs). It included Russian Radio and Television programme, finance for Russian schools, a mechanism for the evacuation of Russians in time of conflict; conditional credits for CARs. It was attached with the demand that 20-30 percent of the aid and assistance be used to assist Russians, and restoring economic levers against CARs that violate the human rights of Russians in their territorial space.<sup>41</sup>

Actually Yeltsin's government had come under increasing pressure from the nationalists to defend the interest of the Russians in the 'Near Abroad'. This trend was clearly noticeable since December 1993 elections when Zhirinovskiy's LDP secured increased votes. The problem for Moscow was that political needs were conflicting. The demand for protection of the Russians undermined attempts to promote CIS regionalism. Moscow might have justified the demand for dual nationality in terms of

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<sup>40</sup> Chufirin, Gennady (ed.) *Russia and Asia: The Emerging Security Agenda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 83-87

<sup>41</sup> Current Digest of Post Soviet Press (CDPSP) vol. 46, no. 9, 30 March 1994, p. 18

a general move towards “CIS citizenship” which however remained a distant dream.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, several Russian women were attacked in Dushanbe during the February 1990 disturbances. The fighting in the summer of 1992 between the Islamists and the Popular Front forces in the southern parts of Tajikistan also resulted in killing of Russians by the Islamists.<sup>43</sup> A wave of migration of the Russians from Tajikistan which started in the wake of February 1990 disturbances reached a new height after the declaration of Democrat leader Shodmon Yusuf on 10 May 1992 that the entire local Russian population would be treated as hostage for the neutral conduct of 201 Armoured Division and the Russian Republic.

Out of a total Russian population of more than 7000 thousand only 300 thousand were believed to have been left in Tajikistan towards the end of 1992. The figure of Russian emigrants from Tajikistan would have been higher but the non-availability of railway containers and their prohibitive cost of 80 to 100 thousand roubles created a sort of check on emigration. The situation was somewhat improved after the defeat of the Islamic Fundamentalists in the Tajik civil war. The new Popular Front government made strenuous efforts to persuade the Russian emigrants to return to the Republic. The exodus of skilled technical Russian labor adversely affected the performance of the industry.

Russians was reported to be leaving Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in a large number sensing local hostility and apprehending the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the near future. While the firm stand of President Islam Karimov against the Islamic Rebirth Party has reduced the migration of Russians, the situation in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan did not appear to be as harmonious as in Uzbekistan in spite of the fact that these Republics confirmed liberal reformists as their Presidents.

President Nazarbaev also withheld his assent to the Kazakh Parliament’s move for changing the constitution to restrict the choice of head of the Republic to a representative of the titular nationality. Of late, Kazakhstan witnessed a powerful trend towards removal of old Russian historical monuments and renaming cities and

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<sup>42</sup> SWB/SU/1948 G/2 17 March 1994

<sup>43</sup> Kaushik, Devendra. “*The Post Soviet Central Asia and Russia: Emerging Contours of a new Relationship*” in Warikoo, K. (ed.) *Central Asia: Emerging New Order*, (New Delhi: Har Anand Publication, 1995), pp.233-235

settlements. Russians living in Kazakhstan had started leaving for the Russian Republic experiencing an uncongenial psychological atmosphere in the sphere of education and culture.

On 22 May 1993, a telebridge programme between Moscow and Alma-Ata, Andrei Kondrashov and Alexander Sviazin, who organized this programme were banned from entering the premises of the Alma-Ata Radio and Television stations. Kazakh scholars brought out studies to reinforce Kazakh claims on the northern territory of the Republic presently inhabited by a predominantly Russian population. For the time being, anti-Russian sentiments in the Central Asian Republics remained confined to an insignificant section of the local intelligentsia and some bigoted religious circles.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, it is clear that Yeltsin's foreign policy towards Central Asia was greatly influenced by its domestic pressure of protection of rights of Russian minorities living in 'Near Abroad'. Due to outward migration there were problem of demographic changes, socio-economic downfall and under-development in the newly independent Central Asian Republics. Both side adopted a rigid position initially but ultimately reconciliation and accommodation proved to be the only way out to resolve the problem of Russian minorities in the 'near abroad'.

### **(3) ECONOMIC POLICY**

Similarly efforts were made to maintain economic unity in the face of the political disintegration of the Soviet Union. However, a mixed pattern evolved. Logic suggested that the years of economic interdependence with the USSR should encourage the maintenance of close links between the Soviet successor states.<sup>45</sup> However, more short term nationalist interests predominated. Russia was also unwilling to allow other more conservatives states to dictate the speed and direction of economic reforms. It, therefore, cut subsidies to other Republics through raising the prices of its exports closer to world prices. Also it effectively abandoned the ruble zone over the period 1992-93 to prevent other Republics from undermining Moscow's more monetarist policies through profligate spending and credit policies.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.235

<sup>45</sup> Donaldson, Robert H. and Joseph L. Noyee. *The Foreign Policy of Russian – Changing Systems. Enduring Intrests*, (New York : M.E. Sharpe. 1998). pp. 146-149

<sup>46</sup> SWB/SU/1613 C2/2 15 February, 1993

About 75% of the native population of the Central Asian Republics was engaged in agricultural production and followed a traditional pattern of life. While their population had gone up during the last one hundred years by 11.5 times, the area of irrigated land had increased only by 2.5 times.<sup>47</sup> The problem of rural over-population in these Republics resulting in growing unemployment was mainly caused by disinclination of the indigenous population to take to a profession other than agricultural or migrate to the northern Russian Republic. The pressure on land had resulted in adoption of Land Code in Kyrgyzstan which declared that the land in the Republic belongs to the Kirgizs alone. President Askar Akaev however, vetoed this provision approved by the Parliament of the Republic.

When the Soviet Union broke up in December 1991, the Central Asian Republics were not ready for independence. They were heavily dependent upon the Union subsidies in their budgets and their economies were closely interlinked with Russia. Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev divides the five year period of the existence of the CIS which includes the five Central Asian Republics into two phases. The first phase, a brief one, lasted till the end of 1992.

Despite the dissolution of the USSR the CIS founding documents retained a single economic, legal, military and defense space. The CIS had a single currency—the Russian ruble, all the objective factors then favoured reintegration of the republics of Central Asia with Russia. However, according to Nazarbayev, the Russian reformers under the leadership of the then acting Prime Minister Gaidar missed the chance when Russia could have played the key role of a nucleus in the renewal of the process of reintegration. “We had then something to preserve”, Nazarbayev told *Nazavisimaya Gazeta* in a long interview marking the five years of the CIS.<sup>48</sup>

Up to 1992 the Union industries were still functioning and the technical links were intact within the framework of an all-Union division of labour. But Gaidar's team of reforms brokers undermined the links holding the Central Asian Republics in a common economic space with Russia by embarking upon the course of radical economic reforms. They thought that they would forge ahead more smoothly without

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<sup>47</sup> Kaushik, Devendra, “The Post Soviet Central Asia and Russia: Emerging Contours of a new Relationship” in Warikoo, K. (ed.) *Central Asia: Emerging New Order*, (New Delhi: Har Anand Publication, 1995), pp.234-235

<sup>48</sup> SWB/SU/2730 B/13 30 September 1996



their old economic links with the Central Asian republics which were then expected to beseech for closer ties with a modernized and reformed Russia. However, it turned out just the other way.

The Russia of Yeltsin-Chubais struggled hard to extricate itself from the deep economic crisis into which it was plunged as a consequence of their 'shock-therapy' reforms. Thus, one finds a scenario in which all the Republics of the former USSR were engrossed in resolving their acute economic problems individually with no role model to follow. In a way the condition of Russia was even worse on account of sharp split among its political elite and a sort of permanent election campaign going on there.<sup>49</sup>

A new phase in Russia's relations with the Central Asian Republics thus began in 1993. In the life of the CIS the year 1993 was marked by a catastrophic fall in production due to the liquidation of the union-republican industrial giants and the closure of a large number of middle and small level enterprises. The former single all-Union power, transport and communication systems collapsed. The problems created by the Central Bank of Russia in making available to the Central Asian Republics an adequate supply of roubles forced these Republics to have their own separate national currencies. Such a climate was hardly suitable for economic reintegration with Russia.<sup>50</sup>

**TABLE – 3**  
**Foreign Trade of the Russian Federation with CIS Countries**  
**(in actual prices; million US dollars)**

STATES	1994	1995	1996
<b>Exports</b>			
Kazakhstan	2198	2555	2550
Kyrgyzstan	104	105	159
Tajikistan	143	190	152
Turkmenistan	112	93.1	115
Uzbekistan	786	824	1085

<sup>49</sup> SWB/SU/1924 G/1 17 February 1994

<sup>50</sup> Kausik, Devendra. "Russia and Central Asian Relations :Assertion of Russia's Eurasian Identity". *Contemporary Central Asia*, vol 7.no1-2.April-August 2003.pp. 9

Imports			
Kazakhstan	1996	2675	3041
Kyrgyzstan	97.9	101	147
Tajikistan	90.0	167	88.0
Turkmenistan	60.4	179	168
Uzbekistan	852	889	654

**Source:** State Committee of the Russian Federation on Statistics (Goscomstat of Russia) *Russian in figures* 2001, p. 362

Russia's trade with Central Asia gradually declined since 1991 (it was only one third of the volume of trade with the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia). Yet, Central Asia remained Russia's main trading and economic partner. In 1997 the share of trade with Russia and other CIS countries in the trade of Kazakhstan was 53% of exports and 69% of imports and for Kyrgyzstan, 78% and 55% respectively. For Tajikistan 34% and 60%; for Turkmenistan 68% and 87%; and for Uzbekistan 23% and 33% respectively. So far as Russia was concerned, only 18% of its exports went to the CIS countries and 29% of its imports came from these countries.<sup>51</sup>

In such circumstances, it was hardly surprising that proposals for an economic union in October 1993 were not taken up. As the time went on, the growing differences between the economic structures and performances of Central Asian economies made integration all the more difficult to achieve. Moscow was dubious about the prospects of integration. Central Asian Republics (CARs) also feared that economic integration would only lead to their further subordination to Russian national interests. Non-Russian nationalities might have exaggerated the dangers, but Moscow's inheriting willingness to use its economic power as a bargaining lever for unilateral advantage fuelled suspicions. Hence the early attempts of economic integration failed.<sup>52</sup>

Hence it can be said that in the first phase of Yeltsin's Presidency i.e. between 1991-1995 Russian foreign policy was marked by a characteristic feature of 'Inactivity' towards Central Asia. This was due to ascendance of 'Trans Atlanticist' approach

<sup>51</sup> Kaushik Devendra. op, cit, 2003, P.15.

<sup>52</sup> Shearman, Peter(ed), *Russia's Foreign Policy Since 1990*. Boulder (West View Press, 1995) pp.64-65

under the supervision of the then Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev. By the end of 1995 when Kozyrev was replaced by Yevgeny Primakov in January 1996 as Foreign Minister, it marked the beginning of a new approach towards Central Asia. It was known as 'Eurasianist' approach. It was characterized by Russia's active engagement in Central Asia. The next chapter will analyse this great policy shift in detail.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RUSSIAN POLICY OF ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT**

## CHAPTER-4

### RUSSIAN POLICY OF ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

By the end of 1995, Russia's disillusionment with the west was complete. It led to end of 'Trans Atlanticist' approach and eventually the end of Kozyrev's era in 1995. Yevgeni Primakov became the new Russian Foreign Minister in January 1996. This marked the beginning of the next phase of Russian Foreign policy in Central Asia. This Approach is known as 'Eurasianist' approach, which assigned prime importance to Russia's Near Abroad in its Foreign policy agenda.<sup>1</sup>

#### **New Look at 'Near Abroad' –Instance of Policy Shift**

Though the new policy shift in favour of 'Eurasianist' vision was at its climax from 1996 under the new foreign minister Primakev, yet its impulses (though in dormant manner) could be heard in the second half of 1992 itself. Critic like Sergei Stankevich who was a centrist in Russian politics revived centuries old debate between 'westernisers' and 'Slavophiles'. He wanted to give greater emphasis to the 'Near Abroad'- a term used by Russia to describe the post-Soviet space around its neighbourhood. This beginning of the shift was more evident, when Russian foreign policy concept was published in January 1993, followed by the new military doctrine in the autumn of 1993.

According to the Russian Foreign policy concept, the pre-eminence was given to the country's national interest, which was to be the fundamental core of Russian Foreign policy. Emphasis was now firmly placed on the need to retain the status of Russia as a great power and to develop a new equal and mutually beneficial relationship of Russia with CIS particularly and other "nearby foreign" states. The document also formally acknowledged that the 'Near Abroad' was Russia's top Foreign policy priority. Therefore, it emphasized Moscow's obligation to protect Russian nationals in the 'Near

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<sup>1</sup> Madhavan K. Palat. *"Ideological choices in Post Soviet Russia"*, New Delhi 1997, p. 113

Abroad', to defend the territorial integrity of the post-Soviet space and enhance the scope of political and economic cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

The Military Doctrine, which followed later in the year extended this idea and argued that Russia has the right to use military force in the defense of Russian nationals in the territory of former Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Andranik Migranian a prominent political commentator expressed similar views in the argument that the ex-Soviet Central Asian Republics are a "sphere of (Russia's) vital interests" and that they should not be allowed to form alliances either with each other or with third countries that have an anti-Russian orientation.<sup>4</sup> Though the idea was in currency from 1992 onwards but still its practice took a much longer gestation period. It was due to Gaider-Kozyrev team's reliance on the west and due to external factors like security dilemma at the border, which led the Russian leadership to pursue policy of 'Passive Isolation' in the early years of Yeltsin's Presidentship.

However, the Russian Foreign policy matured with the time. Russian made a policy shift-called as 'Rediscovery of the old wisdom' in the form of 'Eurasianist' vision. An active role of Russia in Central Asia was not just due to pressure from political forces in Moscow, but was desired since long by some of the Central Asian Republics. It was Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev who recognized the geopolitical realities and historical relations with Russia at the first instance.<sup>5</sup> He showed the natural desire for close cooperation with Asian neighbours. He also warned his partners not to isolate themselves within the framework of 'Islamic' or 'Central Asian' solidarity.

It is important to note here that this policy shift had many causes and consequences. Factors like geopolitical imperatives, security, economic, socio-cultural and historical linkages played their own part in de-linking the foreign policy establishment from its 'pro-western' stand and hence Russian Eagle turned its eye towards this forgotten 'distant neighborhood' with a sort of new enthusiasm and optimism. As it is often said

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<sup>2</sup> SWB/SU/1289 A1/18 November 1993

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. A1/2

<sup>4</sup> Andranik Migranyan, in *The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* Vol. XLIV, No. 43, 1992

<sup>5</sup> "Nazarbayev wants Central Asia linked to Both CIS. OEC." *The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press*. Vol. XLV, no. 28. 1993. p. 15

that Russia is a land with 'Dual Identity' in the form of European culture and Asian geographical location, so it is evident that geopolitics took precedent on any other factor this policy reversal was undertaken. Hence, the post-1995 period witnessed Russia's active engagement in Central Asia, which was a natural corollary of geopolitical realities and practical experiences of the first half of 1990s. It is prudent to look into the causes of this great policy shift.

## **CAUSES OF POLICY SHIFT**

Russian foreign policy in the late 1995 started to shift towards 'active engagement in place of inactive isolation in its 'Near Abroad' due to various reasons. This 'reassertion' of 'Eurasianist' identity can be attributed to several causes (i.e. economic, geo-strategic, geopolitical, cultural etc.) acting at multiple levels (i.e. domestic, regional and international). Some of these factors are discussed below:

### **(1) Disillusion with the west**

Starting with Gorbachev's 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnot' of the Soviet period to Yeltsin's early foreign policy orientation of 'Trans Atlanticist' vision, the main underlying current was a 'Pro-western' orientation. The so-called 'promised but not actually delivered heavy financial aid and economic assistance by west, did not materialize.<sup>6</sup> It is worthwhile to mention here that it was actually the US policy advice of 'shock therapy' through the agencies of IMF and World Bank, which was undertaken by Yeltsin-Gaidar team in the economic sphere.

The main underlying current was the high expectation of western aid. In fact, it was the promise of US aid only, which provided the economic basis for 'Trans Atlanticist' approach in the early years of Yeltsin's Presidency. In the heady days that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment on its territory of 15 independent states, Russian foreign policy was directed towards the construction of friendly relations

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<sup>6</sup> Chenoy, Anuradha M. *The Making of New Russia* (New Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 2001). pp. 238-246

with the west and entry into the leading western economic and political institutions.<sup>7</sup> This was also referred to as “romantic approach’ with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev as its main propounder.

The desire of Russia to be counted among the ‘civilized’ nations of the west was prompted mostly by economic interests, since western economic aid according to them is the only way to bail them out of acute economic crisis.<sup>8</sup> The romantic phase, however did not last long and the honeymoon with the west proved to be short lived. The pendulum of Russian public attitudes towards the west vibrated from romantic hopes to the disillusionment. The hopes actually turned out to be very despair. Russia found itself into acute economic crisis and it was almost close to the economic breakdown of Russian economy.

The ‘shock therapy’ approach in economic sphere, which was carried out, at the behest of US had devastating impact on the majority of Russian people.<sup>9</sup> By 1995 more than a third of Russian population were living below the poverty line-a figure that had more then tripled since the launch of Gaidar’s reforms. Cuts in state spending also led to a crisis in arts and education and public services. Georgy Arbator an advisor to successive Soviet leaders described this process as the ‘deintellectualization’ of Russian Society. Gaidar was criticized severely by the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Russian Khasbullov. International Monetary Fund together with the US was attacked for supporting Premier Yegor Gaidar who was pushing economic reforms by lifting price controls.<sup>10</sup>

What actually happened was that there was not a genuine flow of US aid and assistance to Russia as promised by the US leaders. In fact it were these ‘belied hopes’ which gave rise to ‘nationalist’ and ‘anti-West’ sentiments among the Russian people. In reality, there was ‘reverse’ flow of Russian hard currency-‘ruble’ to US to the amount of \$300 billions. It made Russia much more deprived than before. This out flow of Russian wealth had severe economic repercussions. Firstly it had to face balance of payment crisis. Secondly,

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Mandelbaun (ed). *The New Russian Foreign policy*’ council of Foreign Relations, 1998

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Foye, “Russian and the Near Abroad” *Post Soviet Affairs* vol. III, No. 12, December 1995

<sup>9</sup> *Russian Economic Trends*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (London: Whurr Publisher 1995), pp. 117-121

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 121-123



there was rise of inflation. Thirdly, there was huge trade deficit and lastly the rate of capital formation (an indicator of economic growth) declined drastically (from 234 % in 1989 to 15.1 % in 1995). The problems of Russian economy were further compounded by the “outward migration” of Russian human capital.

The bleak picture of Russian economy and the hostile bid by US in terms of belied monetary and other benefits led to a wave of emigration of prominent Russian scientists, doctors, engineers, academicians and other intelligentsia of the Russian society to the west especially US. This led to ‘Brain drain’ problem. It is very important to note that the timings of such outflow of Russian human capital also proved to be very devastating for Russia. It was engaged in the task of Nation Building and State Building and any outflow of either financial capital or human capital is very detrimental to the prospects of a nation’s economic and social development. In Russia, it was both — ‘currency crunch’ as well as ‘Brain Drain’, which cost Russia very dearly in the early years of 1990s during Kozyrev’s ‘Trans Atlanticist’ euphoria.

As a whole, it led to ‘disillusion’ from the west and hence it was the most important factor causing a new ‘policy rethinking’ by the end of 1995. Even Yeltsin himself admitted that West (especially US) had betrayed Russian hopes and aspirations to the bottom level.<sup>11</sup> In such a scenario it was only ‘Near Abroad’ and the old natural allies of Asia and the third world of erstwhile Soviet era which could provide Russia a new ferment and assertion in foreign policy. Hence, it led to the evolution of ‘Eurasianist’ vision from 1996 onwards.

## **(2) Nationalist Pressure: Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s Role**

Another important factor in determining this shift towards ‘Eurasianistic’ vision in Russian foreign policy was the political pressure exerted by the Russian “Nationalists”. Among its most prominent votaries were- Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the leader of Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), an ultra-nationalist party that surprised every one by

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<sup>11</sup> SWB/SU/1368 A1/3. 12 December, 1995

its showing in the Parliamentary elections of December 1993.<sup>12</sup> No party or bloc won a majority in the parliament. However, Zhirinovsky got a legitimate voice in Russian politics. Other votaries of this extreme “Nationalist” view included Alexander Prokhanov, editor of the extremist newspaper ‘Den’ and Colonel Viktor Alkshis, leader of the reactionary Soviet faction in the Congress of Peoples Deputies.

This group sought to recreate Soviet Union-even by force if necessary. They were blatantly anti-western and opposed the integration of Russian economy into the world economy. They were the 20<sup>th</sup> century heirs to the Slavophiles, contemptuously denouncing “westernizers” for thinking that western culture or political institutions were worthy of initiation and depicting Russian civilization as distinctive and superior.

Though in the end their policies turned out to be more hollow rhetoric rather than substance, the Russian nationalists did find popular support among the dissatisfied and fallen-from-grace Russian population. It was an irrefutable evidence of the growing disenchantment with Kozyrev’s romantic overtures to the US led western states (G-7). Their internal (domestic) criticism combined with external events-including the disappointing western response to Russia’s request for financial aid brought out an end to the Russian honeymoon with the west.<sup>13</sup> It signaled the end of the “romantic” phase of Russian foreign policy. Evidently, there was a clear shift of focus away from the “Atlanticists” and towards the “Eurasianists” particularly in the second term of Yeltsin’s Presidency of Russian Federation.

### **(3) Pressure of Communist Party**

Apart from “Nationalists” another driving force for rising popular opinion against “westernizers” were the leaders and supporters of the otherwise discredited Communist Party of Russia. Though communists had lost prominence in the wake of collapse of

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<sup>12</sup> In the election, Zhirinovsky’s LDPR recorded the highest vote with 23 percent, and Russia’s choice party led by Gaidar got only 15 percent. The LDPR won 64 seats: the communists 48 seats and their close allies, the Agrarian Party 33 and the Reformers 70, in Paul Dukes, *A History of Russia: Medieval, Modern and Contemporary C. 1882-1996*. (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1998). p. 337

<sup>13</sup> Donaldson, Robert H. and Joseph L. Noyee. *The Foreign policy of Russian – Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*. (New York : M.E. Sharpe, 1998). pp. 46-49

Soviet Union, yet their role as a critique of “Trans Atlanticist” approach on ideological basis was worth consideration.<sup>14</sup> Among its prominent votaries was Gennadii Zyuganov—the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

The Communist Party got an influential number of seats in the parliamentary elections of 1993. It got 48 seats and in absence of majority, its role became important both as opposition-representative as well as critique of policies of Russian government especially on the matters related to economic and foreign policy. It was clear that there was no possibility that the Nationalist and the Communist Deputies could be dismissed as unrepresentative of public opinion. Now onwards the Duma was not going to be totally subservient to the President.

In February 1994, the first action that the Duma took was to grant amnesty to all these involved in both the August coup and the siege of the White House. This resulted in the re-entry of the opposition into the political fray. Thus after elections, Yeltsin failed to consolidate his position and his popularity declined dramatically in 1994. It had its own repercussions on the Russian foreign policy orientation. Yeltsin and his reformist team further declined in their electoral strength in the Parliamentary elections at the end of the year. The main winner in December elections was the Communist Party and its close ally, the Agrarian Party, which together won 187 seats in the State Duma elections in December 1994.

For the Presidential elections in June 1996, the Communist candidate, Gennady Zyuganov (President of Communist Party of Russian Federation) was well ahead of Yeltsin in all opinion polls as the campaign process began in early 1996. The final result in the first round however was a very close one. Yeltsin got 35 percent of vote, with Zyuganov not too far behind with 32 percent of vote. It manifested the public opposition to Yeltsin’s policies as represented by communist elements.<sup>15</sup> Moreover both before and during the 1996 Presidential election campaign, influential figures in the Yeltsin camp, fearing a communist victory, routinely spoke to the press about postponing or canceling

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<sup>14</sup> Mandelbaum Michael (ed.), *The New Russian Foreign policy* (New York : Council on Foreign Relations, 1998), pp. 38-41

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 393

the Presidential election. Doubts were raised frequently in Russian media that Yeltsin would ever voluntarily give up power to Zyuganov. The media was manipulated in such ways which lead to the fear that a communist victory might lead to return of totalitarian rule.

However, it was clear that the policy shift towards 'Eurasianist' vision was more or less influenced by the domestic pressure of Communist Party. They were very vocal in exposing the "western designs" and their hidden agenda before the public. Their ideological position found empirical justification in the form of broken US promises regarding economic aid and assistance and the 'disillusion' generated by such acts of betrayed assurances by the West led by US.<sup>16</sup> The economic hardship faced by the Russian people and the loss of political and economic clout once enjoyed during the Soviet Union period reinforced public faith in the restructured Communist Party of Russia. Its leaders like Gennadii Zyugonov were very instrumental in bringing about the change in Russian foreign policy agenda in favour of 'Eurasianist' position which was the inherited wisdom of the communist Soviet Union till its collapse in 1991.<sup>17</sup>

#### **(4) Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism**

The security threat in the form of rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in the five Central Asian Republics was another important factor which led the Russian President Yeltsin to pay due attention to its 'Near Abroad' which is often called as its soft underbelly. The five Central Asian Republics (CARs) witnessed the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the form of 'Political Islam'. The export of 'Political Islam' from Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to these CARs led to serious security implication for Russia. The Chechen problem and other such type of centrifugal tendencies found their expression in the form of Islamic terrorism.<sup>18</sup> Since Russia has sizeable account of Muslim population and these five CARs have Muslim majority, so it led to both internal disturbance as well as external

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<sup>16</sup> Crow, Suzanne. *The Making of Foreign policy in Russia under Yeltsin* (Munich : Radio Free Europe : Radio Liberty, 1993), pp. 28-32

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 116

<sup>18</sup> Dawisha, Adeed and Dawisha, Koreon (ed.). *The Making of Foreign policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York : M.E. Sharpe, 1996), pp. 178-181

threats of narcotic smuggling, illicit arms trade, human trafficking etc. to the vast Russian territory.

The happenings of Tajik- Civil war which began in 1992 removed any doubt about the impending problem of Islamic Fundamentalism. In the Tajik- Civil war between the ex-communist ruling elite and the coalition of Islamic opposition parties, the latter were receiving aid and sanctuary in neighboring Afghanistan. In Afghanistan various Islamic Mujahideen factions had come to power in April 1992. The Tajik Islamists were also getting support from Iran and Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> Saudi Arabia was also exporting its version of 'Political Islam' to these five CARs. Hence Russia had compulsive engagement in CARs owing to its vital security concerns.

A Collective Security Treaty was signed by Russian, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan whereby 25000 strong Russian led security force was created to protect the Tajik-Afghan- Border to keep the Islamic militants at bay. Russia deployed its 201<sup>st</sup> motorized rifle division in Tajikistan. The Islamic elements in Tajikistan received a resolute rebuff from these forces and the ex-communists were put back into power. Russian media in such a volatile situation reported that Russia would defined the 14000 km long Tajik-Afghan- border as its own. According to this view Russia had 7000 km unprotected border with Kazakhstan which would lay open to the Islamic militants and infiltrators in case Russia withdraw from Tajikistan.

Therefore it become increasingly clear for the Russian foreign policy establishment that ignoring Central Asia under the name of 'Trans Atlanticist' approach would have unwarranted security implications for Russian territorial unity and internal stability. Thus the Tajik-Afghan factor made Russian active engagement in Central Asia a fait accompli<sup>20</sup>. Hence Russia had to place its troops in front of four Central Asian Republics. Uzbekistan was the lone exception. The rise of political Islam, Islamic

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<sup>19</sup> Pinar Akdali. "Islam as a common bond in Central Asia: Islamic Renaissance Party and the Afghan Mujahedeen". *Central Asian Survey* Vol. 17, No. 2, June 1998, pp. 279-280

<sup>20</sup> Warikoo.K.Singh Uma and Ray A.K.(eds.), "Afghanistan Factor in Central and South Asian Politics". *Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, Occasional Paper I ( Monograph)*, New Delhi, 1994,pp.8-11.

terrorism and its collateral effects in the form of illicit drug trafficking, arms trade and human trafficking made Russia to follow policy shift in favor of active engagement in the Near Abroad. It also resulted in the abandonment of Eurasian foreign policy orientation of Russia.

#### **(5) NATO's Eastward Expansion**

NATO was one of the cornerstones of the cold war era. All that time was a collective security arrangement of western powers led by US against any possible erstwhile communist Soviet Union aggression in Western Europe. Its very existence after the end of cold war and the collapse of Soviet Union put a question mark on its raison'deter .For Russia, it had been a difficult reality to digest. Russia took a positive view of NATO's partnership for peace programme (PfP) in 1993. Subsequent development however belied the honest intentions of NATO.<sup>21</sup> In fact the expansion of NATO to the East Europe had become a hard fact of history.

After the end of the cold war many Eastern European nations like Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and three Baltic Republics became members of NATO Closer to Russian borders Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine had shown a strong desire for joining the group. Russian foreign policy makers perceived this NATO's eastward expansion as a resumption of a policy of encirclement of Russia, a return to the cold war strategy on part of the US.<sup>22</sup> The dissolution of the Warsaw pact and the changed foreign policy direction of the Eastern European countries ever since had effectively erased the 'strategic buffer' that existed between Russia and the west. Viewed against the back ground of the fragile and suspicious Moscow- West relations, the disappearance of the buffer zone created security dilemma among Russian foreign policy makers.

According to a joint survey of foreign policy specialists conducted by All Russia Centre for Public Opinion Research (VtsIOM) in the first half of 1996, 30 percent of the Russian respondents believed that NATO expansion towards the east ran counter to Russian

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<sup>21</sup> Yurlo, Felix N. "Russia: Problems of Security in the Post-Cold War World", *World Affairs* April-June 2000 vol. 4(3), .45

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. pp 46-47.

interests. In yet another survey in December 1996 conducted by the Russian Opinion Foundation, 31 percent respondents felt that Russia should obstruct NATO enlargement.<sup>23</sup> The US and some of the European countries however tried to portray a positive picture of NATO's expansion to the East. They tried to rationalize the existence of NATO and its further expansion by assigning it new role in the changed international system-that of human rights watchdog. NATO intervention in internal affairs of a sovereign country was justified on the basis of 'benefiting all humanity'. But this raised the alarm bell for Russian foreign policy establishment. It came to realize the gravity of the situation and again started looking at its soft underbelly with a new wave of action and assertion. Thus in this way NATO's eastward expansion further provided impetus to the transformation of Yeltsin foreign policy towards CARs with characteristic feature of active engagement.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore it can be concluded that multiple factors both internal as well as external like disillusion with the west, impact of Russian nationalists and communists, rise of Islamic fundamentalism and NATO's eastward expansion combinely contributed in the policy shift of Russia under Yeltsin towards 'Eurasianist' vision-which hallmarked the next phase of Yeltsin era from 1996-1997. It was actively pursued by newly appointed foreign minister Yevgeni Primakov who gave due attention to the Russia's 'Near Abroad' including the five CARs.

## **EURASIAN VISION: CHARACTERISTICS AND VOTARIES**

The policy shift from 'Trans Atlanticist'; or 'pro-western' to 'Eurasianist' vision was result of many causes. There were many distinguishing characteristics which put this new vision apart from early vision of 'Westernizers'. Since this policy reversal which many a times is considered as change in preferences rather than objectives, was an offshoot of disillusion from the west, so it has distinguishing non pro-west (if not anti-west)

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<sup>23</sup> NATO review in *WEBEDITION* vol. 45, No. 3, May-June, 1997, pp. 11-15

<sup>24</sup> Bakshi, Jyotsna. "No Single Power or Power Centre can have Exclusive Sway over Central Asia : A Geopolitical Analysis", *Strategic Analysis*, April 1998, pp.125-128.

orientation at its foundational basis.<sup>25</sup> The characteristics of 'Eurasianist' policy can be analyzed as under

- Rediscovery of Near Abroad— Manifestation of old wisdom about post-Soviet space and its geo-strategic importance.
- Near Abroad as Russia's special sphere of interest
- Protection of rights and interests of Russian Diaspora in the Near Abroad.
- Active assertion and engagement in the regional economic cooperation and development
- Checking increasing influence of external powers in Central Asia

### **1. Rediscovery of Near Abroad— Manifestation of old wisdom about post-soviet space**

It was both due to external as well internal factors which led Yeltsin to reconsider its policy of 'Passive Isolation' towards Central Asia in the light of emerging realities and historical experiences. In this connection one is also reminded of the comment made by Tsarist Russian statesman Pytor Stolypin who said, "Our Eagle, a legacy of Byzantium is double headed. To be sure, single headed eagles are strong and mighty too, but you cannot turn the Russian eagle into single –headed one by cutting off its head facing east. You can only bleed it white. When in the first half of 1990s, failure of Kozyrev's 'Trans-Atlanticist' foreign policy which neglected its soft underbelly in favor of distant west became evident then Russian foreign policy establishment turned to its past from Tsarist Russia's to the former Soviet-Union period so as to find answers to the dilemma of new direction of its foreign policy.

Important factors like geographical proximity, historical linkages, socio-cultural affinity and economic interdependence were the decisive ones in transforming the mindset of

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<sup>25</sup> Kausik,Devendra."Russia and Central Asian Relations :Assertion of Russia's Eurasian Identity. *Contemporary Central Asia*. vol 7.no1-2.April-August2003. pp. 17-21



Yeltsin's team from 1995 onwards. They not only 'relooked' at their foreign policy priorities but also 'rediscovered' what can be called as its 'Near Abroad' in the post-Soviet space which included the five Central Asian Republics at its core. This was a natural corollary to suit the national interests of Russia and also was in line with the Central Asian geopolitical realities.

Further emphasizing the importance of on these old allies, Yeltsin's election manifest of 1996 identified two priority areas for Russian foreign policy: "the achievement of the utmost integration of the CIS countries on a voluntary and mutually advantageous basis and the active protection of the rights and interests of fellow-countrymen in the 'Near Abroad'. G. Seleznev, Chairman of the Russian Duma, stated Russia's position on the question of ethnic Russians in the Near Abroad: "the categorical rejection of any forms of discrimination or double standards with respects to its compatriots and the consistent defense of their rights and legitimate interests."<sup>26</sup>

## **2. Near Abroad As Russia's Special Sphere of Interest**

Another important characteristic of 'Eurasian vision was that Russia now regarded Central Asia as its 'natural zone of influence' where its writ would run large. One of the most significant governmental documents reflecting Russian thinking about the Near Abroad was President Yeltsin's Decree on "The establishment of the strategic course of the Russian Federation with member-states of the CIS" signed on September 15, 1995. The eight page document was the most dunning evidence of the new Russian thinking on its Near Abroad policy. In many ways it was not only an approval of the trend that set in the mid-1993, it also signaled the aggressiveness that Russia was prepared to demonstrate to guard its vital interests in the Near Abroad.<sup>27</sup>

It showed the renewed interest of Russian foreign policy makers in otherwise forgotten natural zone of influence. On the same line, Yeltsin instructed his executive organs to implement an all inclusive subordination of policies throughout the commonwealth to

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<sup>26</sup> G. Seleznev, "Russian Duma: Defending National Interests", *International Affairs*, Moscow, Vol. 43, No. 3, 1997, p. 6

<sup>27</sup> SWB/SU/1588. A1/19, 16 September, 1995.

Moscow's "vital interests" in what amounted to any urgent call to restore Russian might in its traditional imperial context.

According to Yeltsin, those vital interests encompassed the economy, defense, and security as well as "the rights of Russians, the guarantee of which form the basis of the country's national security." This was perhaps the first time that Russian objectives in the Near Abroad were so comprehensively given the force of Presidential Edict.<sup>28</sup> It marked the changing priorities of Russia vis-à-vis Central Asia in order to address regional and national aspirations and to make its foreign policy an effective tool in furthering the cause of peace, security and development. Post- 1995, Russia started visualizing Central Asia as an immediate concern for realizing its foreign policy objectives.

### **3. Protection of Rights and Interests of Russian Diaspora in the Near Abroad**

One of the major lacunae of the 'Trans- Atlanticist' vision was that it neglected the problems faced by ethnic Russians in the post-Soviet space. About 11.7 million population of Russian people used to live in these Central Asian Republics. They were facing problems of state sponsored discrimination, socio-cultural isolation, linguistic and career advancement problems and economic underdevelopment. It led to a wave of Russian outward migration from CARs to their native country Russia which caused its own set of demographic and socio-economic imbalances. It needed immediate attention of the Russian government.

So when there was policy reversal under Primakov, one of its main characteristic was the explicit concern expressed by Russian state towards protecting the rights and interests of Russian Diaspora in the 'Near Abroad'. The Presidential Decree of 1995 put this Russian concern in a more assertive and categorical term. On the issue of ethnic Russians in the Near Abroad, the decree warned that the violations of the rights of Russians in the CIS states will possibly jeopardize "financial, economic, military-political and other forms of cooperation with Russia", and that observance of the rights and interests of Russians would play a role in determining the level of cooperation. Clearly at this issue it was the

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<sup>28</sup> Kathlam Mihalisko. "Yeltsin's CIS Decree: An Instrument for Regaining Russia's super power status", *Prism* Vol. 1, No. 21. 6 October 1995.

transformation of the commonwealth into a vehicle for the recuperation of Moscow's superpower status.<sup>29</sup> Thus this renewed emphasis on ethnic Russian's interests and their protection was the hallmark of the policy of active engagement of Russia in Central Asia under the macro-policy orientation of 'Eurasiaist' vision.

#### **4. Active Assertion and Engagement in the Regional Economic Cooperation and Development**

In his second term, when Yeltsin embarked on the path of 'Eurasianist' vision the main focus was on the economic priorities of his government in the Central Asia. It was due to the fact that Russia was losing in terms of volume of bilateral trade which took place between Russia and former Soviet Republics during the existence of erstwhile Soviet Union as compared to that of after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991. For instance the overall trade turn-over between Russia and Tajikistan declined by 14 times between 1991-96. It relegated Russia to the fifth place in the Tajik foreign trade.<sup>30</sup> Even though Tajikistan had the highest presence of Russia troops on its soil.

The near economic collapse of Russia in early 1990s invokes serious criticism of the 'Westernizers' for their unquestionable faith & dependence over western aid and assistance. So when the policy shift took place in the form of 'Eurasianicist' vision; Central Asia was seen as the region of 'economic opportunity' which could be harnessed for Russian's economic development based on mutually beneficially co operation in various sectors. Serious attention was paid to establishment of multilateral institutional arrangement in the form of Economic Union, Customs Union and a Payment Union.

On March 29, 1996 a Custom Union was signed between four Republics, viz. Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgystan. Later on Tajikistan also joined the Custom Union. After the formation of the Custom Union there was an increase in Russia's trade with Kazakshtan and Kyrgystan. The fact that Russia choosed to include three of CARs in a

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<sup>29</sup> Umnay, Alexander. "Central Asia in Russia's Post Soviet Policy". *Contemporary Central Asia*, Vo.II, No.3, December 1998, pp.39-43.

<sup>30</sup> Russian trade with Tajik reportedly declined from \$2.900 million in 1991 to \$215 million in 1996. source: *Krasnaya Zvezda* January 28, 1998

Custom Union with itself attested to the importance accorded to these countries in Russian economic policy objectives.

<sup>31</sup> Moscow sought to stem the tide of its declining position in the former Soviet space by seeking economic integration with the inner core of the former Soviet Republics. It was thus also a defining characteristic of economic dimension of 'Eurasianist' shift under Yeltsin's second tenure.

Moscow sought to stem the tide of its declining economic position in the former Soviet space by seeking selective integration with the inner core of the former Soviet Republics, who for various reasons were also more willing for such integration

## **5. Checking Increasing Influence of External Powers in Central Asia**

The political vacuum generated by the sudden demise of Soviet Union created a sense of political and economic opportunity for the external powers to intervene and explore their stake in the post-soviet space. On the one hand there were Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, etc. who were playing the 'Islamic Card' and on the other hand were the western powers like US and Europe who were playing their 'Economic card' to have a leverage in Central Asia's volatile geopolitics.<sup>32</sup> China was not also far behind to play its role in what came to be known as 'New Great Game' in Central Asia. The vast natural hydrocarbon resources as well geo-strategic importance of Central Asia heartland was a bone of contention among regional and international powers.

In such conditions it was quite impossible that Russia could afford to ignore these developments in its soft under-belly too long. Hence when it turned its face towards rediscovered 'Near Abroad'; one of the main foreign policy priorities was to check the growing tide of external influence in Central Asia.<sup>33</sup> This objective of checkmating also became one of chief characteristic of 'Eurasianist' vision in the later half of last decade of

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<sup>31</sup> Spencer D. Bakich. "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation : Working Document or Anachronism ?". *Conflict Studies*, 301, July / August 1997. p.6.

<sup>32</sup> Donaldson, Robert H. and Joseph L. Noyee. *The Foreign policy of Russian – Changing Systems. Enduring Intrests*, (New York : M.E. Sharpe. 1998). pp. 221-229

<sup>33</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein. "Russia : In Search of a New Role – Changing Geopolitical Compulsion in Central Asia". *World Affairs*, Vo. 1, No.2. April-June 1997. p.73

20<sup>th</sup> century. It was also important in the light of NATO's continuous eastward expansion which had serious security and geopolitical implications for region in general and Russian interests in post-soviet space in particular.

Among the prime votaries of this Eurasianist policy included-Sergei Stankevich, who was Presidential advisor and was one of the strongest advocates of this approach. He called for tougher talks to defend the Russian population in the former Soviet Union Republics. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy leader of extreme Nationalist Party (LDP) and Gennadii Zyugonov, President of Communist Party of Russian Federation were also other prominent votaries of Eurasianist approach. It also found support at the hand of Andranik Migranyan, one of Yeltsin's advisors and vocal critic of Kozlov.

Most important among them was Yevgeny Primakov-a seasoned bureaucrat who was not only votary but also became active executor of 'Eurasianist' vision when he became Russian Foreign minister in 1996. Russian orientalist Vyacheslav Belokristinsky also regarded Russia as the topical and main foreign political actor in Central Asia. Igor Podbereski also supported Eurasian position in equivocal terms and urged for reorganization of the post-soviet space around Russia once again. He warned that Russia must realize its destiny as a Eurasian power and correct the mistakes made in the course of its ill-advised reforms or it would contract to the size of the Moscow's Tsardom before Ivan the Terrible.<sup>34</sup>

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF 'EURASIANIST' POLICY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

When Yevgeni Primakov became Russian foreign minister in January 1996, many observers opined that the change of guard was a signal for drastic change in Russian foreign policy — a sudden move away from the west and towards the 'Near Abroad'. How this change was reinforced in to practice – and with what consequences is discussed under the following headings:

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<sup>34</sup> Kausik.Devendra."Russia and Central Asian Relations :Assertion of Russia's Eurasian Identity. *Contemporary Central Asia*, vol 7,no1-2,April-August2003. pp. 21-26

## **(1) Political Dimension**

The pro-active role of Russia in Central Asia indicated a clear Russian desire and willingness to protect its historical, political-strategic interests in Central Asia. Its immediate concerns were restoration of peace and stability in the post-Soviet space, democratization of political elite of Central Asia, protecting the interests of ethnic Russians in Central Asia, and political cooperation at international fora with explicit consent of these Central Asian Republics. Both multilateral and bilateral measures at highest political level were taken to further these objectives. Apparently, the main mechanism chosen to build new relations with the newly independent countries was the CIS. However, more often than not, CIS was bypassed in favour of bilateral agreements with various countries. In April 1996, the new foreign minister Primakov listed following four priorities of Russia's foreign policy:

- Creation of favorable external condition for strengthening Russia's territorial integrity.
- Consolidation of centripetal tendencies across the territory of the former USSR, short of resurrecting the former USSR and preserving the sovereignty of the CIS countries.
- Stabilization of the international situation at the regional level and promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- Cultivate interstate relations which would bar new tension and nuclear proliferation.

On the implementation part, Russia signed several agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on important Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and on military cooperation to safeguard their borders in the later part of the year 1997. During 1998, Yeltsin health once again forced him to absent from office very often. It was left to Primakov and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin to run the affairs of Russian foreign policy.

During the last years of 1990s, Russia did make some sincere efforts to rejuvenate the CIS which otherwise represented a black picture as an integrating mechanism in the Near Abroad. After the diplomatic debacle at the Kishnev CIS summit in October 1997, Moscow started to take a more realistic approach to its relations with the CIS countries.<sup>35</sup> In a report by the Russian Foreign and Defense council approved at its 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly (March 1998), the Russian ruling elite was accused of an inability to recognize the realities of the post Soviet disintegration of the CIS countries.

It also emphasized greater bilateral diplomacy in relations with former Soviet Republics. Consequently, interrelationship between Russia and influential CIS member like Kazakhstan improved noticeably over the next two years. Recognition of the inevitability of the Caspian seabed partition between the littoral states was another sign of goodwill and recognition of reality on the part of Moscow. This move undertaken at the beginning of 1998 drastically improved the Russian-Kazakhstan relations<sup>36</sup> and became a role model for Russia's bilateral relations with other Central Asian Republics.

This bilateral relationship further strengthened when Kazakhstan agreed giving its Baikonour space centre on lease for the flight of Russian rockets and space crafts in lieu of annual fees of \$5 million from Russia. In 1996 and 1997 Russia hosted several rounds of the UN sponsored negotiations for a political settlement of Tajik civil war which culminated in the signing of peace agreement in June 1997.<sup>37</sup> The accord ended the four year civil war in Tajikistan Russia was one of the guarantors of the general agreement on the establishment of peace and national accord in Tajikistan.

In April 1998 Russia and Tajikistan signed an agreement on the establishment of a Russian military base in Tajikistan and in July 1998 the Tajik-Afghan border was reinforced with Russian troops to pacify the violent situation. It was done under the aegis of CIS peace keeping force led by Russia. The two countries of Russia and Uzbekistan agreed on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1999 that the two sides will cooperate for the sake of

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<sup>35</sup> SWB/SU/1768 A1/212 Dec. 1997

<sup>36</sup> SWB/SU/1809 A1/2 8 March 1998

<sup>37</sup> *The Europa world year book* (London: Europa Publications 18 Bred ford square) Vol. II, 1999, p. 3407

strengthening regional peace and security and upgrading mechanism for the settlement of regional conflicts and other crisis that concerned their mutual interest in this region.

## **(2) Economic Dimension**

While implementing the economic policy-part of 'Eurasianist' vision, the Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his Kazakhstan counterpart, Nur Sultan Nazarbayev signed a landmark accord on July 6, 1998 in Moscow on dividing up the northern sector of the oil-rich Caspian Sea. The deal would enable both sides to cash in on the development of the rich oil reserves lying beneath the world's largest inland sea, estimated at some 13-15 billion tones.<sup>38</sup> It strengthened Russian-Kazakhstan economic ties.

In the similar thrust, on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1999 there was an agreement between Gazprom, Russian gas giant and the government of Turkmenistan regarding the delivery of 20 billion cubic meters of natural gas to the markets of Russia and the Commonwealth till the year 2000. They signed an agreement on establishment of the long term partnership, which would take into account the mutual benefits and strategic interests of these friendly states. It contributed in strengthening Russian position vis-à-vis other external powers struggling for tapping the vast oil and natural gas resources found in the region of Central Asia.<sup>39</sup>

With Uzbekistan, the Russian leadership signed two papers: a protocol on the formation of the inter-governmental commission on economic cooperation between Russia and the Republic of Uzbekistan and an agreement between the governments of Uzbekistan and Russia on cooperation in the field of governmental communications. Special focus was given to cotton, as Uzbekistan was the leading producer of cotton among Central Asian Republics.<sup>40</sup> It led to some increase in bilateral trade.

But there were many irritants also in the success of economic policy of Russia in Central Asia from 1996-1999. In the success of Taliban Militia in Afghanistan, Russia saw the

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<sup>38</sup> SWB/SU/1788 A1/3 July 7, 1998

<sup>39</sup> "Foreign policy" *The current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* (Ohio), Vol. 51, no. 48, 1999, pp. 23-24

<sup>40</sup> SWB/SU/367 B/6, Nov. 20, 1999



covert hand of the US oil major UNOCAL and Delta Oil and Saudi Arabia's Aramic which were keen to build a gas pipeline from Turkeministan to Pakistan via Afghanistan. The pipeline would have eliminated Russian control over the Turkmen gas business. The overland access to the CARs from Pakistan across Afghanistan would also change the geo-politics of the region by laying it open to direct US penetration.

Another major bone of contention was the construction of Baku-Tbilisi Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline across Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey to the European markets as the main pipeline for carrying Caspian oil and gas. It was proposed to construct two additional pipelines. As it would bypass Russia, so Moscow saw it as a Washington move to oust it from the oil business in the region. It would erode its economic base. For the time being, Russia's pipeline network— the Baku-Grozy-Novorossisk pipeline remained the main transit route to carry early Caspian oil to world markets. In this context earlier in February 1998. President Yeltsin made it abundantly clear that the Caspian was not an area of "US national interests alone." "Russia", he said. "cannot be indifferent to the Caspian Sea either."<sup>41</sup>

<b>Table – 1</b>		
<b>Multilateral Institutional Arrangement Between Russia and Central Asia: Some Developments</b>		
<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Economic Issues</b>	<b>Security Issues</b>
1.	EEC - Eurasian economic community comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, was formed for the economic development through mutual cooperation.	CIS - Collective Security Treaty was signed in Tashkent Summit of May 1992 between various CIS members' states. It was envisaged as a multilateral security initiative for collective and peaceful resolution of regional conflict and other security issues.

<sup>41</sup> SWB/SU 1769 A1/2 11 February 1998

2.	SCO - An economic organization in the form of Shanghai-5 was raised by Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, in April 1996 with the aim of promoting economic cooperation on mutual beneficial basis among its member states.	CSTO – The Collective Security Treaty was given institutionalized form by the way of formation of CSTO to take care of various geo-security concerns of its member CIS states.
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Formation of multilateral institutional arrangement in the form of Shanghai Five in April 1996 was a major landmark for achieving the goal of economic cooperation among its members. It tried to evolve as an economic powerhouse with Russia and China as its core members. Thus, it was clear that in the economic field, Yeltsin foreign policy towards Central Asia gave mixed results. On the one hand Russia was able to have its regional trade with CARs kept on an upfront, the interference and engagement of US, EU, China etc. somewhat blinked its prospects of economic cooperation to a level of underperformance and below expectation.

### (3) Strategic Dimension

The policy of 'active engagement' adopted by Yeltsin during his second tenure from 1996-1999 had a very important strategic dimension. Moscow was facing security threats in the form of rise of Islamic Fundamentalism, cross border terrorism, arm-trafficking and drug trafficking etc. These security concerns and to address them properly were one of the major thrust areas when Russia 're-looked' at its 'Near Abroad.'<sup>42</sup> Its strategic interest in Central Asia was under great strain hence for Russia it became almost a sort of compulsive engagement in Central Asia which is considered by many scholars as Russia's soft 'underbelly'.

The second phase of Russia's engagement which started after coming to power of Primakov, provided some sort of stability in to the Russo-Central Asian strategic relationship. Russia followed both bilateral and multilateral level of cooperation in the

<sup>42</sup> Rajan Memon. "After Empire": Russia and the southern Near Abroad in Michael Mendelbaum. *The New Russian Foreign policy*. New York Council on Foreign Relations. 1998. p. 101

strategic sphere to strengthen its position in Central Asia-vis-à-vis other external actors. It was implemented both by increasing Russia physical presence in CARs and also by influencing the regional security environment by various bilateral and multilateral means.<sup>43</sup>

In an interview to *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Gen Alexander Menilov, the Deputy Director of Russian Federal Frontier Service made it clear that Russian would not sit safely behind its own border fence.” He added that there could be no vacuum in strategic sphere. He reiterated that Russia was pursuing a “two border” strategy of protecting the national interests of the CARs on external border, and the interests of Russia on its own borders. In Central Asia, the Russian troops started joint missions with the national frontier forces of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan to protect the external frontiers of the former Soviet Union.

Along with the collective security arrangements with Russia, all the Central Asian states also entered into bilateral mutual security arrangements with Moscow for ensuring their security against outside threats. These arrangements were seen as having given Russia “the right to oversee military policies in the region.” Moreover, all the five Central Asian Republics decided to join the unified CIS air defence system the agreement regarding which was signed at Kishinev in October 1997. Russia tried to tie Uzbekistan to itself through a tripartite union between Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan against Islamic fundamentalism and extremism.<sup>44</sup> They tried to conduct concerted campaigns against Islamic fundamentalism, particularly against Islamic fundamentalism and extremism of Saudi inspired Wahabi Islamic variant entrenched in eastern Namangan province and Farghana valley.

In the joint statement signed on May 6, 1998 at the time of President Karimov’s visit to Moscow, “Uzbekistan recognized Russia’s strategic interests in the region and admitted that Russia’s involvement enhanced political balance, economic expansion, regional stability and security. “During the visit the two Presidents instructed their respective

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. pp. 105-108

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 89

governments to draw a strategic partnership plan for the next 10 years.<sup>45</sup> On July 1998, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Russian officers completed a three day staff exercises at a military base outside Almaty. The dostyk/Druzbbba (Friendship) –98 exercise, the first of its type released joint operations. The basic objectives of this exercises aimed at checkmating the western influence in this region led by the United States and to demonstrate the fact that Russia still was a force to reckon with.

These exercises also acted as a counter balance to the US military exercise conducted in September 1997. Along with Kazakh-Kyrgyz-Uzbek joint battalion in the US Army's 82 airborne Division participated in the exercises that were organized by US Central Command. It was waiting for an equally fitting reply from Russia, which came in the form of July 1998 joint military exercises. At the same time Russia also concluded certain bilateral agreements with Central Asian Countries. In October 1998, Yeltsin and Kazakh President Nazarbayev signed a military agreement, which included joint fight against trans-border terrorism, drug trafficking etc. In the same month Russia also signed a bilateral security treaty with Tashkent.

But there were some irritants also in furthering the strategic vision of Moscow in Central Asia. For example Tashkent during the later period of 1990s showed dissatisfaction towards growing Russian presence in Central Asian Republics. At a press conference in Tashkent on 25 June 1998, Uzbek President Karimov expressed resentment towards Russia's role in Central Asia. He alleged that CIS was dictated by Russia and he disagreed with Moscow's position on NATO expansion. As a gesture of protest, Uzbekistan withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty in February 1999 citing that it was a failure.<sup>46</sup>

Coming to the end, it can be stated that in strategic sphere, "Eurasiarist" vision was more successful in asserting Russia's role and active engagement in the 'Near Abroad'. According to Alvin Z. Rubinstein, the military ties enabled Russia to have important

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<sup>45</sup> Russia-Uzbekistan Joint statement, March 6, 1998. SWB. SU/322 B/10

<sup>46</sup> SWB/SU/1867 A1/1 17 February, 1999

basing facilities in four out of the five CARs<sup>47</sup>. Uzbekistan was the lone exception. It was the natural corollary of sustained efforts made by Yeltsin-Primakov team since 1996 to act as determinant player in the rediscovered 'natural sphere of influence' called as 'Near Abroad'.

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<sup>47</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein. "Russia: In Search a New Role-Changing Geopolitical Compulsion in Central Asia". *World Affairs*. Vol.1.No.2, Aprail-June. 1997. p 73.

## **CHAPTER 5**

## **CONCLUSION**

## CONCLUSION

The emergence of the Russian Federation as an independent and sovereign state after the break-up of the Soviet Union was totally a new development in contemporary international politics. Not only that this new state had to face very complex domestic problems but also it had to play a significant role in contemporary international politics. That Russia became a successor state of the erstwhile Soviet Union with substantial military power, also brought about tremendous responsibility to the new state of Russia. So it is worthwhile to investigate Russian foreign policy towards Central Asia during Yeltsin's period (1991-1999) so as to have a glimpse of Russia's new foreign policy outlook and orientation in the post-cold war scenario.

The Tsarist Russian Policy in Central Asia was generally marked by liberal spirit of non-interference in the national life of Central Asia. It led to introduction of advanced Russian culture in Central Asia which led to socio-political development in this region. When Soviet Union was formed in 1917, it was this historical background of Tsarist Period which provided some basis for the Soviet policy in Central Asia.

The Bolshevik Revolution was a product of both internal as well as external factors. By this revolution, the medieval structure of Tsarist Russia crumbled and a new era began with the formation of first ever socialist government in any country. One of the fundamental principles of the Soviet policy in Central Asia was recognition of the principle of the right to self-determination to Central Asian nationalities. It assured free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups of the nationalities inhabiting the territory of Soviet Russia. It led to the formation of single multi-national state, paving the way for federal polity structure of erstwhile Soviet Union.

The formation of Soviet Central Asian Republics was a major achievement of the National State Delimitation Commission formed in 1924. It brought into existence several National Republics in place of the formal multinational political entities of Turkestan, Bukhara and Khorezm. It led to the development of local languages, literature and material prosperity of indigenous nationalities. It can be concluded that economic

policy of Soviet Union in Central Asia served the twin objectives of industrial and agricultural development. This policy not only created self-sufficiency in foodgrains but also created the military industrial complex (MIC). Thus economic structure of Central Asia underwent a massive change under the effect of such policy, which was a great source of super power status of Soviet Union at the international level.

Another important aspect of the Soviet policy in Central Asia was its cultural policy. The cultural policy gave mixed outcomes. It was successful as far as it brought socio-cultural transformation. It gave rise to modernization of feudal Central Asian society. It brought them at the level of prevailing ideas of contemporary modern European society. But it failed at the level of bringing a type of cultural homogeneity in the name of Russification and Sovietization. The local sentiments of various nationalities remained dormant beneath the garb of supra-ethnic Soviet identity or so called National identity.

The second stage of Soviet policy was a period of normalization (1924-1929). It was beginning of the Stalin's period. Economic problems were given major attention in the form of New Economic Policy (NEP). The main thrust was on collective and cooperative way of reorganization the economic life of Central Asian people. It also had a counter effect of acute Centralization of power in the hand of Central authorities and led to growth of reacting forces. During IIIrd phase (1930-1941) there was rise of Nazism in the neighbouring states and intensive agriculture development also took place under the scheme of 'Five Year Planning'. The level of industrialization and allied activities come to match with their European counterparts. The women and other marginalized sections of rural society also got equality of status not only in formal sense but on substantial basis.

During the next phase (1945-1962), the MIC (Military Industrial complex) was fully developed. Its various units lay in the territorial region of Central Asia, for example – development of Baikanor Space Centre in Uzbekistan. The rapid industrialization in Central Asia also contributed to the cold war at multiple levels. The fifth phase towards Détente (1963-1971) was a period of reduction of cold war hostility. Again, focus shifted



towards domestic problems. Various state sponsored programmes like mass literacy campaign, public health programmes etc. brought about a great change in the life of people of Central Asia.

The following two periods i.e. Détente Period (1971-1979) and the period of New Thinking (1980s) had serious impact on Central Asia. In the former, regional imbalances in terms of economic growth and political power at then centre came to the front. Also Marxist utopia also started losing its charm when it came face to face with rising expectations of common people. These culminated in wave of local uprisings in Central Asia. The last phase-the period of New Thinking (1980s) witnessed introduction of 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost' by Gorbachev in 1986.

It exposed the vulnerability of central authority and gave rise to centrifugal tendencies in Central Asia. All these events finally led to collapse of Soviet Union itself. Hence impact of Soviet policy in Central Asia can be summarized as transition from construction, stabilization and then destruction. It led to formation of 15 independent Republics including 5 Central Asian Republics (CARs) viz. Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. It is against this historical background Yeltsin started his foreign policy towards Central Asia in 1991.

The commonwealth of CIS was created on 21 December 1991 in Alma Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan. It was conceived as a multilateral institutional arrangement to address regional problems in the post-soviet space. There were many factors which determined the actual foreign policy behavior of Moscow towards Central Asia. The prime among them was economic factor. The Central Asian Republics were economically dependent on Russia since Soviet Period. So new Russia considered them as a 'burden' and hence initially adopted a 'cold response' towards them in the economic sphere which was seen in the decline of bilateral trade between Russian and Central Asia. Its attempts to create a 'ruble zone' also did not find favor among Central Asian Republics. Russia also ended the subsidies which further aggravated their woes.

Another important factor was the problem of ethnic Russian minorities and Russian speaking people living in Central Asia. According to the 1989 census some 9,500,0,000 Russians were living in Central Asia. In the Kazakhstan they made up to 41 percent of the total population. A large number of ethnic Russian soldiers were also posted at strategically significant military bases across the territory of the former Soviet Union. Russian government's first concern was a desire to secure physical safety of the Russian civil and military personnel. The economic burden of their immigration into Russia was another concern. Russia was also keen at protecting the basic human rights of Russians in the Near Abroad.

The security factor also determined the course of foreign policy of Russia. The independent Central Asia was witnessing upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism as a result of political vacuum. The 'political Islam' together with illicit arms-trade, cross-border terrorism and illegal human trafficking were the vital issues which demanded immediate Russian attention. The 'Afghan factor' also played a crucial role in determining the security imperatives of Russia in Central Asia. Tajik-Afghan border clashes compelled Russia for permanent military engagement in this region.

The evolution of 'Trans Atlanticist' vision can be traced from the beginning of 1992, with the task of devising an effective foreign policy that would be beneficial to Russian state interests. The 'Pro-west' orientation of Yeltsin's foreign policy was mainly shaped by his first foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev. The basic premise of Kozyrev-Gaidar team was that the focus of Russian foreign policy should be on the wealthiest, western capitalist states especially US in an attempt to gain economic assistance and to facilitate Russia's integration into the global economy. 'Far Abroad' was given geo-economic and therefore geopolitical priority over 'Near Abroad'.

But when this approach was put into practice it did not yield favorable results. Critics like Sergei Stankevich declared in March 1992 that Russian foreign policy makers should focus on the developing crisis in their own background. Despite this immediate dissenting public opinion, Yeltsin and his team was able to act independently and differently at first. But with the passage of time the 'disillusion' with the west-in the form

of broken promises of aid and assistance led to rethinking at the foreign policy establishment.

But the underlying current of 'Passive Isolation' from Central Asia still remained the characteristic feature of 'Eurasianist' vision. Despite the pro-cooperation rhetoric on issues like military cooperation, economic ties, border dispute resolution by peaceful means through the instrumentalities of CIS etc, these objectives remained a mirage. In many respects the prospects for cooperation between Russia and Central Asia were hampered by the passionate zeal of Kozyrev in the form of negligence of 'Near Abroad' and greater attention to distant west.

Three aspects of Yeltsin's foreign policy towards Central Asia demands utmost attention in terms of implementation and their impact. The first one was security and military aspect. It was argued in December 1991 that all the independent states could form their own national armies. But they failed to create a unified military force and finally agreed to abolish the joint command of forces in September 1993. In such a security scenario, Russia assumed special responsibility for security in Central Asia particularly in unstable and unpredictable areas. To address the issue of security and military disputes a Collective Security Treaty (CST) was signed in Tashkent in May 1992. Another important dimension was transfer of nuclear arsenals which were scattered around the post-Soviet space and imposed a great security risk.

The second important aspect was the problem of Russian minorities living in Central Asia. Within Central Asia, the local governments introduced the policies promoting positive discrimination and designated indigenous languages for administrative purposes. For example in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the emigration of Russians was stimulated by local nationalism. In Tajikistan political instability was the main factor behind the Russian emigration.

Yeltsin promoted the notion of 'Dual citizenship' for the Russians in the 'near abroad' as a guarantee of their protection. Moscow signed its first treaty on Dual Nationality with Turkmenistan on 23 December 1993. The assistance to CARs was also attached with

strings of demand for safeguarding the interest of the Russian minorities in Central Asia. Both sides adopted a rigid position initially but ultimately reconciliation and accommodation proved to be the only way out to resolve the problem of Russian minority in the 'Near Abroad'.

Lastly, the third important dimension was economic policy. Efforts were made to maintain economic unity in the face of the political disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union. However, a mixed pattern evolved. Russia of Yeltsin- Chubanis struggled hard to extricate itself from the deep economic crisis into which it was plunged as a result of their 'shock-therapy' policy Russia's trade with Central Asia also declined in these years of inactivity. As the time went on, the growing differences between the economic structures and performances of Central Asian economies made economic integration impossible to achieve. Moscow was dubious about the prospect of economic integration. Central Asian Republics (CARs) also feared that the economic integration would only lead to their further subordination to Russian economic interests.

Hence it can be said that in the first phase of Yeltsin's tenure i.e. between 1991-1995 Russian foreign policy was marked by the characteristic feature of 'inactivity' towards Central Asia. This was due to Kozyrev led 'Trans-Atlanticist' vision of foreign policy. By the end of 1995, Kozyrev was replaced by Yevgeny Primakov. It marked the beginning of next phase of Yeltsin's foreign policy in Central Asia from 1996-1999. It was known as 'Eurasianist' approach. It involved Russia's active engagement in the post-Soviet space called as 'Near Abroad'. It was a great policy shift during Yeltsin's period.

A variety of causes went into this transformation of Russian foreign policy. Some of them were more profound as-firstly there was complete disillusion with the west. The promises of aid and assistance were nothing more than a mirage. In fact, the reverse happened. There was a huge outflow of the worth of \$300 billion US dollars to US. Also there was outward migration of Russian human capital in the form of scientists,

academicians, doctors, engineers and skilled workers. It fuelled the anti-west orientation and provided an immediate compulsion for a 'rethinking towards 'Near Abroad'.

Secondly, the domestic factors also played a very important role in bringing out this policy shift in the Russian foreign policy towards Central Asia, most important being the rise of "Russian Nationalists". Their leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky-who was the president of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was one of the main critique of 'Trans Atlanticist' approach and an outspoken votery of 'Eurasianist' vision. The ultra nationalist party LDP surprised every one by its showing in the Parliamentary Elections of December 1993. Thus Russian nationalists found popular support among dissatisfied Russian people. It was an irrefutable evidence of the growing disenchantment with Kozyrev's style of policy.

Another important factor for this policy-shift was pressure from Communist Party of Russia. Gennadii Zyuganov was their main leader. They were very vocal in exposing the 'Western Designs' and their hidden agenda before the public. Their ideological position found empirical justification in the form of broken promises and disillusion from the west led by US. Hence they were also instrumental in bringing this policy shift.

The security threat in the form of rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the 5 Central Asian Republics (CARs) was another causal factor which compelled Yeltsin to pay due attention to its 'Near Abroad'. It was the emergence of 'Political Islam' with cross-border terrorism, drug trafficking, illicit arms-trade etc. which together created a sort of security imperative for Russia to 'relook' its vision towards its soft underbelly and paid due attention to it under the 'Eurasian' policy vision.

The external factor in the form of NATO's eastward expansion was also responsible for Russia's policy-shift. After the end of the cold war many Eastern European states like- Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, three Baltic Republics became member of NATO. Closer to Russian borders Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine showed a strong desire for joining the alliance. The disappearance of the 'Buffer Zone' created a security dilemma among Russian policy makers. They came to realize the gravity of the situation and again

started looking at the post-Soviet space with action, assertion and engagement type of outlook.

The main characteristics of 'Eurasian' policy were firstly, rediscovery of 'Near Abroad' as manifestation of old wisdom about post-Soviet space. Secondly, 'Near Abroad' was recognized as Russia's natural sphere of influence. Thirdly, protection of rights and interests of Russian minorities in the post-Soviet space assumed importance. Fourthly, active assertion and engagement in Central Asia for economic cooperation and strategic partnership. Lastly, checking the increasing influence of external powers in Central Asia.

Among the prime votaries of 'Eurasian' policy were —Sergei Stankevich (advisor to President Yeltsin), Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (leader of extreme Nationalist Party LDP), Gennadii Zyuganov (President of Communist Party of Russian Federation), Andranik Migranian (a vocal critique of Kozyrev). Most important among them was Yevgeny Primakov who was also actual executor of 'Eurasianist' approach when he became the Foreign Minister of Russian Federation in January 1996.

The implementation of 'Eurasian' policy and its impact are analyzed in broadly three dimensions-political, economic and strategic. The immediate political consensus of Russia in Central Asia was on the need for restoration of peace and political stability in the nascent independent CARs, development of democratic ethos, and political corporation with Central Asia at various bilateral and multilateral for at international level.

It leads to creation of commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). However CIS was not successful in achieving its objectives approach in relation with CIS countries. Russia-Kazakhstan relations reached a new height from 1998 onwards and become a role model for other CARs. Russia also played an important role in bringing out the end of Tajik civil war by the peace agreement signed in April 1998.

The main focus of 'Eurasianist' vision was its economic imperative. Efforts were made to realize the goal of regional economic integration. On March 29, 1996 a Custom Union was signed between four Republics viz. Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and

Kyrgyzstan. Formation of Shanghai 5 in April 1996 with Russia and China as its core members and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as other 3 members was a major landmark for achieving the goal of economic cooperation among its members. It would go a long way in strengthening economic ties between Russia and Central Asia.

The policy of 'active engagement' adopted by Yeltsin during his second tenure from 1996-1999 had a very important strategic dimension. Primakov tried to improve Russia's strategic position vis-à-vis other external powers active in Central Asia both by increasing Russia's physical presence in CARs and by various bilateral and multilateral means. All the five CARs decided to join the unified CIS air defence system by an agreement signed in Kishinev in October 1997. They also started joint military operations to combat problem of Islamic terrorism. According to Alvin Z. Rubinstein, the military ties enabled Russia to have important basing facilities in four out of the five CARs. This gave Russia a strong strategic leverage in Central Asia and raised its position as the prime actor in regional geo-strategic developments.

Both Russia and independent CARs have complex inter-dependence as defining characteristics as suggested by famous theorists of international politics Keohane and Nye over variety of economic, strategic geopolitical and socio-cultural issues. It is much far away from Kenneth Waltzian 'Neo-realism' which envisages a pessimistic picture of international politics. Hence Russian foreign policy towards Central Asia during Yeltsin's period (1991-1999) underwent a series of changes which is in line with the dynamic nature of Russia-Central Asia relations. It reflects the dynamic character of regional politics of Eurasian region of which foreign policy is an effective shaper and transformer.

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