

Putin and yeltsin
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Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin who was the first President of the Russian Federation, serving from 1991 to 1999 and Vladimir Putin who served as the second President of the Russian Federation from 2000 to 2008 had similarities and differences in their foreign policy implementations. Yeltsin was dealing with chaotic economic conditions and a decreasing public support and failing reforms inside, while his successor Putin benefited from economic rise, rising oil prices and successful domestic reforms. Different conjunctures had different reflections in the Russian foreign policy of the presidents. In this paper, firstly, I tried to describe the conditions that Putin and Yeltsin encountered, then I made a comparison between the two leader in their foreign policy applications.

Background

In 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia lost control over 5.3 million km² of territory and 139 million citizens which included over 17% of the ethnic Russian population. Invaluable natural resources, historical and cultural sights, and some of the most advanced Soviet military infrastructure and equipment were also out of Moscow's reach.[1]The world politics has turned to unipolarity from bipolarity. Russia was restricted with a shrinking economy and transition policies to free market economy. Moscow was in a disastrous chaotic economic situation after the collapse of communism. The Russian economy fell dramatically; experiencing goods shortages in 1991 and 2500% hyperinflation in 1992.

In the 1990s, the dynamics of Russian foreign policies shifted considerably.

In the Yeltsin era, Russia gradually withdrew from its global military and political role to focus its foreign policy on the transformation of the former

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superpower relationship with the United States and its relationship with Europe, and on the development of relations with the other states immediately on its borders.[2]But Russia lost the capacity to continue providing financial aids to the other states of the former Soviet Union and thus to maintain its economic attraction.[3]At the same time, there were NATO expansion and new European Union memberships were being made among nations of the former Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe. There was again the threat of dissolution of Russian territory. US led international investment started to get advantage of economic spaces in energy sector in the Caspian Basin in Central Asia. Russia's economy deteriorated more badly when devolution occurred in 1998.

Russian energy power declined in the late 1980s and 1990s, due to low oil prices, the dislocations of the collapse of the USSR, and the privatization of many oil companies. Oil production decreased from 600 to 300 million tons per year between 1990 and 1995. However, Russia's ample resources and extensive network of pipelines ensured that its ' petro-power' was ready to re-emerge under President Putin.[4]

After a noticeable decline under Yeltsin (starting from Gorbachev), the Putin era saw a resurgence of Russian power. Putin focused on recovery after a great economic depression. Russia, having the world largest energy resources, benefited positively from the increasing energy prices due to prevailing international concern about energy security, instability in the Middle East since 1999. This increase in prices gave great support to the Russian economy. Since 1999, Russia's annual GDP growth was averaged

between 6 and 7 percent. The government boasted a healthy budget surplus and record currency reserves.[5]

Since 2000, having the advantage of improving economic power which was in chaotic condition in Yeltsin era, Putin started to use soft power to influence neighboring states to implement its regional policies and he also evaded from using its military power to ensure its geopolitical position.

Russia has turned itself from a dead military superpower into a new energy superpower in Putin Era by using soft power. Energy revenues no longer supported a massive military-industrial complex as they did in the Soviet period. As Fiona Hill underlines, new oil wealth has been turned more into butter than guns. Russian natural gas, technology, culture, consumer goods, and job opportunities became a Russian power in Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.[6] And energy-rich countries like Kazakhstan benefited from the same oil price increase as Russia. As Eurasian economies started to recover and grow, Russia's neighbors began to look to it as a market for their exports.[7] Since then dependency on Russia grew increasingly.

The emergence of new transnational threats to US and Western interests, especially terrorism emanating from Afghanistan and the Middle East, shifted international priorities. It was also evident that, with the notable exception of the three Baltic states, none of the other states of the former Soviet Union was likely to be a viable candidate for membership of either NATO or the EU in the near term.[8]

Similarities in Foreign Policy Implementations

Russia doesn't want world domination as it did in Soviet times, but plan to rebuild itself as a great power. Russian foreign policy implementation of both presidents is different from Soviet Era and Tsarist Era policies. For Moscow, in general Eurasian politics are no longer priority. Ideology doesn't exist and military power is hardly appealing.

' Multipolarity' is a key concept of Russia's foreign policy both in Yeltsin and Putin era, which aims to secure Russian position as a great power on the world arena and to help to keep the balance of power. Russia is a member of the Mediator Quartet for the Israel- Palestine conflict along with the United States, the United Nations and the EU, and it has become a participant in the six-nation talks concerning North Korea's nuclear programme with the USA, South Korea, China and Japan. Russia has participated in the G-8 summits since 1997, both in two era. Both presidents tried to utilize multipolar staretegy in their foreign policies.

Russia both in Yeltsin era and especially in Putin era, gave special importance to the UN Security Council, where it has a veto right with other 4 powerful member countries in the world politics. Russia within this platform opposed to the invasion of Iraq which was brought to the table by United States. In addition, Russia accepted the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. Cooperation against terrorism with US in Afghanistan improved relations and contributed to the decision to accord Russia a seat on the G-8 and to create the NATO-Russia Council.

In order to exert influence and be recognized as a major power, Putin, as Yeltsin before him, relies on so-called strategic partnerships with the most important western states, especially the United States, the only indisputable superpower in the world.[9]EU is the main trade partner of Russia. The EU states were Russia's main trading partners, and some of them are quite dependent on Russian oil and gas. Russia prefers to develop relations with EU members separately, with Germany, France, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, rather than as a group.

In addition, although that Russia left the vision of “ Common European Home” aiming to share common European values which was forwarded by Gorbachev, Europe is still the region where Russia wants to see itself. Judged by any criterion-level of political commitment, economic involvement, and security engagement, human and cultural contacts-Moscow's world-view continues to be overwhelmingly Westerncentric.[10]

Differences in Foreign Policy Implementations

Yeltsin, during its presidency, was dealing with chaotic economic conditions and a decreasing public support and failing domestic reforms inside, while his successor Putin benefited from economic rise, rising oil prices and successful domestic reforms. Energy power set a big advantage both in domestic and foreign politics. Putin managed to use it as a foreign policy tool, while being experienced improvements in economies of Russia and Eurasian countries.

In Yeltsin era, Russian interests were not purely aiming to enhance regional security but also to restore the post-Soviet space under Russian leadership.

Knowing that it was beyond Moscow's economic capacity, Yeltsin aimed to build common threat assessments as well as having strong mutual ties between Russia and individual countries. Russian actions during Yeltsin can be better understood as being opportunist.

Putin was more pragmatic. Putin ceased to thinking of a new reintegrated Eurasia. Russia became a stronger actor in the international system but had no ambition to reassert itself as a Cold War global power. Putin put Russia's sovereign interests as a priority in foreign policy. Putin was also more pragmatic in its assessment of threats than Yeltsin. For Putin, the key threats do not come from the United States, but from terrorist activities and those nations falling behind in economic development. Although the Kremlin is wary of US policies and intentions, it prefers engaging with Western partners rather than the balancing tactics implemented in Yeltsin era.[11]

Putin gave more importance to the use of soft power in the near abroad which means using cooption rather than coercion in foreign policy. Soft power speaks to people and societies rather than governments and elites. [12]The absence of pro-Russian governments in Georgia, Ukraine and elsewhere, the task of mobilising ties amongst peoples, rather than with governments, is seen as especially important for preserving influence. This is a key lesson learned by the Kremlin from its defeat during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine.[13]Russia gave start to policies as a tool of soft power such as spreading of Russian mass media, fostering the use of Russian language, giving financial support to Russian diaspora, increasing economic interdependence and creation of a special department for Interregional and

Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries at the Kremlin. The Kremlin aimed to integrate Russia into regional structures and processes.

Soft power which speaks to people and societies, rather than governments and elites can be divided into three components: political legitimacy, economic interdependence, and cultural values.[14] Relating political legitimacy aspect, Russia, in Putin era, was considerably more confident than the Russia of Boris Yel'tsin.[15] According to the assessment of Economic Development and Trade Minister German Gref, the GDP almost tripled from 1999 to 2005 and it continues to grow at the annual pace of 4 – 6%.[16]

Putin conducted a marked “Asianization” of Russian foreign policy. Unlike Yeltsin, for whom Asia served mainly to counterbalance the United States, Putin has pursued closer relations with China, Japan, the Koreas, and the ASEAN member-states both for their own sake and as building blocks in a larger challenge to American “unipolarity.”[17] Ceasing the endeavors to integrate central Asia as a whole, gave importance to bilateral relations. Private sector was used as a soft power. On the February 2003 an agreement were made to create the Common Economic Space with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, to eliminate trade barriers and provide shared energy transport policies.

In the security area, by the foundation of mutual security institution, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2010, Russia strengthened its counter terrorism and security policy in Central Asia with members countries China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In

In addition to this, Russia signed an alliance treaty with Uzbekistan in November 2005, concerning peace, security and stability in the region. In addition, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Armenia created the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in 2003, with the aim of fighting terrorism in the area. The Kremlin stepped up efforts to integrate Russia into regional structures and processes. Bilateral “strategic partnerships” have been supplemented by membership of, or increasing interaction with, organizations such as APEC, the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN, the East Asia Summit, and the Organization of Islamic Conference.

In the area of economic interdependence, Putin increased its economic presence in the economies of the former Soviet republics. Russia participated in energy privatization in the former Soviet region, and as a result of bilateral negotiations, the Kremlin asserted control over the strategic property and transportation of the former republics. As a result of soft politics conducted by Putin, Turkmenistan has turned out to be an energy partner. Russia obtained the right to be the main electricity provider in Georgia. Russia obtained a nuclear power station and became main gas provider in Armenia.

Finally, in the area of cultural values, Putin allocated more financial support for Russian diasporas in the post-Soviet area. For instance, in 2003, the government allocated R210 million towards this goal, and in 2004 such funds grew by 20%. Russia has devised the ‘Russian language’ federal programme led by Lyudmila Putin, the president’s wife.[18]

Conclusion

Although that the two presidents faced with different conditions during their presidencies, both of them conducted a multilateral and multivectoral policy in the international relations. Their policies were without ideology and they didn't have any ambition of world domination as were in Soviet era. In Putin era, there was a more self-reliant and pragmatic Russia in the foreign policy, who got the benefit of Russian soft power more intensively.