



# RUSSIA AS A GLOBAL POWER

A DREAM OR REALITY?

## ABSTRACT

The beginning of the new decade saw a very active Russia on the world platform. However, this dynamism has often been characterised as being “assertive”. Russia through its international policies has sent a clear message that it has re-entered the global arena as a universal power and it is there to stay. This article discusses at length about the evolution of the New Russian State.

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**\*Note- The Author has used the term “New Russia” instead of Russian Federation.**

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## INTRODUCTION

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The New Russia or the Russian Federation as it is officially called came into existence after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Its politics, both domestic and foreign, have always been subjects of great interest and importance for many scholars and academicians. With the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a complete change in the World order. This geopolitical catastrophe left the United States as the sole superpower, thus giving rise to a new unipolar world. The new world order brought nothing but chaos for Russia considering that the nascent state was generally viewed as the heir of the Soviet Union. Both at the national and international level the country was in complete disarray. The new Russian government had to accept and deal with the loss of its empire and the superpower status. With the shift in power within the country at the start of a new century, there was a change of ambitions and goals both at the national and international levels. The era of 2000s can be described to be a period of evolution. The beginning of the new decade saw a very active Russia on the world platform. However, this dynamism has often been characterised as being “assertive”. Russia through its international policies has sent a clear message that it has re-entered the global arena as a universal power and it is there to stay.

This article discusses at length about the evolution of the New Russian State. Firstly a lot of information has been provided regarding the nation’s history. The Author specially focuses on the international politics of Russia and change in its foreign policy outlook. The composer of this

written work has also paid attention towards the evolving relationship between Russia and China and a deteriorating relationship between Russia and the United States. And lastly the article gives an insight about whether Russia’s aim of becoming a global power can be turned into a reality.

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of a new Soviet state and the overthrow of the Tsarist Russia in 1917. There were two major revolutions that erupted that year called the February and the October Revolution<sup>1</sup>. The February Revolution resulted in the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II and in its place a provisional government was established by the state Duma. In the aftermath of the February Revolution, power was shared between the weak provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet<sup>2</sup>. On November 6 and 7, a bloodless coup d’etat was launched by the leftist revolutionaries led by Bolshevik party leader Vladimir Lenin against the provisional government. This resulted in the formation of a new government with Lenin as the head of the State. However, soon after, a civil war broke out in 1918 between a Bolshevik White Army forces and the Bolshevik Red Army. In early 1921, the Bolsheviks had defeated their enemy and gained a

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Gregorian calendar the two revolutions took place in February and October respectively. Generally they are referred to as March and November Revolutions.

<sup>2</sup> The Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies was a city council of Petrograd, the capital of Russian Empire. It played a key role in the success of the Russian Revolution of 1917. It was not an invention of 1917, however, but originated in the course of 1905 Revolution. [http://www.johndclare.net/Rempel\\_Soviet.htm](http://www.johndclare.net/Rempel_Soviet.htm).

complete victory. Thus in 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was established comprising a confederation of Russian SFSR, Belorussia SSR (now Belarus), Ukrainian SSR, and the Transcaucasian Federation (divided in 1936 into the Georgian, Azerbaijan, and Armenian republics). Also known as the Soviet Union, the new communist state was a successor to the Russian empire and the first country in the world to be based on Marxist Socialism. In the years to follow, it eventually encompassed 15 republics- the Russian SFSR, Ukrainian SSR, Uzbek SSR, Kazakh SSR, Belorussian SSR, Azerbaijan SSR, Georgian SSR, Tajik SSR, Moldovian SSR, Kirghiz SSR, Lithuanian SSR, Turkmen SSR, Armenia SSR, Latvian SSR, and Estonian SSR.

The civil war had left the Soviet Union in a state of complete disorder. Famine and poverty shaped much of the society. With the deteriorating conditions of economy and unrest of the people in the society, Lenin had no choice but to introduce a “New Economic Policy” in 1921. It was a revised economic policy which allowed the peasants to sell their produce for profits and allowed the small traders to run their businesses. At the same time the local nationalities that had been forced to follow a strict communist line were allowed to use their own language and customs and the churches, mosques, and bazaars were re-opened. In a nutshell, the main feature of NEP was to relax the severe restrictions and grain requisitioning imposed on the people of the country under “War Communism”<sup>3</sup>. In the years to come

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<sup>3</sup> “War Communism” was an economic policy which was introduced by the Bolsheviks during the period of Russian Civil War. Its chief features were

Lenin’s health had deteriorated and on January 21, 1924, he passed away in the village which is now known as Gorki Leninskiye. Lenin’s successor was Joseph Stalin who ruled the USSR from 1929 to 1953. It is during his rule that World War II broke out and the Soviet Union fought the War alongside the United States and the Great Britain as their ally. Another important event that occurred during his rule was the USSR getting involved into a Cold War with the United States immediately after the end of World War II. Under him the Soviet Union was transformed into an industrial and military superpower. In order to achieve this success, he had introduced a series of five year plans which was centred on government control of the economy and included a forced collectivization of agriculture, in which the government took control of the farms also known as “Collective Farming”. However, his rule was characterized by terror and totalitarianism which meant to eliminate anyone who might oppose him. He had expanded the powers of the Secret police, encouraged citizens to spy on one another and had millions of people killed or sent to the Gulag system or forced labour camps. He also initiated the Great Purge, which was a series of campaign designed to free the Communist Party, the military and other parts of Soviet society from those whom he considered a threat.

Nikita Khrushchev assumed power after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 when

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the expropriation of private business and the nationalization of industry and forced requisition of surplus grains and other food products from the peasantry by the state.  
<https://www.britannica.com/event/War-Communism>.

Cold War was at its heights. He is mainly known for introducing a policy of “peaceful coexistence” with the West and also for provoking the Cuban Missile Crisis. Domestically, he started a process of “de-Stalinization” that made the Soviet society less despotic. In May 1960, Leonid Brezhnev was appointed President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet which made him the head of the State. He held this post until July 1964 and was Khrushchev’s deputy till he was appointed as the First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party on October 15. Brezhnev developed a concept called the “Brezhnev Doctrine” which maintained that the right of Soviet intervention in cases where “the essential common interests of other socialist countries are threatened by of their number.” This doctrine was used to justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviets and its Warsaw Pact allies in 1968. By the end of 1960s Brezhnev gave the indication that he wanted to normalize relations between West Germany and the Warsaw Pact and ease tensions with the United States through a policy of “Détente”. Both Brezhnev and Nixon did meet twice during the early 1970s, and in 1975 signed the Helsinki Agreement along with major European nations. The Agreement recognized European borders as they stood after World War II and also gave basic human rights to the people of Eastern Europe. After his death on November 10 1982, he was criticized for the decline in the living standards of people, the spread of corruption and cronyism within the Soviet bureaucracy, and although he gave the Soviet Union daunting military-industrial base which was capable of supplying large numbers of modern weapons, in doing so he distressed the

Soviet economy. At the same time, he was also credited for the thaw that had developed between the USA and USSR during the final years of his rule.

Yuri Andropov, who succeeded Brezhnev as the Premier of Soviet Union, ruled the country for a very short period of time. Although his rule was short-lived, it was an eventful one. Domestically he focused on resuscitation of the weakening economy and tried to deal with corruption and rising alcoholism among the Soviet People. On the foreign policy front, Andropov had to face the anti-communist diplomacy of Ronald Reagan. In 1983, the Soviet diplomats broke off negotiations concerning reduction in the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces and the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START). The following year, Andropov died from a debilitating illness. Just like his successor, Konstantin Chernenko who became the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in 1984, ruled the country for a brief period of time. His brief rule was characterized by the return of the hard-line policies of Brezhnev. He disengaged himself from supporting the economic and political reforms made by his predecessor. During his term, the Soviets had retaliated for the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games held in Moscow by refusing to attend the 1984 summer games in Los Angeles. Chernenko’s declining health conditions interrupted him from making a lasting impression both domestically and internationally. He died on March 10 1985.

Mikhail Gorbachev was the leader of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991. He served as the General Secretary of the

Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 until 1991, and as the country's head since 1988 until its dissolution in 1991. His ascension to the position of the General Secretary of the CPSU represented a new age in Soviet politics. When he came to power, Gorbachev was 54 years old which made him the youngest General Secretary since Stalin. His comparative youth gave him different perspectives from his predecessors as his rise in the party was not connected to direct participation in the 1917 Revolution. He hailed from a peasant family and this humble background played a large role in shaping his political thinking. His politics, both national and international, has been called as "new thinking" by his contemporaries as well Gorbachev himself. By the time he came to power, the Soviet economy had already stagnated and the empire seemed fragile and decaying. Gorbachev felt that certain reforms were necessary for the survival of the Soviet empire. On the domestic front, he introduced two important policies of "glasnost"<sup>4</sup> and "Perestroika"<sup>5</sup>. And on the foreign policy front Gorbachev inclined itself towards the West and made various disarmament deals with them which eventually led to the end of Cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Thus Gorbachev is known as "the man who changed the world".

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### **THE NEW RUSSIA**

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<sup>4</sup> Glasnost means "openness" which brought new freedoms and democratic elections. <http://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/perestroika-and-glasnost>.

<sup>5</sup> Perestroika means "restructuring" which loosened government control on the Soviet economy and permitted limited private enterprise. <http://www.history.com/news/the-soviet-unions-final-hours>.

With the end of the Cold War came the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This gave rise to a New Russia called the Russian Federation which was also viewed as the heir of the Soviet Union. It became a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, a position which was previously held by the Soviet Union along with France, China, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It was Boris Yeltsin who became the President of this new chaotic state and envisioned transforming it into a democracy, a market economy, and into a more open society. He eliminated most price controls, privatized a slew of major state assets, allowed for the ownership of private property and otherwise embraced free market principles. He also supported freedom of press, permitted public criticism and had let Western popular culture seep into the country. Under him private banks, stock exchange, and commodities exchange came into being. Additionally, he agreed for the nuclear arms reduction and called the soldiers back to the country from Eastern Europe and former Soviet Republics. Although these measures were taken by him, the country continued to be in a state of complete disarray. According to Kristi Govella and Vinod K. Aggarwal in their article "The Fall of Soviet Union and the Resurgence of Russia", in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia went through a period of dramatic domestic political change and uncertainty in the foreign policy arena. They further explain that for a country that was once a superpower in a bipolar world began to doubt its place in the international system. This was mainly because the collapse of the USSR left Russia in a state of economic, political, and social turmoil, marked by declining

economic output and increasing inflation, foreign debt, and budget deficit. Other problems which were pointed by them were lack of law and order, loss of central control over the periphery, conflicts in Chechnya, rampant corruption, chronic political instability, and a severe financial crisis.

On the World Platform, the New Russia stood nowhere. The country was unsure of its interests both national and international and found itself in a strange position in the international arena. The period when Boris Yeltsin ruled the country i.e. from 1991 till 1999, the country faced a series of internal crisis which includes the 1993 Constitutional Crisis and the 1998 Financial Crisis. As Fyodor Lukynov describes, that the new Russia became a state which was forced to overcome its severe systemic decline. He further asserts that during the same time the new State was now dependent on the mercy of those who had recently been its enemies. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has been trying to find its place in the world and struggling to reclaim its status as a leading power. However, this seems to have changed since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. He has been a dominant figure in Russia's political system. It is said that since his re-election in 2012, the Russian authorities have further tightened control over the media. Putin is said to have adopted a harsh nationalist course and projects himself as a strong leader who took Russia out of the economic, political, and social crisis of the 1990s. As far as the international system is concerned, Putin's focus has always been on restoring Russia to the great power status by attempting to re-assert Russian domination in its "near-

abroad"<sup>6</sup> and by restoring Russian influence in certain parts of the world where Russia believes it can continue to play a major role. According to International Strategic Analysis Institute, in today's time and scenario, President Putin is attempting to roll back many of the losses in power and influence that Russia suffered in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, while attempting to show the people of Russia and the rest of the world, that Russia remains a major global power. In the words of Abdul Ruff, in recent times Russia has raised its role and prestige first with its annexation of Crimea and then by sending it's military to Syria to defend President Assad and his autocratically illegal regime.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, much is talked about Russia's economy. According to many, Russia's economy is not in a good state and as Fyodor Lukyanov puts it, that Russia should quickly do something about its economic policy or else it will not be able to sustain a leading position in the world. Nonetheless, according to Abdul Huff, Russia's military is getting stronger and has already intervened in Georgia, Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, and Syria which has further boosted its confidence. Another significant development that has taken place in recent times and is worth mentioning is Russia's joining of the World Trade Organization on August 22, 2012. This episode clearly sent a message

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<sup>6</sup>"Near-Abroad" comprises of those states who were once a part of Soviet Union and are now independent states.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/02/russia-moves-keep-near-abroad-soviet-states-in-check>.

<sup>7</sup> Russia's rising role in the world by Dr Abdul Ruff.  
[http://moderndiplomacy.eu/index.php?Itemid=124&id=2066%3Arussia-s-rising-role-in-the-world&option=com\\_k2&view=item](http://moderndiplomacy.eu/index.php?Itemid=124&id=2066%3Arussia-s-rising-role-in-the-world&option=com_k2&view=item).

to the Russian people and the world at large that its economy is forever inextricably linked with others in the age of globalization.<sup>8</sup> Against all these developments that have taken place in recent times, we cannot deny the fact that Russia's primary focus is to establish itself as a global power on the world platform.

### **THE FOREIGN POLICY OF NEW RUSSIA**

As the Soviet Union disintegrated, all of the focus of the Western world had shifted away from Russia. The world order had changed and left the United States as the sole superpower, thus giving rise to a new unipolar world. Govella and Aggarwal have discussed in detail about the evolution of Russia's foreign policy since the time it came into existence in 1991. According to them, Russian foreign policy went through several stages in the 1990s. The first stage was marked by "Liberal internationalism" which meant that Russia had embraced a pro-Western approach under Russian foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev. In 1992, Kozyrev announced that the new Russia's foreign policy would make a marked departure from the Soviet-era foreign policy. It was clear that the foreign policy would be based on Russia's national interest instead of international class interest and on democratic principles that would lead to peaceful policies. Hence in the first two years of its existence, Russia supported Western positions on issues such as international conflicts.

The second stage of Russia's foreign policy described the uncertain nature of the

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<sup>8</sup> What Role will Russia play on the Global Stage? By World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2012/10/what-role-will-russia-play-on-the-global-stage/>.

West. By 1993, it had become clear that Russia was not going to be easily integrated into the Western Community. Around mid 1990s, Moscow made a series of threats towards the Commonwealth of Independent States<sup>9</sup> and the Baltic states<sup>10</sup>, thus making it clear that it would not accept decreasing influence over its neighbours and protect Russians in its "near abroad". A third stage began when Russia appointed Yevgeniy Primakov as foreign minister in 1996. He sought to establish Russia as a regional hegemon within Eurasia and to limit the influence of U.S. in the former Soviet states. Thus his approach of retraction from his predecessor made him gain immense support from the Russian elite.

According to Michael Rywkin, since Putin came to power, Russian foreign policy has been focused on regaining the superpower position and on prevailing the "near abroad" to return to the Russian sphere of influence. He further claims that for Russia, the United States remains the power by which it measures the competence of the world. The New Russia aims of replacing the post Cold War unipolar world order with a multipolar world.<sup>11</sup> Since Putin returned to take control of the country in 2012, Russia's

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<sup>9</sup> Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created in December 1991. In the adopted Declaration the participants of the Commonwealth declared their interaction on the basis of sovereign equality. At present the CIS unites: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine. <http://www.cisstat.com/eng/cis.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> The Baltic States consists of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-the-baltic-states-are-where-nuclear-war-most-likely-17044>.

<sup>11</sup> "Russia's Place in the World" by Michael Rywkin, 2008.

foreign policy has become more assertive than it was during his first term of Presidency. This has been manifested by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and intervention in Eastern Ukraine, and also the deployment of Russian forces in the Syria in 2015. According to Chandra Rekha, these events reflect the trend of Kremlin's national interests and foreign policy goals. She further reveals that, the motives of Russia's foreign policy have been to challenge NATO's expansionist policy in the former Soviet space and the US-led international system. According to a Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation adopted in 2016, Russia is ready join hands with all those who are equally willing to cooperate in line with the principles of equality, mutual respect, mutual benefit and norms of international law, as well as recognition of the central role of the United Nations in global affairs. The concept also provides a systemic vision of the basic principles, priority areas, goals and objectives of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. They are as follows:

- To ensure national security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and strengthen the rule of law and democratic institutions;
- To create a favourable external environment that would allow Russia's economy to grow steadily and become more competitive and would promote technical modernization as well as higher standards of living and quality of life for its population;
- To consolidate the Russian Federation's position as a centre of influence in today's world;
- To strengthen Russia's position in global economic relations and prevent any discrimination against Russian goods, services and investments by using the options afforded by international and regional economic and financial organizations;
- To further promote the efforts to strengthen international peace and ensure global security and stability with a view to establishing a fair and democratic international system that addresses international issues on the basis of collective decision making, the rule of international law, primarily the rules of the Charter of the United Nations (UN Charter), as well as equal, partnership relations among States, with the central and coordinating role played by the United Nations as the key organization in charge of regulating international relations;
- To pursue neighbourly relations with adjacent States, assist them in eliminating the existing and preventing the emergence of new hotbeds of tension and conflicts on their territory;
- To promote within bilateral and multilateral frameworks, mutually beneficial and equal partnerships with foreign countries, inter-state associations, international organizations and within forums, guided by the principles of independence and sovereignty, pragmatism, transparency, predictability, a multidirectional approach and the commitment to pursue national priorities on a non-

confrontational basis; expand international cooperation on a non-discriminatory basis; facilitate the emergence of network alliances and Russia's proactive participation in them;

- To ensure comprehensive, effective protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots residing abroad, including within various international frameworks;
- To strengthen Russia's role in international culture, promote and consolidate the position of Russian language in the world; raise global awareness of Russia's cultural achievements and national historical legacy, cultural identity of the peoples of Russia, and Russian education and research; consolidate the Russian speaking Diaspora;
- To bolster the standing of the Russian mass media and communication tools in the global information space and convey Russia's perspectives on international process to a wider international community;
- To facilitate the development of constructive dialogue and partnership with a view to promoting harmony and mutual enrichment among various cultures and civilizations.

While Russia's current foreign policy is focussed on bolstering Russia's prestige, supporting economic recovery and growth, and maintaining influence in its near abroad. According to Chandra Rekha, Russia's strategic posture is currently undergoing a fundamental re-orientation

towards Asia, more importantly towards China, who has made remarkable growth in international relations.

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## RUSSIA-CHINA RELATIONS

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During the era of bipolar politics when the world was divided between two different ideologies, countries like India chose to stay away from bloc politics. On the other hand, countries like China sided with the Soviet Union as the latter was ready to help industrialise and modernize the PRC. It was against this backdrop that the two States concluded the "Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance" in 1950. Relations between the two nations started deteriorating after Nikita Khrushchev came to power in 1953. His policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the Western world was not acceptable by China. They also questioned the de-Stalinisation process initiated by Khrushchev as they viewed these policies and principles as a betrayal towards Stalin's vision of the USSR. Chandra Rekha in her article "Evolution of Russia-China Bilateral Relations" describes that the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s was a result of an ideological dispute which lasted almost until the collapse of the Soviet Union. However when Mikhail Gorbachev took control as the General Secretary of the Soviet Union in 1985, he wanted to re-establish ties with the PRC and hence announced a 'China First' policy. Despite these developments, the process of rapprochement came to a standstill by the debacle of the Soviet Union.

## RUSSIA-CHINA RELATIONS IN THE POST COLD WAR ERA

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Since 1991, the relationship between Russia and China has continuously evolved and strengthened. Their cooperation at the political, economic, and security levels has intensified. During the 1990s both Russia and China signed two partnership agreements. In September 1994, China and Russia declared the establishment of a “constructive partnership featuring good neighbourliness and mutually beneficial cooperation”. Furthermore on April 25, 1996, China and Russia announced the establishment of a “partnership of strategic coordination based on equality and mutual benefit and oriented toward the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, on July 24, 2001, the “Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation” between China and Russia was signed. Additionally, on June 6, 2012, China and Russia agreed to enhance their “comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination” in a joint statement. According to Bob Savic<sup>12</sup>, in his article “Behind China and Russia’s ‘Special Relationship’”, the series of partnerships and agreements underlined the principles of mutual benefit, mutual trust, and equality in addition to setting specific economic targets in China-Russia bilateral relations.

China and Russia’s relationship is said to have intensified after Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 as the U.S. and the EU

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<sup>12</sup> Bob Savic is a Senior Research Fellow at Global Policy Institute, London Metropolitan University and a Partner in Eurasia Corporate Services, St. Petersburg Capital Management LLP. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/12/behind-china-and-russias-special-relationship/>.

launched sanctions against Russia. The relationship between Russia and China before the 2014 has been described by many as “marriage of convenience”. Relatively, John S. Van Oudenaren<sup>13</sup> in his article “Why Trump Can’t Break Russia Away from China” writes that since the 2014 military intervention in Ukraine by Russia, the Sino-Russian “marriage of convenience” has evolved into a genuine strategic partnership based on overlapping interests and mutual antipathy towards the United States. Bob Savic has given a detail account of the 2014 Strategic Partnership between Russia and China. According to him some much-publicized and high-profile deals have emerged from this partnership. They are as follows:

- a) In May 2014, Gazprom<sup>14</sup> and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed the Sales and Purchase Agreement for gas to be supplied via the eastern route (Power of Siberia gas pipeline). This 30-year Agreement provides for Russian gas deliveries to China in the amount of 38 billion cubic meters per year. This

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<sup>13</sup> John S. Van Oudenaren is a research assistant at the National Defense University’s College of International Security Affairs. <http://thediplomat.com/2017/02/why-trump-cant-break-russia-away-from-china/>.

<sup>14</sup> Gazprom is a global energy company focused on geological exploration, production, transportation, storage, processing and sales of gas, gas condensate and oil, sales of gas as a vehicle fuel, as well as generation and marketing of heat and electric power. It holds the world’s largest natural gas reserves. The company’s share in the global and Russian gas reserves amounts to 17 and 72 percent respectively. It is a reliable supplier of gas to Russian and foreign consumers and is the only producer and exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in Russia. Lastly it is among Russia’s top four oil producers. <http://www.gazprom.com/about/>.

is considered to be a landmark gas supply deal;

- b) A deal with Russia's largest oil company, state-owned Rosneft, involving financial deals with CNPC to supply oil worth up to \$500 billion from Russia's largest oil field was also established shortly after, prospectively enabling Russia to surpass Saudi Arabia as China's main supplier of oil;
- c) In 2014, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) and the Central Bank of Russia signed an arrangement for a currency swap worth 150 billion Yuan and 815 billion Rubles. The deal was meant to facilitate settlement in national currencies and boost bilateral trade;
- d) Since 2014, and particularly in 2015, Russia has become one of the five largest recipients of Chinese outbound direct investment in relation to Chinese government's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) connecting Asia with Europe;
- e) China was Russia's largest bilateral trade partner, in 2015, in spite of declining overall bilateral trade in U.S. dollar terms, relative to 2014, trade flows continued to expand in terms of volume;
- f) Russia's exports of mechanical and technical products to China rose by about 45 percent over the course of 2015 possibly signifying an important trend in the diversification and competitiveness of Russia's non-energy sector in terms of bilateral trade prospects with China.

Conjointly, Savic also discloses that since the 2014 Strategic partnership between China and Russia, there has been an extensive broadening of bilateral relations beyond merely focussing on economic ties which includes strengthening close coordination in foreign policy, intensified cooperation in political areas, and also enhancement of bilateral cooperation in multilateral institutions. One of the most important developments in the political sphere between Russia and China in the recent times was the announcement of the planned integration with Chinese-led BRI<sup>15</sup> with Russia's Eurasian Economic Union<sup>16</sup>. Nandan UnniKrishnan in his 2015 article "Russia-China Relations: Implications for India", informs that both Russia and China are engaged in various multilateral fora such as Russia-India-China Forum (RIC), the Shanghai Cooperation (SCO), and BRICS. According to him, both the nations view such an engagement as one way of strengthening a multipolar world in which they are key players as well as a platform

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<sup>15</sup> The Belt and Road Initiative provides a visionary blueprint for global economic development in the new world order. It refers to the land based "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the seagoing "21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road". The routes cover more than 60 countries and regions from Asia to Europe via Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and the Middle East. By 2050, the Belt and Road region aims to contribute 80 percent of global GDP growth, and advance three billion more people in the middle class. <http://beltandroad.hktdc.com/en/belt-and-road-basics>.

<sup>16</sup> The Eurasian Economic Union is an international organization for regional economic integration and was established by the Treaty on Eurasian Economic Union. It provides for free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor. The Member-States of the EEU are the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation. <http://www.eaeunion.org/?lang=en#about>.

to present an alternative viewpoint to the Western dominated global discourse.

Now the important question that arises is that what has led China and Russia to engage in such a courageous manner. Angela Stent<sup>17</sup> describes the nature of Russia-China relationship as pragmatic. According to her, both the countries have similar views on various subjects like both China and Russia support each other on major foreign policy problems, dislike domestic protest, and see the U.S. in a similar way. She further explains that both the countries agree that world is need of a new order that takes their interest into account more than it does right now and also that the time has come when the world needs to move away from U.S-dominated global order.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, according to Chandra Rekha, in her article “Evolution of Russia-China Bilateral Relations”, the contemporary relations between Russia and China have strengthened due to the convergence of interests and mutual concerns. According to her these interests and concerns are as follows:

- Russia and China’s displeasure with the Unipolar movement has led the two countries to declare that the new international order should be based upon “mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each others internal affairs, equality and mutual

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<sup>17</sup> Angela Stent is Director of Centre for Eurasian, Russian, and East European Studies and Professor of Government and Foreign Service at Georgetown University. She is also a Senior Fellow (non-resident) at the Brookings Institution and co-chairs its Hewitt Forum on Post-Soviet Affairs. <https://explore.georgetown.edu/people/stenta/>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/14/politics/trump-china-russia/index.html>.

advantage, peaceful co-existence and other universally recognized principles of International law”. One of the demonstration of this overlap of views could be seen in 1997 when China and Russia signed a “Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of New International Order”;

- The two countries have also reaffirmed the intention to work towards the strengthening of the UN and along with countries like India, Brazil and others anticipate the emergence of a multipolar world;
- Russia is an export oriented country which depends mainly on its energy and defense markets for sustaining its economic growth, in other words, its economy is one-dimensional. Whereas China is an import oriented country especially in terms of both energy and defense markets. And as we all know that China’s demand for energy is expanding with time and is expected to increase in future, in these circumstances Russian energy market is the key to China’s energy consumption. At the same time Russia too is in search for geo-political diversification for its energy markets;

Also, according to A. Kuo in his article “Geopolitics of US-Russia-China Relations: North Korea and Middle East by Mercy”, Russia and China have common interest in the Pacific and the Middle East areas. He further observes that interests of both the nations in the near and Middle East are complementary. Both

countries have vital interests that the whole strip starting from the Mediterranean and reaching Central Asia achieve stability as soon as possible. Their interests are not just restricted to security issues, but they are also interested in energy-related and economic issues in the region. China intends to maintain and implement good relations with all producers and energy holders of the areas. On the other hand Russia aspires to play an important and active role in the region. Its main interests include balancing the presence of U.S. in the region and to build and improve the infrastructure for the transport of its energy resources in Europe.

While the G-20 countries were busy gearing up for the G20 Hamburg Summit 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping made a two day visit to Russia ahead of the Summit, his third to the country this year. Xi, told the Russian media that relations between the two countries were currently at their “best time in history” and that Russia and China were each other’s “most trustworthy strategic partners”. Many important discussions took place between the two leaders of the country on deepening of economic linkages and security concerns. A \$10 billion investment fund was announced for cross-border infrastructure projects linked to “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) and the Eurasian Economic Union. The two countries also issued a joint statement calling for the halt of North Korea’s missile testing program and that the U.S. and South Korea should stop carrying out joint military exercises.

Although both China and Russia have bolstered their relationship since the New Russia came into existence they have not

declared a formal alliance. Since Putin came to power, Russia rose to be a more politically and military assertive country. On the other hand, China became economically and institutionally stronger. It is often predicted that there is a possibility that in future Russia-China relations might not be the same as it is now but John S. Van Oudenaren mentions that no matter what friction takes place between the two countries it can be managed. Nevertheless, the contemporary relations between Russia and China according to Damien Sharkov, a reporter for *Newsweek*, are at an unprecedented level.

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### **RUSSIA-U.S. RELATIONS**

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The Soviet Union and U.S. along with the Great Britain fought World War II as allies against the ‘Axis Powers’. However, throughout the War, the relationship between both the nations was strained. One of the reasons for this tension was that the U.S. was cautious of Soviet Communism and Stalin’s dictatorship. On the other hand, the Soviet Union viewed America as a nation who was not ready to consider the USSR as a legitimate part of the international community and resented them because of their delayed entry into the War which had resulted into the killings of millions of Russians. By the end of the War in 1945, the tensions had escalated mainly due to Soviet expansionism in Eastern Europe which made America apprehensive about Russia’s aim to rule the world and America’s arms build up and interventionist approach to international relations made the USSR detest the U.S.

This led to, as Frederick Bernas describes an epic battle between opposing ideological worldviews of the Capitalist USA and Communist Soviet Union referred to as Cold War. All through the Cold War, the relationship between both the superpowers deteriorated. However, the period 1981-1991 witnessed a dramatic transformation in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. According to the Office of The Historian, United States of America, during these years the threat of a nuclear war between the superpowers waned away as the Cold War ended swiftly and peacefully. Additionally, in 1985, a vigorous Mikhail Gorbachev, who was a protégé of the former Soviet leader Yuri Andropov was appointed as the General Secretary and the head of the Soviet Union. Under Gorbachev, His aim was to transform the Soviet regime into a more modern social democracy. On the foreign policy front, he saw that huge amount of money were being invested in the military to keep up with the arms race between the Soviet Union and USA. In order to save this money for fixing its broken economy, he made important nuclear disarmament agreements with President Ronald Reagan. Thus these developments in the relations between the two nations eventually brought the Cold War to an end.

#### **RUSSIA-U.S. RELATIONS IN THE POST COLD WAR ERA**

As mentioned above, in the post Cold War era, the new nation was in a state of complete chaos in terms of the country's politics, economy, and society. He envisioned transforming the New Russia into a market economy, democracy, and a more open society. As far as the foreign policy of the Russian Federation was

concerned, Yeltsin had brought Andrei Kozyrev into the picture to do the job. Since the very beginning, Kozyrev was a proponent for increased cooperation between the United States and Russia. He also promoted a policy of equal cooperation with the newly formed independent states of the former Soviet Union, as well as improved relations with Russia's immediate neighbours and the West. Sangtu Ko in his article "Change of U.S.-Russia Relations After the September 11 Terrorist Attacks", explains that Russia's pragmatic foreign policy was based on the expectation that the West would provide assistance for their transit to democracy and market economy. During the time period from 1992 to 1996 Russia and the United States signed around 100 interstate and intergovernmental agreements, which accounts for more than half of similar U.S.-Soviet agreements between 1931 to 1991.<sup>19</sup> Some of the important agreements signed during this period are as follows:

- On January 3 1993, George H W Bush visited Moscow and after meeting the Russian President signed the START II<sup>20</sup> Treaty. This treaty is a successor of the START I<sup>21</sup>, which was initially proposed

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<sup>19</sup> "U.S.-Russia Relations after the Cold War" a thesis written by Viktorija Kotova, Aalborg University, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> START II complemented rather than replaced the earlier START I Treaty. It established a limit on strategic weapons with reductions to be implemented in two phases. <http://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/treaty-between-united-states-america-and-union-soviet-socialist-republics-strategic-offensive-reductions-start-ii/>.

<sup>21</sup> START I was the first Treaty to provide for deep reductions for U.S. and USSR's strategic nuclear weapons. It played an indispensable role in ensuring the predictability and stability of the

by Ronald Reagan and was signed by the United States and USSR in July 1991;

- Both countries also signed agreements on other issues like “Cooperation in space exploration and the use of space technology”, “Expansion of contacts between the scientific and technological communities” or “Abolition of diplomatic travel restrictions”;
- They also signed agreements related to trade and investments like “an agreement to extend reciprocal most-favoured-nation tariff treatment to the products of each country” and a “treaty for avoidance of double taxation”.

Thus the Russia-U.S. relations during the 1990s can be described as “avant-garde”. However, at the end of the decade there were traces of growing tensions between the two countries mainly due to the reason of NATO’s decision to start bombing Yugoslavia.

With the beginning of the new millennium both Russia and the United States had new head of states. It is said that the new administration of George W. Bush did not have a good start with Russia. However, relations between the two nations took a new turn after the September 11 terrorist attacks. According to Viktorija Kotova, a short rapprochement took place after the 9/11 attacks as Russia provided the U.S. with intelligence assistance to combat Taliban and allowed the United States to

deploy its military bases in Central Asia to promote U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. Despite these developments, tensions soon arose especially after the Russia-Georgia War of 2008. When Barack Obama came to power in 2009, he launched a “re-set” policy which was intended to move the relationship between Russia and the United States to a more positive footing with the goal of securing Moscow’s help on issues key to Obama administration’s agenda.<sup>22</sup> The main idea behind Obama’s “re-set” policy was to leave all former disputes behind, erase Cold War thinking and prevalent animosities between the two countries and start over in building a solid base for a new and improved solid relationship.<sup>23</sup> According to Steven Pifer, the coming of Vladimir Putin to power as the President of Russian Federation in 2012 seemed to augur a less cooperative relationship between the two nations. The year 2014, saw the lowest point in Russia-U.S. relationship. This happened as a result of Russia’s annexation of Crimean peninsula in March 2014. Following this, President Obama cancelled his plans to attend the G-8 meeting which was to be held in Russia in June the same year, some bilateral trade talks were halted, there was a suspension of planned military-to-military contacts by the Defense Department, and a visa ban and an asset freeze was imposed on people who were associated who were involved with violating Ukraine’s sovereignty.

In September 2015, Russia intervened militarily in the Syrian Civil War. Russia

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Strategic balance and serving as a framework for even deeper reductions.  
<http://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/treaties-between-united-states-america-and-union-soviet-socialist-republics-strategic-offensive-reductions-start-i-start-ii/>.

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<sup>22</sup> US-Russia Relations in the Obama Era: From Reset to Refreeze? By Steven Pifer 2015

<sup>23</sup> Obama’s “Re-set” with Russia: Failure or Lost Opportunity? By Jan Hornat.  
<http://postmito.cz/obamas-reset-with-russia-failure-or-lost-opportunity/>.

took this action since being a long time ally of Syria since the Cold War; Russia felt a certain loyalty towards Assad. Further, Russia viewed Syria as a place where it could regain some influence which was present during the time the Soviet Union existed. On the other hand the United States strategy was to overthrow the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad and started funding various armed groups who were fighting to overthrow the regime. This precipitated tension between the two nations as they were already going through a rough phase of their relationship. This strain of relationship escalated when the U.S. under the Trump administration launched a missile strike against Syria on April 7<sup>th</sup> 2017. This came as a response to a chemical weapons attack which according to the Syrian opposition and Western powers was catapulted by the Syrian government and that Russia also bore some responsibility for this attack. This incident was highly criticized by the Russian government as they described the attack as a violation of international law and significant blow in the Russia-U.S. relationship. Since then the Presidents of both the nations have held acrimonious views of the relationship between the two countries and have also exchanged sharp words. According to President Donald Trump, the relationship of the United States with Russia may be at an all-time low. He was further quoted saying that “Right now, we are not getting along with Russia at all”. On the other hand, Putin who was equally pessimistic said that “the level of trust on the working level, especially on the military level, has not improved but has rather deteriorated.” At the recent G-20 Summit, the presidents of both the countries met face to face for the

very first time since Donald Trump came to power. During the meeting which went around for more than two hours, Trump seems to have confronted Putin about Russia’s interference in the 2016 U.S. elections which was outright denied by Putin. This was another occurrence that led to depreciation of relations between the two countries. The meeting also comprised of talks on counter-terrorism and cyber-crime and the two sides announced a ceasefire in southern Syria. The U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson later said that the White House wanted to “move forward” from the hacking and accepts “intractable disagreement” with Russia on the matter.

According to Dmitry Suslov, one of the fundamental features of Russia-U.S. relationship has been its cyclical nature. He explains that every new attempt to build sustainable partnership has failed to be followed by another round of deterioration. The meeting of the two Heads of States in Hamburg for the G-20 Summit may be considered to be a beginning towards a new phase of building relationships between the two countries. But if one adheres to the above interpretation made by Suslov, we cannot expect much in the future.

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## CONCLUSION

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Russia’s history can be characterised as tyrannical and full of bloodshed. When compared, modern day Russia with Soviet Union, the former modish State seems to be in a much better shape. It has become much stronger militarily and on the foreign policy front has exhibited an “assertive” and “aggressive” approach. As far as the

internal politics of Russia is concerned, it is its democracy that has been questioned. Since Putin came to power he adopted an authoritarian political system. Besides, the Russians saw a process of re-centralization that started in the early 2000s and picked up the pace after 2004. According to Marc Plattner, who is the vice president for research and studies at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and co-editor of the Journal of Democracy, Russia can be called a kind of hybrid regime in the basic sense that it has some democratic characteristics, such as elections and multiple parties, along with many authoritarian features.

Although the Cold War ended more than two decades ago, its traits are still visible in the international system. A clear example of this is Russia and the United States involvement in the Syrian Civil War despite the fact that today it is no more a case of ideological differences but of dissimilarity in their beliefs. Russia-U.S. relations have always been unique and crucial to the destiny of human kind and in the present scenario their relationship can be described to be at the peak of hostility. Even though, both the countries met at the recent G-20 Summit in held in Germany, the future of their relationship seems unforeseeable. On the other hand, Russia seems to have been opening itself to the rest of the world. One of the examples could be its strengthening relationship with China since 2014. Both China and Russia have shared strategic interests and need each other for their survival and it is because of this reason that they cannot afford to have an astringent relationship with each other. Thus in future we can hope to see a greater boost in the relationship between the two giant nations.

Will Russia be successful in establishing itself as a global power? Well Russia has already set its foot in this direction. From the start of the Russia-Georgia War in 2008 to Russia's involvement in the Syrian Civil War in 2015 displays Russia's ambitions on the world platform. According to some scholars, factors like Russia's one-dimensional economic system and economic sanctions from the West after the annexation of Crimea may restrict of Russia's ambition from turning into reality. Russia under Putin is determined create a multipolar world where its position along with countries like China and India is that of a global power. However, Abdul Ruff has an interesting take on this subject. He argues that despite economic sanctions of USA and Europe, Russian economy is not shrinking because of its natural resources, oil output, and arms sale<sup>24</sup>. He asserts that in today's time one thing is clear and that is that world cannot ignore Vladimir Putin's Russia and the U.S. has to take into consideration the views of Russia in world affairs. The closing remark of the conclusion of this article shall be what Dr Abdul Ruff has used to end his article called "Russia's Rising Role in the World". He comments that "after almost 25 years of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Putin is well on his way to making Russia the **Ubiquitous State and Indispensable Partner** of his dreams, expect Russia to be very active on the diplomatic, military, and cyber fronts.

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<sup>24</sup> An important point which should be mentioned here is that Russia is a nuclear power.

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