

History

An Analysis of the Former Soviet Union Foreign Policy: Russian and Ukrainian Experience.

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Abstract

The foreign policy of the FSU has been quiet challenging considering its distinct nature of being composed of states whose very existence was either unknown or unacknowledged during the cold war, but have had to deal with the domestic political flux or with the legacy left by a discredited regime. This paper attempts an appraisal of the FSU's foreign policy using Russia and Ukraine as case studies. The international context which Russia and Ukraine have confronted in view of the gravity of change, combined with the unique circumstances of their emergence through a process of the soviet state collapse, has involved them in the development of a uniquely new regional system of international relations. Gorbachev's cooperation with the west did not only lay an auspicious grounds for Russia and Ukraine's foreign policy, but reflected a decline in the soviet unions superpower status. This has affected Russia's own actual and perceived standing in world politics due to its declared status as a 'continuing state'. Ukraine; on the other hand, formally broke with a centuries long experience of subjugation to Russia. This divorce has been a defining factor in its foreign policy debate. Consequently, their policy has tended to be dictated more by circumstance, and constraints than by a clear sense of vision or purpose. Russia and Ukraine have been less the shapers of the post cold war international system than have been shaped by it.

Introduction

The analysis of foreign policy relates to states behaviour in the international system. Their strategies for attaining objectives and goals are said to be the core determinants of foreign policy. Thus, from a systematic perspective, the analysis of foreign policy must begin with those internal factors which give rise to the external behaviour of states and their degree of influence on the external environment.

A country's foreign policy is a set of political goals that seeks to outline how that particular country will interact with other countries of the world. It is a "complex and dynamic cause of action that a nation follows in relation to other states policies on specific issues as well as commitments to certain positions on the current forms of interest and objectives, the principles of right conduct it professes... in international relations and the means and methods by which it pursues them" (The Brookings Institution, 1975: 375 cited in Eminue, 2006).

As such foreign policies are generally designed to help protect a country's national

interest, national security, ideological goals, and economic prosperity. This can occur as a result of peaceful cooperation with other nations, or through aggression, war, and exploitation (Wikipedia, cited in Haukkala 2006). For instance, in the after-math of WW II, the U.S. sought to create a new international order in the western hemisphere based on multilateral international institutions. In a similar vein, the current U.S. emphasis on a 'Greater middle East' (Haukkala 2006) and Russia's resurgent primacy to a 'look East' foreign policy (Webber in Webber and Smith, 2002: 149) can be regarded as the latest attempt at devising new rules of the game internationally.

The foreign policies of the fifteen (15) states of the FSU, including both Russia and Ukraine are products of same processes of transformation as a result of the collapse of the Soviet union in 1991. Unlike other regional systems such as Europe, Middle East, etc the FSU is faced with the identity question, being composed of states whose very existence was either unknown or unacknowledged during the cold war era. Russia and Ukraine in particular have been confronted with a unique transformation in the development of a completely new regional system of international relations.

Historical Background

The pre Gorbachev's leadership witness a decline of Soviet influence in the middle East since 1970, Soviet arsenal aimed at Western Europe were successfully countered by US led NATO. Gorbachev's attempted to regain the initiative by exploring the possibility of renewed diplomatic relations with Israel and a comprehensive middle East peace conference proposed to eliminate all nuclear weapons in stages by 1995 in response to the Reagans' led US strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) (Ewah, 2002:40). With Gorbachev's rise to power and enormous world wide popularity, the soviet government in a sense turned in-ward desperately seeking a viable model of reform for its creaky economy. Clearly unable to compete with the likes of U.S. and Japan in the areas of international trade and technology, Moscow adopted the twin principles of *glasnost* (political openness) and *perestroika* (economic restructuring), hoping to retain socialist precepts of equity but with a humane political face (accommodating opposition views) and market incentives (permitting managerial autonomy and the possibility of leasing or owning land) (41).

The Soviet authority in the early 1990s continued to operate on the foreign policy premise that intense rivalry with the West for control of Europe and the 3rd world had only alienated the very countries most needed for capital investment and had brought on a crippling arms race. It was judged better to ease tensions even to the point of allowing the breakup of the Eastern bloc security system, in order to open up that bloc to constructive technological partnership with Western states particularly West European states moving toward their own economic merges in 1992 and beyond. (42).

Looked at geopolitically, Gorbachev's opening to the West was calculated to link the dynamic but cramped Western and Central European areas to the vast but under developed Soviet State. The Region of the FSU can therefore be said to exist as an emerging international sub system but does not preclude meaningful interaction of the successor states with the wider world (Levgold, 1992: 158). This however gave rise to distinct and overlapping patterns of interactions which include internationalization implying the legal incorporation of the successor states into international affairs (Motyl, 1991: 6). Upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia stood apart as the largest, most populous, best

endowed with resources and carries with it the history of centuries of dominance over its immediate neighbours and therefore represents at least a potential hegemon. The other fourteen former soviet republics though not enjoying same privileges accorded Russia, have experienced a relatively easy entry into the world of states and were granted membership into the United Nations.

Another pattern has to do with the relationship between the FSU, and geographically adjacent countries outside the FSU, which can be considered as regional in nature. According to Mark Webber, apart from the unique case of Russia, four other distinct groups exist. Firstly, the Baltic states which identifies itself with the European mainstream, and have laid claims to NATO and the EU membership. Secondly, the Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus states which have aspired to heightened involvement in Euro Atlantic structures, and have shown a close attention to the Eastern Europe dictated by geographical proximity, ethnic and territorial affinity. The third group is the transcaucasian states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia which have laboured under fairly concrete geopolitical constraint, isolated from major sea routes, bounded by influential neighbours such as Iran, Turkey, Russia and occupying an ambiguous position that straddles Europe and Asia. The Fourth group is the central Asian States of Kazakhstan, kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which holds the most distinctive extra-European position of the successor states. Initially considered susceptible to the competing influence of Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, these states have in fact distanced themselves from a specifically southern orientation in foreign policy. Assisted by ample endowments of energy, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have also attracted increasing amount of Western; and to an extent, Chinese attention (Webber, 1996: 110-11). Then the Russian case, where its geographical enormity and physical dominance of the Eurasian continent has necessitated a foreign policy that; alone among the successor states, is really multi-regional in nature, sensitive simultaneously to Europe, the middle East the Indian sub continent, China and the Asian pacific region (Lukin, 1994: 109).

The third pattern of interaction deals with vital bilateral relations that lay emphasis more on an assumed sense of status and less on geography. Here, Russia stands out. It has attempted to continue with the Soviet Union's position as the principal interlocutor of the U.S. while at the same time seeking privileged positions in relations to both Europe and China (Motyl, 1991:6). On the other hand, Ukraine, for quite different reasons has also solicited special relationship with the U.S. and European capitals. But the material legacy and geostrategic partition handed down to Ukraine could be considered as both a liability and an asset. The competence of Ukraine forces were open to debates as most of the officers were Russian, developmental patterns oriented towards a coalition war in European; a legacy of cold war military planning, and the Ukrainian economy highly depleted by the running cost of its military corps. Ukraine is therefore seen as a state bequeathed with a huge potential, yet labouring under the weight of terrific problems, a duality that has inevitably affected its foreign policy (Moroney 1998).

Ukraine is second to Russia in terms of demography and territory in the former Soviet Union. The advantages it enjoyed in agricultural production and accounting for a quarter of Soviet GNP was offset by its total dependence on the Russia economy particularly in the energy sector and an infrastructural obsolescence that beg for urgent external assistance. Militarily, Ukraine was a major beneficiary of the Soviet dissolution having

the largest military force in Europe after Russia with about 720,000 military personnel, 6,400 tanks, 1,400 fighter aircraft, the entire fleet of the Soviet navy serving the Black sea, and about 14 percent of the Soviet strategic nuclear war heads (Bukkvoll, 1997a:86-7). All these forces presented Ukraine with formidable foreign policy problem in shaping its relationship with Russia and the Western powers. Ukraine's pivotal location and with a land borders measuring almost 8,000km bringing it into contact with seven other states; Russia, Moldova, Belarus, Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia. Except for Belarus, others had potentials cause for territorial claims against Ukraine particularly considering its ethnic make-up.

Nature of Foreign Policy Making

The making and practice of foreign policy within Russia and Ukraine is not unique in relation to their overall experience. Any measure of distinctiveness which the foreign policy process might possess arises above all from a replication of domestic circumstances which shape their external priorities. Inevitably, analysis will concentrate at first on a straightforward specification of all the variables that might conceivably affect foreign policy decisions. The ultimate ambition is to be able to state with some confidence the factors that tend to be most influential, in what circumstances, and why? (Hill, 1997:1).

Factors likely to be less prominent in the policies of new states than in the advanced ones may have bureaucracy as a leading parameter. In recent years, the roles of large departments and the routines of administrative procedures have increasingly been related to what happens in foreign policy. The office of the president leads Russian foreign policy making institutions. As president, Head of state, and commander in-chief of the armed forces, the office of the president controls the foreign and security related ministries, and also appoints and heads the Security Council and other presidential teams dealing with foreign policies. Other bodies accorded foreign policy related functions include the ministry of foreign affairs, the parliament, and the office of the Prime Minister that sometimes deputizes for the president on foreign trips, international trade and other related issues. Finally, we have the ministries such as defence, external economic affairs and cooperation with the CIS states (Webber in Webber and Smith, 2002:151).

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the first two years of the new Russian state witness a turbulent foreign policy debate leaving an unenviable legacy for policy making. Russia was bequeathed an unclear soviet-era constitution and a system of state institutions in disarray owing to the upheavals of the Gorbachev reforms and the withering away of the communist party control. The whole process could be summarized to one of under-institutionalization (Checkel, 1995:44-5). Institutional structures and political 'rules of the game' were removed but the nascent Russian state could only act as an inadequate replacement. (Wallander, 1996:211). Until late 1993 when the policy debate started being addressed seriously: with the emergence of an elite consensus on foreign policy and the movement towards political centralization owing to the disbandment of the soviet-era Russian parliament and the subsequent adoption of a new Russian constitution, these problems, in conjunction with the divisive nature of the policy debate led to a foreign policy making and implementation process characterized by lack of coordination, serious competition among the various agencies, and a general sense of drift and confusion (Crow 1993).

It should be noted that the military had also occupied a prominent position in the policy making institution of Russia until it was stripped of its political influence following its devastating propaganda in the break-away Russian region of Chechnya between 1994 - 1996 and the demoralizing impact of military reforms (Nunn and Stulberg, 2000: 45-62). However, the Russian federal structure and the attempts by some regions to assert their own foreign policy prerogatives have contributed in complicating the nature of foreign policy making and implementation process. For instance, while the foreign ministry is given an upper hand, among other bodies claiming a role in foreign policy coordination, there had been periodic inter-agency confusion even on major issues such as the enlargement of NATO, relations with other successor states and ties with China.

In the case of Ukraine, its foreign policy process has not been too different from the transitional, not reliable and routinized experiences of Russia. Ukraine government fell victim to confused lines of authority and institutional competition due to the fact that though communism had collapsed, Ukraine was still nominally regulated by the 1978 constitution. This constitution was ill-suited to the requirements of political life after communism. This inherited constitution however placed the business of foreign policy on the president. President Kravchuk did little to change this situation, as he was fully in charge of all foreign negotiations and had a high profile on international issues concerning nuclear weapons and European security. He further established a Presidential foreign policy unit headed by the national Security Council, and appointed core loyalists as ministers for defence, and foreign affairs. The office of Prime minister was completely kept out of foreign policy but concentrated on economic matters. On the part of the parliament, with the banning of the CPU temporarily in 1991 following the confusion caused by the communist majority after the election of 1990, most members were made to undergo a nationalist orientation between 1991 - 1992 to suitably fit into the independent Ukraine. This led to an aggressive parliament in defense of Ukraine national interest even more than the president himself. The post communist constitution of June 1996 and a constitutional amendment in April 2000 saddle the parliament with the duty to rectify all treaties entered into by the president. There were also foreign policy implications with regard to the powers of the parliament in approval of budgets. This is seen where the leftist learning parliament elected in 1994 sometimes refused to approve cuts in social expenditure thereby disqualifying Ukraine from IMF facilities particularly when the parliamentary composition is at variance with the president.

Foreign Policy Content

It is obvious that a conception in which foreign policy is nothing more than a by product of domestic politics could hardly do justice to the elements of continuity in national policy. At some points it is necessary to recognize that objective requirements of the national interest place certain irremovable limits upon any state-man seeking to formulate foreign policy. Regardless of the intentions, social philosophy or religious outlook of individuals, there are broad strategic interest intimately bound up with a nation's geographic position and international role that must be safeguarded if its independence is to be preserved (Kissinger, 1959: 30-35)

Russia foreign policy can clearly be understood from a brief analysis of its initiatives in different strategic regions of the world. Russia has been successful in reclaiming its

strategic prominence in its former republics in central Asia. Uzbekistan has already made the US to withdraw its air bases, and Russia under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization along with China had called publicly for the US to spell out a time-table for the withdrawal from other republics. After the September 11th terrorist attack on the US World Trade Centre, Russia allowed the U.S. to establish military presence in some states of the central Asia to prosecute its war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan with the expectation that the West and U.S. in particular would support Russia's campaign against the Islamic Jihad in Chechnya. Russia soon realized that U.S. was selective in its approaches to combat global terrorism as the Chechnya terrorism against Russia was perceived by the US as a separate strategic blip on the American radar.

Russia is working out a new format to replace the Organisation of the CIS formed in the wake of the dissolution of USSR. The aim is to establish a new web of inter-connected bilateral security relationships. Since 1993, reference to the successor states as constituting a zone of Russia's vital national interest have become almost a dogma among the Russian leadership. Such rhetoric has given rise to the argument that Moscow is intent upon the construction of a new Russian empire (Cohen, 1997).

The Russia-India strategic partnership stood greatly devalued during the Gorbachev and Yeltsin regimes. Their policies had started reflecting American and Western formulations on South Asia. In 2005, India publicly stated that Russia would be India's prime strategic partner and prime source of its major weapon system. Not too long, Russian Army troops and naval ships carried out their first joint military exercise in India. Russia's President expressed his country's support for India's candidature for the permanent membership of the UN Security Council. All these are noteworthy when viewed against the backdrop of India's emerging strategic partnership with the US. Russia had successfully re-established itself as a key player in the West Asian strategic calculus. The US and European states need to incorporate Russia's support to reign in Iran's nuclear programme as Russia enjoys a strategic partnership with Iran, the region's predominant and emerging regional power. Russia enjoys a good working relationship with Syria and Israel- America's prime ally in Asia. The Russia-Iran-Syria strategic partnership is West Asia's northern and most overarching strategic relationship which spans from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Gulf and Afghanistan. Today, Russia in relation to Iran has achieved what it was attempting to do for the major part of the 20th century. Iran is a solid Russian foothold in West Asia and critically in the Gulf region.

In recent times, Russia's primacy in East Asian foreign policy has been more visible. Russia-China strategic partnership stands greatly intensified. With the border dispute agreement in place, both nations have available military resources so relieved for other tasks. Russia and China conducted the first ever large scale joint military exercise in East Asia to which military observers from all over the world, except the US, were invited. Through all these foreign policy initiatives, Russia is indulging in a politico-military signaling to the US that it intends; along with China, to change the status quo of balance of power of the last decade in the region. Japan and Taiwan appear to be the only remaining steadfast American ally in the region.

The US has been faced with special concern over Russia's foreign policy focusing on East Asia, since it has enjoyed a uni-polar predominance in this region and the Pacific for over a decade. That would be questioned by Russia and more by China in the coming

years as an intensifying Russia -China strategic partnership would make the impact more ominous. On the other hand, the US would have more concern in the West Asia, particularly the Gulf Region as Russia's reawakening and its evolving security relationships could unravel the American strategic architecture in the West Asia.

Russia conclusively proved to Ukraine, that it would use the supply of Russian oil and gas as political tools of diplomacy to further its national interest. What was ostensibly projected as a price war of oil and gas supplies to Ukraine was a cover to send political messages that Russia would not countenance the Ukraine or its neighbours to further American strategic interests at the expense of Russia. Europe dependent states on Russian oil and gas supplies got similar messages in tandem (Chinyaeva, 2001). In East Asia, this strategic reality is also dawning on the regions major countries - China and Japan. Both are vying and competing for Russian pipelines to East Asia in the process both China and Japan are agreeable to investing \$ billions in Russia in return. Even smaller states are currying favour with Russia on the same account. The Philippines President open support and demand that Russia be accepted as a full member of the EAS is seen as a step prompted by similar impulses. That is, in lieu of financial investments, which they lack, the smaller states are willing to extent political support to Russia.

For Ukraine, it has been a little difficult to arrive at a foreign policy consensus due to the diverse opinions. Three distinct schools of thought stand out. The nationalist, who hold sway in the West, argue that Ukraine had originally been part of Europe but was merely separated by the long association with Russia. They nurse a sense of grievance at being the victims of oppression by Russia and declare that Ukrainian independence can not be guaranteed through a close relationship with Russia because of Russia's imperial tendencies. They opine that the Ukrainian independence would best be served by a distancing from Russia and integration with the West and neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe. The second school of thought is the leftist (socialist and communist); concentrated in the Russian populated East, who have nostalgia for the Soviet Union and hope for a communist restoration in Moscow and therefore favour a close relationship with Russia and other successor states. The third school of thought is the moderate, who tilts towards a Euro-Atlantic orientation but also seeks to maintain stable relations with Russia. This is encapsulated by the idea of neutrality enshrined in Ukraine's 1990 declaration of state sovereignty (Bukkvoll, 1997a: 10-17, 88-89).

In the early years of the Soviet Union dissolution, Ukraine's stance on nuclear weapons did not only provoke the wrath of Russia but also strain its Relations with the U S. Having been cajoled, among other states such as Kazakhstan, and Belarus, in 1992 -94 to abandon the nuclear weapons left on their territories (Webber in Webber and Smith, 2002:154), Ukraine subsequently prevaricated over the removal of the strategic nuclear weapons on its territory until June 1996. In protecting its new-found independence, Kiev argued that relinquishing its arsenal should be linked to the provision of financial assistance and security guarantees from the other nuclear powers (Zlenko, 1993: 11 -14).

On the issue of CIS membership, Ukraine viewed the organization with skepticism, looking at it as a possible instrument of Russian control. Both President Kravchuk and Kuchma opposed all efforts to create supranational structures of authority within the organization and kept their distance from military involvement. Ukraine has rather form alliance with other states opposed to the CIS such as Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan.

However, appreciating the CIS as a possible means of economic cooperation and a forum for other dialogue, Ukraine tactically maintain its membership of the CIS Economic Union.

Looking at the bilateral economic area, Ukraine had sought to reduce its dependence on Russia through recourse to alternative suppliers of oil and gas, such as Iran, Iraq and Turkmenistan and through the development of its own reserves. Despite this, Ukraine remained tied to Russia because pipelines carrying vast bulk of Russian gas exports to the outside world cross Ukraine land and this bring to Ukraine lucrative transit fees. Also, huge proportion of debts owed by Ukraine for its gas consumption has gone unpaid. Even at that, local concerns have been involved in siphoning off an estimated 23 billion cubic meters of gas from Russian pipelines (Rontoyanni, 2000: 17).

Within the West, Ukraine sought to establish a diplomatic identity and presence on the world stage. The US, Britain, and Germany; for instance, have had a growing appreciation of Ukraine's strategic importance and its long-term economic/political potentials. President Kuchma has persuaded the West to see that Ukraine has a strong case for association with Euro-Atlantic structures.

In July 1997, Ukraine signed a special charter of cooperation and consultation with NATO having been the first successor state to established partnership with NATO for peace programmeme. Ukraine was also admitted into the council of Europe in November 1995, in cognizance of the progress made by Ukraine towards creating a constitutional democracy and at a time when Russia was still outside the organization. However, there had been some reluctance on the part of the Western states to embrace Ukraine fully either due to its woeful economic performance, which has made it a little difficult to attract IMF loans, or from a fear of provoking Russia (Light,White,and Lowenhardt, 2000: 83-85).

President Kuchma however took the pragmatic view that coexistence with Russia and a level of integration with the West were compatible, not mutually exclusive, goals. Relationship with the Eastern Europe; Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, have been more on the expectations of having a recognition of its identity as an East or central European state, to address controversies relating to national minorities and territorial claims, and to prepare for the eventuality of non continental divide that may arise between itself and some of its East European neighbours, particularly in the event of Poland and Hungary's accession to NATO and EU membership (Pavliuk, 1997: 347-348) considering the long history of conflict and mistrust between Poland and the Soviet Union. Ukraine had registered great progress in its bilateral relations with Poland and had since undertaken the commencement of both military and economic cooperation (Burant, 1993: 396 - 397). This is however made more possible by both states' common appreciation of the latent threat from Russia. In 1992 Ukraine signed an inter-state treaty with Poland. Other such treaties include - Hungary 1993, Slovakia - 1993 and Romania - 1997. All these treaties have a renunciation of territorial claims, particularly Romania that had earlier supported the demand for the return of territories annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 (Webber in Webber and Smith, 2002: 171-172).

Conclusion

Russia and Ukraine, have been affected by the challenges of post - Communist changes of nation building, state building, and economic restructuring. Their political leadership had been a part of the Soviet communist hierarchy and played a decisive part in engineering the transfer of power away from central authorities after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The twin processes of institutional change and partial democratization have occasionally given rise to crude institutional competition, unpredictable policy- making routines and an absence of consensus on the ground rules of politics thereby leading to a considerable concentration of formal political power and decision-making authority around Presidential leaders.

Russia's foreign policy; following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, was marked by deference to the US and Europe's major countries. This arose due to both political and economic reasons. Politically, the 'Atlanticist' school of foreign policy thought view Russia as a natural ally of the West. Economically, Russia with its economy in a mess as a result of a sudden switch to a free market economy was dependent on the US and the west for resuscitation. While Russia's strategic assets in the form of its nuclear weapons and ICBMS arsenal were intact, it could not use its military muscle in diplomacy for countervailing purpose, due to its political and economic dependency on the West. As a result, Russia's foreign policy was in a retreat from the pursuance of its traditional strategic interests in the Asian continent. Consequently the US had a free and unchallenged play in this region.

Today's. Russia's foreign policy in this strategic region is in a resurgent mode in a bid to regain its traditional influence. This is due to a combination of Putins' resolute leadership in marked comparison to his two predecessors, his firm handling of the economy, a boost in foreign exchange reserves, and growing oil and gas production and abundant oil revenues due to rise in global oil prices. Oil and gas are increasingly being used by Russia as political tools.

The Ukrainian foreign policy has been marked by the prominence it has given to presumptions of external threat particularly considering its entanglement ethically, economically and militarily with the source of threat, and also that it has permitted the transfer of substantial military assets to that source, in the process engaging in one of modern history's few cases of unilateral renunciation of nuclear weapons. The foreign policy has had the ostensible advantage of being able to draw upon some experience of independence, but has however, had to labour under the weight of long periods of what was, in effect, Russian rule and has had to deal with the presence of a large ethnic Russian minority. A sound foreign policy based on a clear vision of Ukraine's national interest and embedded in stable bilateral and multilateral relationships has yet to take place partly due to the nascent nature of the Ukrainian state and its foreign policy.

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