

The End of Bipolarity

Soviet System:

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [USSR] came into being after the socialist revolution in Russia in 1917. The revolution was inspired by the ideals of socialism, as opposed to capitalism, and the need for an egalitarian society. This was perhaps the biggest attempt in human history to abolish the institution of private property and consciously design a society based on principles of equality. In doing so, the makers of soviet system gave primary to the state and the institution of the party. The soviet political system centered on the communist party, and no other political party or opposition was allowed. The economy was planned and controlled by the state.

Emergence of USSR as a Global Hegemony:

After the Second World War, the east European countries that the soviet army had liberated from the first forces came under the control of the USSR. The political and the economic systems of all these countries were modeled after the USSR. This group of countries was called the 'Second World' or the 'Socialist Bloc'. At the Warsan pact, a military alliance, held them together. The USSR was the leader of the bloc.

The Soviet Union became a great power after the Second World War. The Soviet economy was then more developed than the rest of the world except for the US. It had a complex communications network, vast energy resources including oil, iron and steel, machinery production, and a transport sector that connected its remotest areas with efficiency. State ownership was the dominant form of ownership: land and productive assets were owned and controlled by the Soviet State.

Conclusion: The Soviet System, however, became very bureaucratic and authoritarian, making life very difficult for its citizens. Lack of democracy and the absence of freedom of speech stifled people who often expressed their descent in jokes and cartoons. Most of the institutions of the soviet state needed reform: the one – party system represented by the communist party of the Soviet institutions and was unaccountable to the people. Although, on paper, Russia was only one of the fifteen republics that together constituted the USSR, in reality Russia dominated everything, and people from other regions felt neglected and often suppressed.

Gorbachev and the Disintegration:

Mikhail Gorbachev, who had become General Secretary of the communist party of the Soviet Union in 1985, sought to reform this system. Reforms were necessary to keep the USSR abreast of the information and technological revolutions taking place in the west.

Gorbachev initiated the policies of economic and political reform and democratization within the country. The reforms were opposed by leaders, within the communist party.

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A coup took place in 1991 that was encouraged by communist party hardliners. The people had tasted freedom by then and did not want the old- style rule of the communist party. Boris Yeltsin emerged as a national hero in opposing this coup. In December 1991, under the leadership of Yeltsin, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, three major republics of the USSR, declared that the Soviet Union was disbanded. The Communist party of the Soviet Union was banned. Capitalism and democracy were adopted as the bases for the post Soviet republics.

The declaration on the disintegration of the USSR and the formation of the commonwealth of Independent states [CIS] came as a surprise to the other republics, especially to the central Asian ones. The exclusion of these republics was an issue that was quickly solved by making them founding members of the CIS. Russia was now accepted as the successor state of the Soviet Union. It inherited the Soviet seat in the UN Security Council.

Causes of disintegration of the Soviet Union:

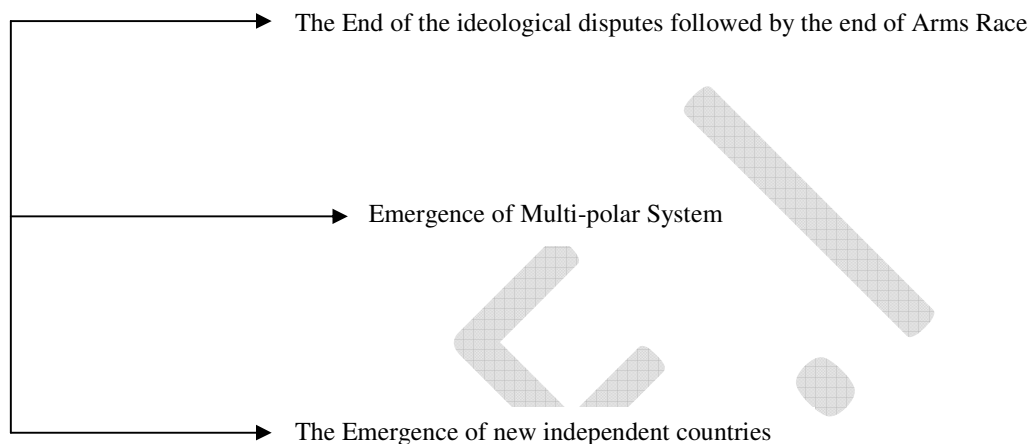
While there are unique features of the Soviet collapse, there may be more general lessons to be drawn from this very important case:

- There is no doubt that the internal weakness of Soviet political and economic institutions which failed to meet the aspirations of the people, were responsible for the collapse of the system. Economic stagnation for many years led to severe consumer shortages and a large section of Soviet Society began to doubt and question the system and to do so openly.
- Soviet Economy used much of its resources in maintain a nuclear and military arsenal and the development of its satellite states in Eastern Europe and within the soviet system [the five central Asian Republics in particular]. This led to a huge economic burden that the system could not cope with. At the same time, ordinary citizens became more knowledgeable about the economic advance of the west. They could see the disparities between their system and the systems of the west. After years of being told that the soviet system was better than western capitalism, the reality of its backwardness came as a political and psychological shock.
- The Soviet Union had become stagnant in an administrative and political sense as well. The communist party that had ruled the Soviet Union for over 70 years was not accountable to the people. Ordinary people were alienated by slow and stifling administration, rampant corruption, the inability of the system to correct mistakes it had made, the unwillingness to allow more openness in government, and the centralization of authority in a vast land. Besides this, the party bureaucrats gained more privileges than ordinary citizens. People did not identify with the system and with the government increasingly lost popular backing.

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Consequences of Disintegration of the Soviet Union:

The disintegration of the Soviet Union as the Second World Power and the collapse of socialist systems in Eastern Europe had profound consequences for world politics in general and Asian countries like India can be analyzed in the way of three kinds of enduring changes like:



The End of the Ideological dispute:

The disintegration of Soviet Union meant the end of the cold war confrontation and the end of cold war confrontation signifies collapse of the ideological conflict between socialist and capitalist. Now there is no alliance system on ideology. As the alliance system led to the formation of military blocs, so the end of confrontations demanded the end of the arms race and restoration of possible peace.

Emergence of Multi-polar System:

With the disintegration of USSR, the end of the cold war left open only two of possibilities like either the remaining superpower would dominate and create a 'Uni-polar System' or different countries or groups of countries could become important players in the international system, there by bringing in a 'Multi-polar system, where nobody's power could dominate.

As it turned out, the US became the sole super power. Backed by the power and prestige of the US, the 'capitalistic economy' was now the dominant economic system internationally. Institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund [IMF] became powerful advisors to all these countries since they gave them loans for their transitions to capitalism. Politically, the nation of liberal democracy emerged as the best way to organize political life.

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The Emergence of new Independent Countries:

The end of the “Soviet Bloc” meant the emergence of many new countries because at the dawn of the disintegration of USSR, Soviet Union divided into 15 independent countries. All these countries had their own independent aspirations and choices.

Thus, the international system saw the emergence of many new players, each with its own identity, interests, and economic and political difficulties.

Shock Therapy in Post – Communist Refines:

The ‘Shock Therapy’ was the ‘State of Affairs’ which signifies the collapse of communism followed by a painful process of transition from an authoritarian socialist system to a democratic capitalist system. The model of transition in Russia, central Asia, and East Europe was influenced by the World Bank and the IMF.

Consequences of Shock Therapy:

The shock therapy administered in the 1990s did not lead the people in to the promised utopia of mass consumption. Generally, it brought ruin to the economics and disaster upon the people of the entire region. In Russia, the large state – controlled industrial complex almost collapsed, as about 90 percent of its industries were put up for sale to private individuals and companies. Since the reconstructing was carried out through market forces and not by government –directed industrial policies. It led to the virtual disappearance of entire industries. This was called ‘the largest garage sale in history’ as valuable industries were undervalued and sold at throwaway prices. Though all citizens were given vouchers to participate in the sales, most citizens sold their vouchers in the black market because they needed the money.

Conclusion: The old system of social welfare was systematically destroyed. The withdrawal of government subsidies pushed large sections of the people into poverty. The middle classes were pushed to the periphery of society, and the academic and intellectual manpower disintegrated or migrated. A mafia emerged in most of these countries and started controlling many economic activities. Privatization led to new disparities. Post – Soviet states, especially Russia, were divided between rich and poor regions. Unlike the earlier system, there was no great economic inequality between people.

India and the Post – Communist Countries:

India has maintained good relations with all the post – communist countries. But the strongest relations are still those between Russia and India. India’s relations with Russia are an important aspect of India’s foreign policy. Indo-Russian relations are embedded in history of trust and common interests and are matched by popular perceptions.

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Common view on the multipolar world order:

Russia and India share a vision of multi-polar world order. For both these countries multi-polar world order is the coexistence of several powers in the international system, collective security, greater regionalism, negotiated settlements of international conflicts, an independent foreign policy for all countries and decision making through bodies like the UN that should be strengthened, democratized and empowered.

India's stand towards Russia:

India gets meaningful benefits for having healthy relations with Russia on the issues like Kashmir, energy supplies, Sharing information on international terrorism, access to central Asia and balancing its relations with China.

Russia's Stand towards India:

Like India, Russia stands to benefit from this relationship because India is the second largest arms market for Russia. Besides, India military gets most of its hardware from Russia. Since India is an oil importing nation, so Russia is important to India and has repeatedly come to the assistance of India during its oil crisis.

Thus, we may conclude that India has maintained good relations with all the post – communist countries. But the strongest relations are still those between Russia and India.

