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RUSSIA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

After the fall of the Soviet Union (USSR), Russia has developed a prudent approach to multilateralism. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) had almost become dysfunctional and there was a need to form new associations both with close neighbours and with the West. The Post-Soviet period saw extreme political and economic instability. The fall of the controlled economic structure led to confusion, chaos and disorder. This paper analyses the involvement of Russia in four main organisations namely Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS, the current scenario and the future aspects.

KEYWORDS

Russia, CIS, CSTO, SCO, BRICS, EU.

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INTRODUCTION

During 1990s, Russia promoted the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with the idea of maintaining its supremacy on the former Soviet states. However, many member states were disillusioned by it and even Russia felt that it was offering more to the organisation than what it was getting in return. As a result, by the end of 1990s, the CIS has almost faded off and had become defunct. Moscow had chosen to pursue a targeted strategy to influence the near abroad by developing multilateral organisations with nations willing to cooperate with Russia. The two most important and notable organisations formed were the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). The CSTO was set up as a modified version of the 1992 CIS Collective Security Treaty. Since 2004, EurAsEC has taken over many of the functions of the former CIS especially the development of a Customs Union. Russia has become an active member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a regional organisation formed to promote regional and economic harmony in Central, South and South-East Asia. [8] This organisation is notable for China's membership as this is the only regional organisation where Russia agreed to share the ground with another major external power.

OBJECTIVES

After the fall of USSR, Russia has undergone drastic changes in its international trade and economic policies. However, it has lost substantial portion of natural resources and economic power. China has taken a leading role in the region by opening up its economy to market forces and this poses a major threat to the erstwhile Soviet power. Russia has realized that the modern world is a multilateral one unlike the post war period. In today's age of globalization, international trade and business forms the backbone for the growth of any nation state. Due to US sanctions, trade in Russia is limited to a large extent and so it seeks to strengthen its position in the eastern part of the world. The paper deals with policies and strategies formulated by Russia to create an impact in world trade and business. It analyses the involvement of Russia in four main organisations in the region namely Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS. It seeks to study the current position of Russia in these trading organisations and also to look into its future prospects. It also focuses on study of strategies formulated to counter China's growing influence in the region and maintain its hegemony in Central Asia and its former Soviet states.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is theoretical and completely study based. It focuses on Russia's trade relations with some of the most important international organisations. The scope of the study is limited to the following organisations: Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS. Information about origin of these organisations and their current roles and responsibilities has been taken from international articles and papers. CSTO was one of the earliest organisations spearheaded by Russia after the failure of CIS. Russia's membership in BRICS is important because it signifies its relations with nation states of Asia, Africa and Latin America which has a significant scope and effect on global trade and business. The methodology followed was to study about each institution separately and to deal with one institution at a time. Effort has been made to correlate the role of Russia in these organisations and the effect it had in its international relations, for e.g. the Ukrainian crisis. WTO has been considered because Russia is a new member and it highlights its relations with the Western world. SCO is the only organisation where both Russia and China are significant dominant members which help study its relations with Beijing as well.

COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANISATION (CSTO)

The CSTO consists of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Its focus is on traditional military cooperation with main objective to develop a counter terrorism force, military training activities, sale of defence goods and the centre of formulation of defence strategies. The backdrop for the formation of this organisation was the Ukrainian and Georgian interest in joining NATO. As a result, presence of NATO looming at its borders became a threat. It was recommended that the CSTO Collective Operational Reaction Force (CORF) should be formed with size, technology and effectiveness at par with NATO. The agreement to form CORF was finalized by CSTO in February 2009. As per this agreement, a troop of 16000 is to be formed. Russia would supply 8000 troops, Kazakhstan 4000 and Tajikistan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia 1000 each. [4] This position reflects Russia as the dominant military power in the region and also a major sponsor for the other member states.

However, this dominant position of Russia was not welcome by all members. Some members were apprehensive about committing to a full scale and permanent military battalion under Russian control which further delayed the CORF for many years. For e.g. Uzbekistan had been pretty sceptical. Tashkent only joined in 2005. It also raises voices over Moscow's dominance of the CSTO as Russia's intentions to set up a CSTO camp at Osh in Southern Kyrgyzstan (close to Uzbek border) as it saw the move as a threat to its sovereignty. Belarus initially too refused to ratify but later agreed. Russian dominance of CSTO is fait accompli. There is uncertainty about the other member's willingness to adhere to its policies.

EURASIAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (EurAsEC)

It was established in 2001 by Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, having grown out of the failing CIS. In 2005, it simultaneously granted Uzbekistan membership and merged with the Central Asian Cooperation Organization. This organisation was formed with Russia's objective of staying relevant in Eurasian and Central Asian region under the growing influence of China and the West. From 2010, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia formed a Customs Union where a single customs tariff would be regulated by the Custom's Commission in the entire territory. This was a major gain for Russia as this brought two of the strongest Post-Soviet nations into the Moscow controlled economic zone. However, this three state centric policy was one of the reasons why Tashkent suspended its decision of membership.

In a summit held in Moscow in 2009, its members agreed to establish a "Joint Anti-Financial Crisis Fund" to be administered by the Eurasian Development Bank. Russia contribution to EurAsEC represents its efforts to fight the financial crunch in the global coalition. However, some also view its contribution as an effort to impose its influence on the other member states.

SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION (SCO)

The SCO was founded in 1990 with the objective of settlement of border issues between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia. It was initially known as the "Shanghai 5". Finally, in 2001, with the inclusion of Uzbekistan, it came to be known as the SCO. India and Pakistan joined in 2017. The objective of the organisation have broadened including non-traditional security and also fostering economic, cultural and humanitarian collaboration. However, SCO is primarily driven by China and Russia does not enjoy the same authority as that in CSTO and EurAsEC. However, it did make some notable gains. Moscow has interest in supporting the current regimes of the Central Asian Republics. The SCO is focussed on tackling the problem of "three evils" i.e. terrorism, extremism and separatism. Thus the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist structure and programs against narcotics trade serves Moscow's purpose to a largest extent as well. However, Russia's involvement in SCO is limited, it only restricts itself to large and big investment infrastructure projects and it avoids any movement towards customs coordination. It prefers to play micro-economic coordination only within the EurAsEC community thus excluding China. It fears that given its superior economic capacity, involvement of China in the region can reduce Russia to the second level player, something which obviously Moscow is against. SCO is also an important way in this Russia can assert its presence and value in international affairs.

CSTO and SCO both have common objectives of enhancing national security but there is a difference in their approach. CSTO focuses on traditional military coordination while SCO looks into non-traditional security issues. EurAsEC and SCO both aim at economic harmony and coordination but EurAsEC is more concerned with micro level customs coordination whereas SCO is centered on large scale infrastructure projects and energy cooperation. Russia keeps a balance between EurAsEC and CSTO on one hand and SCO on the other to protect its position in the region and keep a check on China's growing influence.

WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTHS

Even after 25 years since the Collective Security Treaty was signed, the CSTO has failed to address the security issues of the constituent countries. Its anti terrorist activities have mainly remained confined to military training and it could not achieve significant success in the anti drug trafficking trade as well. There is no cooperation with the SCO as well which has almost similar objectives. CSTO member states use the organisation to obtain free military training from Russian Defence Academies with significant value creation. None of the other members participate in Russia's military pursuits nor support Russia's defence policy.

Although an agreement was made for establishing a single unified air defence system in Central Asia, no country except Russia has shown any real interest. All the other member states are concerned with upgradation of their own air defence systems. All the CSTO member states are economically not quite sound and are in no position to fund these projects. Russia instilled a sense of fear among the other states and convinced them that security can only be achieved by submitting to the Russian military and defence system. A CSTO Crisis Response Centre has been established in Moscow for exchange of information among defence personnel. It has been created in line with National Defence Management Centre of Russian Federation. In short, the other member states will look forward to Russia for internal defence issues and work on Moscow's recommendation. The CSTO is simply a covert tool of Russia to assert pressure and control on the post Soviet states but lacks strength of a standalone body.

RUSSIA-CHINA COMPETITION AND DIVIDE

The divergent attitudes of Beijing and Moscow regarding the relationship between SCO and CSTO have also resulted in several confusing and competition between the two for gaining supremacy in the region. PRC has always focussed on promotion of economic, cultural and non military security potential of the SCO whereas Russian policymakers have tried to restrain SCO's military potential as a strong presence of PLA in the Central Asian region would pose a threat to Russia's supremacy. But inspite of Russian efforts, China and Central Asian Republics have prevented SCO transforming into a clothe conflict of interest lies in the fact that on one hand Russia sees the possibility to fight another Chechnya like counter-insurgency operation whereas on the other China's main objective is to suppress another Tiananmen like rebellion. China also blocked Russian efforts to establish direct military contacts between CSTO and SCO. Since China is not a part of CSTO, it tries to keep SCO independent of the Moscow dominated institution. Central Asian Republics too prefer working with SCO over CSTO as it is not dominated by a single supreme power and gives them more space for independent action and consultation.

Another reason for SCO's popularity among the Central Asian Republics (CARs) is that unlike that of CSTO, they can consult with China with Russian support rather than directly approaching Beijing on a bilateral basis. China wants to make it clear that it is not seeking any hegemonic role in the region and is only concerned with economic, social, cultural and non military security aspects. But some view Beijing's growing power and presence as threat to the Western interests and values.

However, both China and Russia gains from SCO. Moscow recognises the security role of China in the region and in case of any hostile actions from Beijing, Moscow can depend upon CSTO as an alternate institution in the region which is growing militarily and on which Russia has strong control.

AFGHANISTAN AS A CRITICAL AREA

Despite every difference, all the members agree that CSTO and SCO should cooperate with each other to prevent narcotic trafficking and regional terrorism related to Afghanistan. The March 2009 SCO-hosted international conference on Afghanistan endorsed wider cooperation between the SCO, CSTO and CIS on the anti-drug and counterterrorism tracks. The June 2010 Moscow international conference on "Drug Production in Afghanistan: A Challenge for the International Community" had representatives from both institutions in attendance. Even NATO was involved to draft a multi-institutional pact that would combine their efforts under the leadership of the United States to curb drug trafficking and narcotic trading from Afghanistan to Central Asia and then to Russia.[7]

Recent experience shows that no single institution can achieve desirable and improved results on their own. Even a mighty alliance such as NATO has to work in tandem with local institutions such as CSTO, SCO and have to integrate their diverse beliefs, values and objectives to achieve favourable results, reduce wastage of resources and energy and bring stability in the region.

BRAZIL, RUSSIA, INDIA, SOUTH AFRICA, CHINA (BRICS)

Moscow had been keen on the establishment of BRICS due to the following reasons:

- Russia was not satisfied with the global economic and financial system and believed that it only benefitted few elite developed nations only.
- All the member states are suffering from similar problems such as "need for infrastructure modernisation, stabilization of currency and large scale poverty". Both India and Brazil have a problem of currency stabilization against dollar. The Rouble too has depreciated considerably since 2013. China is losing its competitive advantage of cheap labour force.

- Although the member countries do not agree on every point however they still have a common point. All of them are dissatisfied with the current global system and questions the same. Since the Post War period, the world remained bipolar. The member states demand a multipolar world order that is gradually taking shape today. BRICS supports the UN Security Council for maintaining global peace and harmony.
- The BRICS nations were wary of the frequent military usage by the US and NATO. Russia stressed on the prevention of the use of the Security Council to cover up for the imposition of unilateral solutions to conflict situations.
- The existing world organizations are extremely skewed towards the West and hence the member states felt that a new organization was necessary to raise their voice in the international discussion forum.
- BRICS had been a platform for Russia to find a stable identity. After the fall of the USSR in 1991, Russia was reduced to a regional power. Integration with the West as an equal member was not an option for Russia. So BRICS provide an opportunity for Russia to reassert its global position and aspirations. Although BRICS portrays itself as a non military organisation, the US still remains unconvinced and still sees it as a threat.
- Russia also believes that BRICS can help prevent drug trafficking, conflict resolution, non-proliferation of mass destruction weapons, piracy, money laundering, illegal migration and others. Thus it can also help in promoting international security and cooperation.

OBJECTIVES OF RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN BRICS

- To make the international monetary and financial system more stable, equitable and effective which in turn will help development of its own economy and financial system.
- Maintaining peace, security and territorial integrity and sovereignty of Russia and the other member states and non interference in their internal matters.
- To enhance and develop a multi-vector character of its foreign policy.
- To have a widespread linguistic, cultural and informational presence in the other member countries which a part of BRICS. [6]

As Roberts points out, that coordination with the other member countries gives Russia a platform to be heard in the international forum as NATO and G8 did not bring satisfactory results to Russia. BRICS is an imperfect fit for Russia because none of the other countries share any dominant national identity as a great power of European Civilization. None of them have a first world identity. Russia historically had an European identity but it's changing in modern times towards a more Eurasian identity which is a unique amalgamation of both Europe and Asia, a melting pot for various cultures. [5] So BRICS would act like a bridge or "Power Multiplier" for Russia to connect to the Western world and be more relevant in global and international relations.

BRICS also serves the purpose of dual soft balancing. By portraying BRICS as a power alternative for institutions like NATO, Russia can achieve preventing Western hegemony to a considerable extent. This has also increased its transactions with China (In addition to the already existing SCO). This would help Russia keep an eye on China as a growing economic and political power and to keep a check on its international activities.

According to the "Concept of Participation of the Russian Federation in BRICS," published by the foreign ministry in March of 2013, Russia lays out plans for further formal institutionalisation of BRICS but only to an extent which do not hamper bilateral relationships.[2] In fact, Russia's foreign policy is based on bilateral relations and not making formal agreements that would limit the country's sovereignty and independence of designing its own foreign policies. Thus there is a clear underlying message that BRICS is just a tool for Russia to connect to the West to restore its position as a world power.

IMPACT OF THE UKRAINE CRISIS

The Russian annexation of Crimea led to a decline in Russia's relationship with the West and resulted in sanctions on Russia by the US and the EU. At this point of time BRICS served both political and economic benefits for Russia.

The first was political that none of the member countries supported Russia's annexation of Crimea but none of the condemned the act openly as well. Rather they mildly rebuked the G20 on the ground that no observers of the G20 have the authority to exclude another unilaterally. This silence on the Crimea issue gave Russia an edge and room to maneuver. The agreements reached during the July 2014 BRICS summit in Fortaleza and July 2015 summit in Ufa, Russia; both offer compelling imagery supporting Russia thus preventing the Western efforts to isolate Russia. [1]

Economically BRICS offered great relief to Russia from Western sanctions and also due to its self-imposed ban on import of western agricultural products. Though the sanctions had their own demerits as Russia witnessed inflation in its local economy with the Rouble collapse in 2014. However during this period, it was able to form closer ties with the BRICS member states. Latin America especially Brazil saw the void left by EU sanctions on Russia as an opportunity and tapped the Russian market well.

However, the Crimean crisis had a deep impact on Russia and BRICS in general. As relations with the West froze for Russia, it started to see BRICS as a real alternative to the west. Russia is now attempting to position BRICS as a weapon against western interference in their interests.

REACTION OF BRICS TOWARDS RUSSIA'S GROWING ANTI-WESTERNISM

BRICS nations have conflicting views on growing Anti-Westernism. All the BRICS have more investments in the US and the west than among themselves. Even though China is the largest trading partner for both Brazil and South Africa, none of the BRICS nations feature in the list of China's main trading partners. All of them continue to have business relations with the US. Hence the BRICS documents emphasize on the point that the organisation is not directed at any third party nor is an Anti-Western bloc.

Further BRICS's goal of reshaping global governance is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. So they will need the help and support of the Western powers in order to achieve their objectives. So being overtly Anti-Western will prove to be counterproductive.

CURRENT SITUATION AND FUTURE STEPS

Russia's international relations and foreign policy has undergone several changes in the past decade. Its relations with the US are incoherent and cannot be achieved by traditional means. In 2019, Moscow will focus more on international summits. It aims to "Play Trump" capitalizing on his policies. The immediate priority of Russia is to safeguard the US-Russia nuclear arms control regime. It might be forced to accept the Bolton's plan for a symbolic nuclear agreement that would not stop deployment options. However, an advantage for Russia is that the Democrat Congress in the US might not fund Trump's nuclear build up. In Europe Russia is continuing to woo European Union leaders after sanctions were imposed following annexation of Crimea in 2014. Kremlin is cooperating with fringe parties across the EU both in the far right and far left. In 2019, Moscow will need to double its reconstruction efforts in Syria. It has to convince the international community to release funding for the same which will be difficult considering Syrian government's reluctance to reforms. Russia needs a more strategized outlook towards Africa. Initially when Africa needed capitalism or neo-liberalism it tilted towards the West and when it sought socialist development, they leaned towards Moscow. Now in today's age, Russia main objective would be to offer something which is already not made available by China or the West. Russia is building closer relationship with China to counter the economic losses made by US sanctions. However it has to be careful about China's increasing military interests in Central Asia.[3] China's dominance in the region of former Soviet states can pose economic and political challenges for Russia and so its policy towards China has to be a balanced one. It needs to accept China as a complimentary power and the major rival to the US.

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