CHAPTER II

IMPACT OF THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE SOVIET UNION ON INDO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: A CRITICAL REVIEW
The disintegration of the Soviet Union changed the scenario of international politics. Gorbachev made this clear by announcing his resignation as Soviet President on 25 December 1991. On that occasion he told his viewers in a televised broadcast: “We live in a new world. The cold war is finished...”¹. That ‘new world’ saw the emergence of Russia as the ‘continuer-state’² of the Soviet Union, losing its super power status but retaining the permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. Russian Foreign Policy was no more designed to serve “the utopian aim of spreading communist ideas round the world” rather, as Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev said during his visits to Rome in November 1991, it sought ‘full blooded cooperation’ with the West to become a part of the ‘civilized world’³. Russian leadership adopted the policy of ‘pro-Western romanticism’ or ‘enlightened pragmatism’ with a view to streamlining the process of its transformation to democracy, market reforms and pluralism. Kozyrev urged the Russian leadership in his article in Izvestia to give up ‘artificial situation of confrontation’ with the US because ‘the developed countries of the West are Russia’s natural allies’, not ‘adversaries’.⁴ In this drive of full-blooded cooperation with the West, Russia paid less attention to its old allies like India, hence giving a blow to the special relationship existing between India and Russia for about four decades. Russian leadership did not

² We follow here the line of the former Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev who said in an interview on 1April 1992, “the legal successor states are in fact all the former republics of the Soviet Union but the continuer is precisely Russia”, in Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Moscow, quoted in Summary of World Broadcast, 3 April 1992, p. SU/1346 A1/1. Leaders like former Russian Supreme Soviet Chairman, Ruslan Khasbulatov supports this view.
want Russia’s relationship with India to become dominating, to have an adverse effect on its relations with other countries of the region. In this air of uncertainty, it was obvious that the Kashmir issue received little attention by the Russian leadership.

The post-Soviet Russian foreign policy was essentially an extension of the policy pursued by Mikhail Gorbachev during the last years of his leadership. Gorbachev launched the policy of *Perestroika* in the year 1985 to lead the Soviet Union out of the model of socialism which was imposed on the country for many decades and which had been turned bankrupt.\(^5\) He criticized the Soviet system as a system created according to the rules of tyranny and totalitarianism which were against country's basic economic and social interests, and which led the country into a dead end and brought it to the brink of an abyss.\(^6\) To come out of this crisis Gorbachev saw no other way but perestroika, which emphasized on de-ideologisation of relations in international sphere, political democratization and introduction of market reforms. Steps were taken to end confrontation with the West and to reassess Soviet policies towards its old allies. Gorbachev held a number of summit talks with the US President George Bush and both declared cold war over at the Malta summit in December 1989. “We do not consider you an enemy any more,” Gorbachev told the US President. The agreement on German reunification was a proof of this assertion. Other important developments included the signing of a treaty on the reduction of conventional forces in Europe (CFE) in November


\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) n. 1, p. 99.
1990 and the signing of the START Treaty in July 1991. The stand taken by the Soviet leadership on the Gulf crisis in 1991 confirmed the impression that Gorbachev's New Thinking represented a break with the 'old thinking' of the previous communist regimes. Domestically perestroika unleashed hitherto shackled forces of nationalism and ethnicity, leading to rapid movement of events, culminating in the disintegration of the USSR. It is worthwhile to mention that the Russian Federation under the leadership of Yeltsin picked up the thread from where Gorbachev left it. In this sense, a former Indian diplomat, A.K. Damodaran categorized the new Russian foreign policy as a "remarkable example of both continuity and change, more continuity than change".8

Even during the last years of Gorbachev there were indications that the Soviet Union was reappraising it policy towards India, including the Kashmir issue. In the first formal summit with President Bush at Washington in June 1990, Gorbachev agreed to include Kashmir issue and Indo-Pak relations in the agenda bypassing the vocal opposition to the move by its traditional friend, India.9 Critical comments were made in the Soviet press on India's reservation on NPT and its stand on the Kashmir issue.10 There were talks of the Soviet assistance in the construction of a nuclear power plant in Pakistan. Soviet Foreign Minister Edward Sheverndadze during his visit to Pakistan in February 1989 discussed this matter with the Pakistani government.11 Official Soviet pronouncements on Soviet-third world relations made it clear that the Soviet Union

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9 Ibid, p. 57.
10 Ibid, p. 47.
wanted to pursue a policy in the Third World which was termed ‘business like’ and no more. In other words, the thrust was on bilateralism tailored to serve the needs and requirements on the basis of mutual advantages. It was obvious that the Soviet Union under Gorbachev was no more interested in issues and problems vital for developing countries including India, as it was enthusiastic to develop closer ties with the West for its smooth transition to democracy and market economy. This policy framework marked an imprint on the Russian leaders who followed the same policy line in an air of uncertainty.

Though the Russian leadership pursued the policy framework initiated by Gorbachev, the situation was radically different after the demise of the Union. The new state of Russia could not immediately define and implement a long-term strategy in world affairs. It also lacked the central bureaucratic expertise of the former Soviet Union to guide and execute its strategies. Also the new foreign policy makers in the Russian Government were immature, inexperienced and had a very narrow perception of international problems. 12 Russian leaders proclaimed no global ambition, no world role, nothing more than becoming an unabashed member of Euro-Atlantic community. 13 During most of the year 1992, Russia even did not have a clear picture of its borders, armed forces, and many other essential aspects of a sovereign state. Another factor preventing the establishment of a comprehensive international strategy was the chaos in

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12 Jaysekhar, Burbulis Visit to India, Mainstream, vol. 30, no. 32, 30 May 1992, p. 27.
Moscow's relations with the former republics of the USSR that had become independent countries. The viability of CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) as a loose federation was doubtful at that time. The pattern of Russian Foreign policy was further blurred by economic, social, political and ethnic crisis inside the country itself. These factors also affected Indo-Russian relations. The former ambassador to the Soviet Union, T.N, Kaul's observation in this context seemed to be emphatic: "there is bound to be some change in these (Indo-Russian) relations because of the systematic, geographical and geo-political mutations taking place in the far flung areas, regions and states of the erstwhile USSR". 

It was, hence, understandable that during the initial years Russia could not adopt a well-defined foreign policy strategy. According to Foreign Minster Kozyrev, the priority areas were: development of the CIS, democracy, human rights and market. But, Yevgeny Primakov, the head of the Russian Foreign Policy Department, assigned priority to: "monitoring the non-proliferation of 'critical technologies', combating 'terrorism' and helping to prevent 'the development of regional crises that might affect all regions of the world'." Khasbualatov, the head of the Russian Parliament, emphasized that "priority attention should be paid to the promotion of contracts with those countries that can help Russia in real terms build up its economic might", and "diplomatic efforts should be

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17 Ibid.
concentrated on such a ‘delicate’ sphere as relations with the other CIS member states, particularly with Ukraine...". However, he agreed that Russian foreign policy priorities were “rather vaguely defined” and “alienated from the paramount problem of foreign economic relations”. So, it was difficult in part of Russia to adopt a concrete policy approach towards various countries including India in the changing world order, characterized by complexities, uncertainties and asymmetrical power configurations.

However, various scholars attempted to identify available patterns of priority in Russia’s foreign policy. According to Olga Alexandrova, there were four main conceptual patterns in Russia’s foreign policy after the collapse: the Westerners, the Russian nationalistic frame, the Eurasian, and the geographical realist school of thought. The ‘Westerners’ were those Russian politicians and intellectuals who advocated that Russia, as a part of European-Christian civilization, should foster close political and economic ties to the West and that it should establish a society based on the (Western) European system of values – democracy and the market economy. They viewed the West, as Russia’s natural ally, both with regard to internal political and economical transformation as well as to the structuring of a ‘new international order’. President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev belonged to this group. Hence, there was a Western-orientation in Russian foreign policy in initial years. On the other hand, the Russian nationalists harped on the mystic ‘Russian Idea’ and emphasized on the notion of

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18 Ibid.
a 'third way', a fundamentally anti-Western attitude.\textsuperscript{20} They criticized the integration of Russia into the European 'civilization', vigorously pursued by the 'westerners' as a national catastrophe and as the relinquishment of national identity. The advocates of 'Eurasism' believed that Russia was neither a Western type European nor a purely Slavic or Asian country but it constituted a single 'Eurasian' structure. According to the Eurasians, Russia's geographical location between Europe and Asia determined its specified historical course and its special civilization mission. The 'geopolitical realism' school of thought formulated Russia's foreign policy priorities in terms of power and the extension of influence.

According to another view\textsuperscript{21} there were three orders of priorities in Russia's foreign policy choices; first priority was towards the members of the commonwealth of independent states (policy of near abroad); second was to develop relations with the west; and the last priority was to establish or maintain relations with the Third World. Russia’s foreign policy had ten priorities wherein the CIS was first and the US, Europe and South Asia were fourth, fifth and seventh respectively, pointed out an article.\textsuperscript{22} According to the article, a Russian periodical stated Russia’s priorities in January 1993 as follows: (1) the CIS; (2) arms control and international security; (3) economic reforms; (4) the United States; (5) Europe; (6) Asia-Pacific regions; (7) West and South Asia; (8) the Near East;

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p. 366.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Peter Shearman, "Russia's Three Circles of Interests", in Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, ed, \textit{Regional Relations: Asia Pacific and the Former Soviet Union} (Colorado: West view Press, 1993), pp. 45-64.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Anita Inder Singh, "A New Indo-Russian Connection: India's Relations with Russia and Central Asia", \textit{International Affairs} (London), vol. 71, no. 1, January 1995, p. 72.
\end{itemize}
(9) Africa; and (10) Latin America.

The post-disintegration Russian political scene witnessed serious debates among various political leaders and factions regarding foreign policy choices. Various scholars and political leaders criticized the extreme pro-Western orientation of Kozyrev. Sergei Stankevich, Russian Federation State Adviser on Political Questions, said that a policy that is built only on interest is very vulnerable, and in Russia, it is simply disastrous.\(^{23}\) Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Russia's Liberal Democratic Party leader, adopted a radical stand. To Zhirinovsky, there would have been no conflict between India and Pakistan if Kashmir had been with India.\(^{24}\)

The International Committee of the Supreme Soviet also witnessed sharp division\(^{25}\) regarding the policy approach of Russia towards South Asia in the context of Yeltsin's proposed visit to India in January 1993. Georgy Kunadze, a Deputy Foreign Minister argued against retaining the 'special relationship' with India that the Soviet Union had cultivated in the interests of cold war confrontation with the United States and China. This position was contested by a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Yevgeny Pudovkin, who said it was a major mistake of Russian diplomacy to renounce the special relationship with India. He said there were few countries in the world with which Moscow had such a long standing cordial relations, as with India and it is an asset that should not be squandered. Prof. Tatiana Shaumian, who herself was present in the

\(^{24}\) Times of India (New Delhi), 7 March 1995.
\(^{25}\) The Hindu (Madras), 22 January 1993.
foreign policy deliberations mentioned above, narrated this scene of heated debate before the author. She remembered how specialists on India, including herself, tried their best through articles and pamphlets to convince the policy makers “the necessity to continue and develop our relations with India.”

The Head the South Asian Department of the Foreign Economic Relations Ministry, Viktor Koptevsky, also took objection to Kunadze's claim that trade with India had not always been advantageous to Russia. He said India provided a large market for Russian industrial plant while over a half of all imports from India had consisted of goods Russia could not buy elsewhere or had to play a far high price for. Academician Yevgeny Chelysev, an authority on India, said it was deeply distressing to see Russian-Indian relations coming to ruin because of Moscow’s pro-Western orientation. India is a great power, while Pakistan and other countries are just states like others, said the academician. He said Yeltsin’s visit to India in January 1993 should serve to restore the ties between the two countries to their old level.

The number of Russian leaders and academicians, who opposed new Russia's foreign policy, seemed miniscule. However, it would not be wrong to say that during the initial years, Russian foreign policy was drifting away from the traditional framework. During an interview on the general direction of Russia's foreign policy, broadcast in Russian TV on 3 March 1992, Pravda correspondent asked Foreign Minister Kozyrev,
"Why there is such an obvious pro-western bias in foreign policy? The absolute majority of visits and talks betray a pro-Western orientation... But what about the eastern, Asian direction?"\(^{27}\) It is worth mentioning here that in the year 1992 itself, major Russian leaders including President Yeltsin and Kozyrev made whirlwind tour to major Western countries including the US, the UK, Germany and France. Even Yeltsin once wrote to the NATO asking it consider allowing Russia to become a member sometime in future, because "this will contribute to creating a climate of mutual understanding and trust, strengthening stability and cooperation on the European continent".\(^ {28}\) Kozyrev justified the pro-Western bias on the following grounds. "First of all, there are urgent things which had to be done... the urgent things now include correcting a bias, getting rid of any sort of confrontation with the West on military issues in order to free our hands for reform. Secondly, we have now covered the Western G-7. Whether we have a stabilization fund and whether we enter the world economy depends on the G-7, eventually".\(^ {29}\) Hence, it was 'pragmatism', the catchword of the then foreign policy establishment in Moscow, which guided the Russian foreign policy. It seemed the Russian leaders were interested to boost their sagging economy, to bring stability in the region, and for that matter they did not seem to hesitate to follow the Western dictates. This line of policy was apparently clear when President Yeltsin instructed the Russian ambassador to the UN to vote for the introduction of sanctions against Yugoslavia.\(^ {30}\) Before that Russia had been opposing the

\(^{28}\) The Hindu (Madras), 21 December 1991.  
\(^{29}\) Ibid.  
\(^{30}\) Summary of World Broadcast, 1 June 1992, p. SU/1395.
introduction of sanctions against Yugoslavia. Kozyrev was against sanctions and went to Yugoslavia on a peace mission at a time when most of Western diplomats were leaving the war-turn country, but later, blaming the war on 'Communist-Belgrade regime'\textsuperscript{31}, he went ahead and supported the sanctions against Yugoslavia.

The changing perception in the Russian foreign policy towards South Asia was evident during the first months of the year 1992. During his interview to the \textit{Summary of World Broadcast} correspondent, the head of the Asia-Pacific Department of Russia's Foreign Ministry, Alexander Losyukov, said: "the union government began to reassess its policy in the Asia Pacific region and it scored certain positive results on this. The present policy is aimed at developing cooperation with its former adversaries while preserving normal relations with the countries it called and calls its friends. For example, Moscow invariably supported India in its controversies with Pakistan, although such support quite often had a negative impact on our relations with Islamabad. We have now revised this approach. For instance, Russia supports the Pakistani idea of converting South Asia into a nuclear-free zone, despite the fact that India is blocking it".\textsuperscript{32} He rejected the media allegations that Russia is turning its back on India. He said that Russia, as before, attributes great importance to the development of its relations with India. But he stressed: "We do not want our relations with India to become dominating, to have an adverse effect on our relations with other countries of the region or damage Russian national interests". It was clear that for the new leaders of Russia, priority areas were not

\textsuperscript{31} Patriotic (New Delhi), 16 June 1992.
maintaining special relationship with old allies like India but to bring stability and economic development in their own country. For the achievement of that objective, Russian leadership thought, the Western cooperation was necessary. This approach demanded a revision of Russia’s special relationship with India.

Russia’s policy of developing closer ties with both India and Pakistan was evident from the document of Russian Foreign Ministry, No. 1615/15, dated 25 January 1993. It said: “economic and geo-political considerations demand close ties with India. Russia’s policy must be formed with considerations of India’s significance as a country affirming itself as a regional power among the developing countries. At the same time, we must also consider the factor of the Indo-Pakistani opposition... which has an effect on the entire region... Our policy must not provide ground for other states to perceive it a deliberately and strictly pro-Indian or become a hincrance to the development of relations, especially with Pakistan to the level of relations with India, so that they are aimed not to being equally remote, but at being equally close.”33 But it was unlikely possible to maintain close relationship with both India and Pakistan especially when the Kashmir issue was in view. It was well known that both India and Pakistan possessed widely divergent views regarding the Kashmir issue. So, this approach of Russia caused grave concern in the mind of Indian leadership. At that time, there were also differences between the two countries relating to auctioning off of the debt (rupee-rouble controversy), signing of the NPT, etc, which furthered the lowering of relationship. Taking these developments into account, a Russian commentator observed that the
Moscow-Delhi ties lost their basis with the end of the cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{34}

The gap in mutual understanding between Russian and Indian leaders was one of the important factors that led to worsening of relations between the two countries. The response of government of India to the August coup of 1991 was made in haste. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s remarks that the overthrow of Mikhail Gorbachev was an instinctive example of over enthusiastic reformers annoyed the pro-reformist leaders.\textsuperscript{35} Yeltsin himself was a self-proclaimed radical reformer. Indian policy-making showed its own weakness in dealing with the turbulent changes in the former Soviet Union. In the absence of new initiatives, the Indian bureaucracy clung to the tradition of putting faith in a single leader, Gorbachev. The Indian policy makers were also deeply prejudiced against Yeltsin; much of this prejudice was gained through Western media. Because of such prejudices they were slow and reluctant in dealing with Yeltsin’s leadership. When Yeltsin offered to sign a treaty with India during the Foreign Minister Madhav Sinh Solanki’s visit to Moscow, it was quietly rejected much to the chagrin of the Yeltsin government. The editorial of \textit{Times of India} on 22 November 1991 wrote, “despite the chagrin it causes to Mr. Boris Yeltsin, India like other countries still regards Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev as the principal interlocutor...”\textsuperscript{36} The Indian leadership appeared reluctant to

\textsuperscript{33} Quoted in \textit{Patriot} (New Delhi), 29 December 1994.
\textsuperscript{34} Dimitri Volsky, quoted in S.N. Verma, “Russia and India: From Hiatus to Resurrection”, \textit{Strategic Analysis}, vol. 18, no. 4, July 1995, p. 573.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Times of India} (New Delhi), 22 November 1991.
wrench itself away from the largely notional centre led by Gorbachev and more decisively towards the beckoning republics. One Indian Strategic Analyst wrote, keeping in view the disintegration of the Soviet Union, “adjusting to international life without the mighty Soviet Union will be difficult”. 37

However, it would be unfair to hold the view that there were no attempts to gear up the lacklustre relationship between India and Russia during these formative years. On 23 December 1991 the government of India decided in principle to recognize the eleven breakaway republics of the Soviet Union. In a press conference in New Delhi on the same day, the External Affairs Minister Madhav Sinh Solanki described the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a positive development. 38 He told the press that direct political and diplomatic contacts had been established with eight republic including Russia. During his visit to the Soviet Union in November 1991, Solanki held talks with important Russian leaders including President Yeltsin. Welcoming his Indian guest on 15 November 1991, Yeltsin stressed that this is “the first visit in the history of Russian-Indian links”, 39 and stated that the changed situation in the USSR has made the present meeting ‘historically necessary’. He accepted an invitation from the Indian Prime Minister to pay an official visit to the country. Yeltsin expressed his keenness to establish ties with India. It can be noted here that Solanki’s meetings with the Russian leaders were the first direct contact between Indian government and the Russian leaders after the August coup, which almost closed all the possibilities of survival of the Union.  

On 15 January 1992 India and Russia finalized a new political treaty and signed memoranda of understanding on trade and supplies of defence and power generation equipment. The political treaty contained elements of the 1971 Indo-Soviet friendship treaty while the memoranda on trade and defence and power equipment supplies had been structured to allow flexibility to meet changes in the two countries' economies, leader of the Indian delegation, Foreign Secretary, J.N. Dixit told reporters. Yeltsin's first contact with the Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao, took place in New York, where both had gone to attend a United Nations Security Council meeting. In the discussion that took place, Yeltsin told the Indian Prime Minister that there was no change in the policy of Russia on Kashmir and other issues and Russia followed the old Soviet line in this respect.

The cryogenic rocket deal controversy indicated that Indo-Russian relationship was influenced by Russia's pro-Western policy. India had conducted an agreement with the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1991 to provide cryogenic rocket motors. India's Minister of State for External Affairs, Eduardo Faleiro had declared that his government intends to use Russia's technology "only for peaceful and civilian purposes." Even experts pointed out that it takes approximately ninety days to prepare for launching the rocket, which makes it impossible to use it effectively for military purposes. Russian leaders assured the Indian establishment that Russia would execute the agreement signed

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by the former Soviet leadership. The Russian Secretary of State, Gennady Burbulis, during his visit to India in the first week of May, assured Indian leaders that Russia attached considerable importance to its relations with India and that Russia would fulfil all its commitments towards India including transfer of cryogenic rocket engines despite the US pressure. But his statement that, "let neutral, international experts once more evaluate this deal in accordance with all the standards of international law and then proffer their judgment which for our part, we will try to accept in the proper fashion," surprised Indian leaders.

Later events made it clear that Russia succumbed to the Western pressure. The US State Department urged both the Russian space agency, Glavkosmos and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) to cancel the rocket deal. According to a report, India's success in space technology prompted the US to apply pressure on Russia to cancel the agreement. The US Secretary of State, James Baker, during his visit to Moscow in February 1992 told Kozyrev that the deal with India 'created serious problems' in the US - Russian Cooperation in space and warned that the US might impose trade sanctions against Russia if the contract was not scrapped. At another meeting in Brussels on 6 March 1992, Baker told Kozyrev that if Russia did not annul the contract swiftly then the US might reconsider the idea of trade sanctions. On 9 May 1992, shortly before the decision to impose sanctions was made, Russian President, Boris

45 Ibid.
Yeltsin had a telephonic conversation with the US President, George Bush and both of them achieved an understanding on the question of showing goodwill in matters of expanding sales markets for this (Cryogenic) type of technology on the basis of equal rights. But, surprisingly on 11 May 1992, the American side announced that the sanctions were to be imposed. The sanctions envisaged stopping for two years the issuing of export licenses in respect of Glavkosmos and ISRO. And they also banned for the same period any of these organizations' imports to the US. Not only that, the US State Department urged other parties to Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) to impose sanctions against both the organizations. Interestingly, the US State Department spokesperson, declared on 13 May 1992 that the sanctions against Glavkosmos would not stand in the way of the US buying from Russia the advanced nuclear topaz rocket engine!

It is noteworthy that the Russian Foreign Ministry ‘deplored’ the decision of the US state department to impose sanctions on the Glavkosmos. Even the head of Glavkosmos, Alexander Dunayev, vowed to continue supplies to India despite the sanctions announced by the US administration. Against such a background, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of the US adopted an anti-proliferation amendment sponsored by Joseph R. Biden, making US aid to Russia conditional upon Russia’s agreeing to abandon the sale of rocket technology to India. Later, Russia succumbed to

47 Summary of World Broadcast, 14 May 1992, p. SU/1380 i.
48 Times of India (New Delhi), 13 May 1992.
49 n. 41, p.181.
the US pressure and none other than Yeltsin himself declared Russia's inability 'to fulfill the contractual obligations due to unforeseen developments'. Russia's Foreign Minister, Kozyrev, known for his pro-western approach, gave a moderate image to the US sanctions and clarified that, 'this (the sanctions) is not a matter of sanctions against industry.... it will be viewed as an individual case regarding only Glavkosmos... not against the whole space industry and so on.'

Hence, it could be emphasized in the context of Cryogenic deal, that the policy making in Russia could not adopt an independent line in the initial years. Some Russian intellectuals and media were not satisfied with Russia's negligence of India. Participating in a discussion programme, "Does Russia have a Foreign Policy" one People's Deputy, Baburin questioned 'Russia's double standards in foreign policy' in dealing with cryogenic agreement with India. He criticised that “Russia had been neglecting its relations with India”. Glukhov in his article, 'Washington - Moscow: Know your Place', in *Pravda* on 13 May 1992, severely criticized Russia's subservience to the US. He wrote, "having received nothing as yet except promises of 24 billion dollars, we are already paying for the potential future credits". He criticized the failure of Russian diplomacy to check the US sanctions. The sanctions followed the visit to the US by Russian Deputy Premier, Yegor Gaider, the visit to India by State Secretary, Burbulis and a telephone conversation between the US president, George Bush and the Russian

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President, Yeltsin. Glukhov wondered: “Is it a case for staggering inefficiency by Russian diplomacy, not being able to get its Washington partners to consider its position? Or is it a case of staggering presumptuousness on the part of Washington, which regards the ‘White House’ on the Moscow river merely as a branch of the American White House?” However, as we have observed, during the transitional years of Russia’s foreign policy, Moscow was keen to promote its interests even at the cost of canceling its old agreements and commitments. Under the cloak of ‘enlightened pragmatism’, the Russian leadership was hoping that only the Western cooperation could help tackle the crises, both internal and external. In the cryogenic rocket motor case, a high level Russian diplomat stated that Russia assigns “top priority to national interests ... he is convinced that it would be unwise to neglect opinions of foreign experts, who say that the contract with India does not entirely comply with the MTCR”\(^{54}\). This conviction of relying on ‘foreign experts’ gave a severe jolt to Indo-Russian relationship in the transitional years in bilateral relationship.

Russian Supreme Soviet leader, Ruslan Khasbulatov began a weeklong state visit to India on 3 August 1992. The visit was considered to be an exercise in damage control. Khasbulatov was one among the advocates arguing for retaining good relationship with all allies. While accepting that the developments in Russia had a negative impact on Indo-Russian relationship, the Russian leader assured the Indian leaders that Russia

\(^53\) Ibid.

\(^54\) *Summary of World Broadcast*, 13 May 1992, p. SU/1381 A/V2.
ascribed highest priority to having good relations with New Delhi.\textsuperscript{55} He further assured the Indian leaders that Russian cryogenic engines would be supplied and the contracts with Glavkosmos would be fulfilled. During the visit, Khasbulatov explained the Indian establishment the domestic policy of Russia and how market mechanisms are being played there. He urged the Indian businessmen to play their role in Russian market to fill the relations with concrete substance, to deepen them. After his return to Moscow, Khasbulatov told the newspaper \textit{Rossiyskaya Gazeta} that attempts to revise relations with India are 'completely unacceptable'.\textsuperscript{56} He said that the Russian parliament will press on the Russian government to have all the signed agreements, contracts and commitments are fulfilled, including the ones stipulating the delivery of cryogenic motors to India, because 'this is in our interests, in the interests of Russo-Indian relations'. But Khasbulatov's insistence on retaining old ties with India or revamping the old relations according to the exigencies of time fell on deaf ears of those Russian leaders who had an upper hand in the policy making.

At the same time, the Indian foreign policy also came for review because of the end of the cold war and adoption of the policy of economic liberalization by the Narasimha Rao government in New Delhi. In June 1991, when he assumed country's leadership, problems were mounting in Indo-Soviet trade relations because of erratic supply of Soviet goods. Soviet oil deliveries to India fell short by $1.5 billion in that

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Asian Recorder} (New Delhi), September 9-15, vol. 38, no. 7, p. 22560.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Summary of World Broadcast}, 17 August 1992, p. SU/1461 A14.
India had already been facing irregular supply of spares for Soviet weapons. Rupee rouble controversy made the situation worse. Russia’s Economy Minister Andrei Nechayev said that India continued to want bilateral trade in the traditional form of Russian credits. But he made clear the Russian position that the new credits would be at double the existing interest rate and with one-tenth of the payment being made in advance. Russia was not ready to adjust with its devalued rouble with India’s rupee. It might be noted that India closed trading accounts with the Soviet Union on 28 December 1991, immediately after the formal disintegration of the Soviet Union, and new accounts were opened in the name of the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

India could not afford to ignore the smooth supply of Russian weapons and spare parts. India’s Defence Minister, Sharad Pawar arrived in Moscow on 6 September 1992, on the invitation of Russian Defence Minister, Pavel Grachev to discuss the possibility of obtaining an improved version of the Mig-29 fighter. He also discussed with his Russian counterpart about further deliveries of spare parts to India. Commenting, at the request of journalists in Moscow, on the results of his meeting with Grachev on 7 September 1992, Pawar said, “we will always try to maintain the development of cooperation with Russia in the military sphere at the level of the past 40 years”. In turn, Grachev admitted that the transitional period brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union had slowed down the development of Russia’s links with India. “Today (7th September) we have discussed and mapped out a range of directions for the restoration of the links in the

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military, and military and technical spheres. This concerns Indian side most of all, all of us too, for that matter,” he said.

Pawar’s meeting with President Yeltsin, fixed for 8 September 1992, was cancelled, the reason being that the Russian President was ‘too busy’ in preparation to his visit to Japan. It seemed that as if the Russian President did not give due importance to the Indian Defence Minister’s visit. Instead of Yeltsin, Pawar ended up meeting with the State Secretary, Burbulis and the acting Premier, Yegor Gaider. Pawar and Burbulis met on 8 September 1992 and discussed primary issues of developing bilateral relations in light of President Yeltsin’s visit to New Delhi in January 1993. Burbulis pointed out the necessity of ‘real activisation’ on Russo-Indian contacts, above all in the economic sphere. He assured Pawar that “India was and remains a priority today for the Russian State” in its region. 59 Pawar conducted negotiations with acting Premier, Yegor Gaider, at which they mainly discussed problems of deliveries of arms from Russia to India. Interfax news agency, Moscow, reported on 17 September 1992: “India is to buy a total of 30 MIG-29 fighter planes, 24 combat planes and 6 training aircrafts.” 60 The report disclosed that the tentative agreement on the deal had been reached during Pawar’s visit to Moscow in September 1992 and that the contract ‘might be signed’ during Yeltsin’s visit to India in January 1993. According to the report, Russia intended to grant India credit amounting to $830 million to finance programmes for the construction of aircrafts, ships and tanks under agreements signed between the former Soviet Union and India.

Though Pawar described his visit to Russia as successful, bilateral relations remained unsatisfactory.

In an effort to meet Indian defence needs, Pawar went to Ukraine in October 1992. He discussed with the Ukrainian leaders on the matter of solving the issue of spare parts to India for various types of armaments purchased from the former Soviet Union. Ukraine had been lobbying to sell weapons to India since January 1992. Kiev was a major weapons manufacturing centre in the former Soviet Union and in the past supplied arms to India under Indo-Soviet defence contracts. During Pawar’s visit, Ukraine agreed to supply armaments and spare parts to India in return of medicines and cloths, and partial payment in hard currency. Immediately, perhaps in a bid to maintain its dominance in Indian defence market, Moscow offered a variety of military holdings to India. The Chief of Staff of the Indian navy, Admiral L. Ramdas, paid on official visit to Russia in November 1992 at the invitation of the Commander in Chief of the Russian navy, Admiral Feliks Gromov. Ramdas went to St. Petersburg and familiarized himself with training facilities of the naval academy named after Admiral Kuznetsov. According to ITAR-TASS, Ramdas displayed interest in the purchase of Russian warships and the training of Indians at Russian naval schools. However, Indo-Russian defence relations during the year 1992 were, on the whole, a low-key affair.

If the above discussions serve any indication, it was amply clear that Russia’s policy towards Kashmir, during the initial years, 1991-92 was not based on any clear-cut

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policy framework. The pro-western drive to protect and promote Russia’s national interests was the major thrust of Russia’s foreign policy in that period. Hence it was not surprising to see the change in Russia’s Kashmir Policy in unexpected lines. It was evident during the visit of Russian Vice President, Alexander Rutskoi to Pakistan in December 1991. During the visit he announced a very significant change in his country’s stand on Kashmir by saying that the right of self-determination of the Kashmiri people should be decided under UN auspices and in accordance with its resolutions.63 The Russia-Pakistan Joint Communique64, issued on 22 December 1991, read, along with other things: “The Russian side acknowledged Pakistan’s position and expressed the hope that the issue would be resolved peacefully through negotiations between Pakistan and India on the basis of international agreements”.65 This was in clear negation of the Indian stand on the Kashmir issue. It was also against the provisions of the Simla Agreement, signed by both India and Pakistan, which emphasized on the resolution of the Kashmir issue bilaterally without any third party mediation. This approach of Russia caused grave concern in the Indian political establishment and public in general. One observer of Indo-Russian relations, expressing concern over the Russian stand wrote, “it is now possible that Russia, which takes the Soviet Union’s seat on the United Nations Security Council, will not exercise veto in favour of India”.66

63 Asian Recorder (New Delhi), vol. 38, no.6, February 5-11, 1992, p.22140.
65 Ibid.
In another report, Pakistani newspaper Nation reported that Rutskoi, during his
talks with the Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif at Lahore, assured Pakistan of help
for supply of arms on request. Russia also supported Pakistan-sponsored proposal for a
nuclear weapon free zone in South Asia. The Russian President Boris Yeltsin, through
Rutskoi offered Pakistan a treaty of friendship and extended an invitation for visiting
Russia to his Pakistani counterpart, Ghulam Ishaq Khan. Some other instances could be
cited here to corroborate the Russian shift from its traditional approach towards India and
Pakistan. The delegates of the Islamic conference, held in Moscow in September-October
1992, were received by Vice President, Rutskoi and Russian Supreme Soviet Chairman,
Khasbulatov. Among other things, the conference drew attention to the state of affairs in
Kashmir, reported ITAR-TASS. From these events it seemed apparent that Russian
leaders were in full drive to end ‘special relationship’ with India which was dominating
and which had a ‘negative impact on our (Russia’s) relations with Islamabad’. Now the
Khrushchevian policy of supporting Indian stand on Kashmir unequivocally seemed to be
a relic of the past.

Russia’s policy towards India, and particularly on Kashmir was thus not identical
with earlier Soviet policy. In the period of transition, marked by turbulence in every
aspect of Russian society, polity, economy and culture, the leadership gave up the
traditional approach towards its old allies including India. In the post-confrontation, post-
communist world, Russia focused more on democracy, market reforms and pluralism, for

67 Asian Recorder (New Delhi), vol. 38, no. 6, February 5-11, 1992, p. 22140.
68 Summary of World Broadcast, 3 October 1992, p. SU/1502 AVz.
which, the leaders thought, western-aid was essential. But the sudden shift in the priority areas proved costly for the Russian society. Gulf crisis, Yugoslavia-crisis and cryogenic rocket controversy, etc. provided ample proofs of Russia's weakness. It was thus on expected lines that its relations with India, including its stance on the Kashmir issue, should get affected in 1991-92. But to view it as a radical change was, however, premature as later years unfolded. Though initially Russian leaders displayed some kind of interest in the Pakistani stand on the Kashmir issue, as was evident from Rutskoi's visit, it could realize gradually India's importance and role in the region. But that shift came in later years.