Chapter Three

The Presidency
The presidential government in Russia is of very recent origin. The history of the Soviet system has usually been written in terms of its leaders. Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Gorbachev are the names with which distinct periods of Soviet institutional development are associated. This practice captures one of the essential elements of the Soviet system, i.e., the prominent role played by the leading figures. However, for more than seventy years of the system's existence, there was a fundamental ambiguity with regard to the top job, reflected most importantly in the low level of institutionalization of leading positions in the political structure.¹ The creation of the presidential office after the referendum of 1993 and the conception of that office by Boris Yeltsin had decisive implications for the political development in Russia. Indeed in Russia, after December 1993, it was the presidency that defined the character of the political system. Yeltsin used his ascendency after the dissolution of parliament to secure the adoption of a constitution that extended his already considerable powers. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the institution of presidency in Russia with all the powers and functions by situating them in the context of the real politics of transition period. However, it would be logical to provide this description with a conceptual background. It is, therefore,

important here to take up a brief discussion of the theoretical debate on presidentialism and parliamentarism.

I  DEBATE ON PRESIDENTIALISM AND PARLIAMENTARISM

In the past decade there has been an insurgence of interest in the institutions of government. Among other research subjects, neo-institutionalism has conducted studies of the respective merits and drawbacks of presidential and parliamentary systems. The generally accepted starting point for comparing presidential and parliamentary systems has been Walter Bagehot's, *The English Constitution* published in 1867. His praise for the British system of parliamentary or cabinet government emanated from what he viewed as the fusion of powers in the system. If, for Bagehot, the fusion of powers provided responsible and effective government in Britain, then the US presidential system, with its separation of powers, was held to endanger unaccountable and inefficient government.

The study of executive politics has been characterized by dichotomous country specific debates about whether there is, for example, prime ministerial or cabinet government. The study has tended to be

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3 See ibid., p.28.
dominated by country specialists who have engaged each other in largely
domestic controversies about the working of their own countries’
government. These controversies have frequently taken the form of highly
polarized debates. For example, in Britain, academic attention has
perennially focussed on the question of whether there is prime ministerial
or cabinet government. In France there has been long standing debate about
the respective powers of the President and the Prime Minister. In Germany
the central issue is whether the system is best classified as a chancellor
democracy or a co-ordination democracy. In Ireland the focus has been on
whether the head of government is a chairman or a chief.

In 1943-44 a celebrated discussion of the respective merits of
presidential and parliamentary system was conducted by the American
Journal of Public Administration Review. The classic argument in favour of
each system was put forward by an American and a British specialist. Dan
Price contended that adherence to the separation of powers doctrine has
provided the US with more responsible government. In a presidential
system there is dual control of executive branch, the people elect the
President and the President holds his appointees responsible, retaining the
power to discharge them at his discretion and the people elect the congress

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4 See Robert Elgie, "Models of Executive Politics, a Framework of the Study of the Executive
Power Relations in Parliamentary and Semi-Presidential Regimes", Political Studies, vol.45,
no.2 (June 1997), p.217.
which controls the executive by statutes, by appropriations and by investigations.\footnote{Price, cited in Taras, n.2, p.29.}

One of the most well known advocates of the parliamentary system was Harold Laski. For him, the function of parliamentary system was not just to legislate but to ventilate grievances and thereby scrutinize the executive's policy. He added: "it must so discuss the principles upon which the government of the day proposes to proceed that the virtues and defects are fully known to the electorate". As the parliamentary system's greatest virtue, Laski pointed to its provision of "coherence of policy".

As democratic processes unfolded, scholarly attention shifted from the transition stage to the consolidation stage. Scholars now sought to uncover the factors that facilitated or obstructed processes of democratic consolidation. As part of this effort, some comparativists stressed the role played by the formal rules of the game in shaping the political systems. In particular, they asserted that the institutional choice of presidentialism tends to produce democratic failure. It is tempting to argue that parliamentary systems are more democratic than presidential ones. Arend Lijphart, in a survey of 22 countries which had been continuously democratic since World War II, found that 18 of them were parliamentary.
Only the United States had a clear presidential system and in Finland, France and Switzerland, the system was mixed. When reviewing the non-communist states in the 'third wave' of democratization, it can also be noted that whereas presidentialism prevails in Latin America, the countries of southern Europe incline towards parliamentarism. If we look at post-communist states, the tendency towards presidentialism increases as one moves eastward. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia are basically parliamentary systems. Bulgaria, Poland and Romania all have a stronger and directly elected President although Poland, the country most noted for its semi-presidentialism was thought to be moving away from this model after Walesa's defeat at the end of 1995.

The perils of presidentialism were outlined by Juan Linz, who argued in a seminal article that two institutional features of presidential regimes – fixed terms of office and winner take all elections – had contributed historically to rigidity in the political process, inadequate societal representation, dual authority between the executive and the legislature, and the fragmentation of the party system.

7 See ibid.
Under the presidentialism, Linz argued, there is a greater propensity for political stalemate coupled with the probability for non-democratic outcomes. Moreover, Linz strongly disputed the argument often raised by proponents of presidentialism that it provided more effective governance and hence promoted political stability. Following Linz, a large number of scholars subsequently sought to explain why so many regime transitions had failed to achieve democracy. They contended that presidentialism in a systematic way impeded processes of democratic consolidation.\(^9\) However, this conclusion was countered by Mathew Shugart and John Carey who found in a wide ranging comparative study that democratic failure was as apt to occur in parliamentary as in presidential regimes.\(^10\)

These classic arguments about the advantages and the disadvantages of the two systems have been complemented in the past decade by analysis influenced by rational choice theory. From this perspective, presidential regimes are more likely to foster antagonism between the executive and the legislative branches of government and consequently cause gridlock in government. They set up a zero sum game in which parties and their

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leaders concentrate overwhelmingly on capturing the presidential office. One party's victory is considered as the loss of the other. The question here is whether have the post-communist systems, particularly Russia, sought to insulate themselves from such dangers by imposing extensive checks on presidencies or have fallen into a trap. We will analyse in the following pages evolution of the institution of Russian presidency by situating it in the context of foregoing theoretical discussion.

II POST-COMMUNIST CHOICES

To varying degrees, the institutional choices in post-Soviet Russia have been hamstrung by the abrupt appearance of conflict of interests between different branches of government. Deciding on a presidential or parliamentary system and on the separation or the fusion of powers has not been a matter of preference for a particular mechanism. Rather it has been influenced by factors such as preference and attitude towards democratic reform. Though strong personalized political leadership had been the Russian tradition from Tsarist times, yet Russia came late to a presidency as it had come late to free elections.

The Soviet Union was a republic, with the chair of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet as the titular head of the state. The Chairman carried out only ceremonial duties with no real political power. Only in 1988, with
the resignation of Andrei Gromyko, did Gorbachev become the head of Presidium as well as the party leader. Gorbachev assumed an additional and newly established post in 1989 when he became Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. The presidency was not formally constituted as an office until March 1990, when Gorbachev became the first – and as it turned out to be the last President of the USSR. There was no Russian presidency until June 1991 when Boris Yeltsin, already Chairman of the Russian parliament, was elected to that post.

The introduction of the Soviet presidency, and subsequently a presidency of the Russian Federation, was part of a trend towards presidencies throughout the Soviet successor states. Tajikistan established a presidency in November 1990; and by 1994 when Belarus adopted a new constitution, each of the member states of the CIS had an executive head of the state. In the Central Asian Republics the post was occupied by an authoritarian ruler of a distinctive type. In Kazakhstan, for instance, Nursultan Nazarbave was elected unopposed with 98.8 per cent of the vote in 1991, and after 4 years his tenure was extended to the year 2000.

In Uzbekistan, Isham Kerimov won a similar extension of this term with 99.6 per cent support. And in Turkmenia 99.99 per cent of voters in a 1994 referendum gave President Niyazov the traditional title of
Turkmenbashi (leader of the Turkmen) and extended his term to 2002. In Central and Eastern Europe new constitutions differed in the extent to which the office of the President was a ceremonial post, as in the Czech Republic, where it was first held by the dissident playwright Vaclav Havel, or a post claiming political authority as in Poland where the dissident leader Lech Walesa was elected to the office in December 1990.

Thus the introduction of a strong executive President was part of the process of democratization taking place in Russia and Eastern Europe as a whole.

III THE EMERGENCE OF PRESIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT IN THE POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

The creation of the new presidency had been among the radical proposals announced by Gorbachev at the Central Committee Plenum in February 1990 at which the constitutionally guaranteed 'leading role of the Communist Party' had been relinquished. The idea of a Soviet presidency, in fact, was a good deal older than this. It had been under discussion at the time of the adoption of the 1936 constitution; Stalin, however, declared against a presidency that could challenge the newly established Supreme Soviet and the idea made no further progress. A 'presidency' was

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11 Speaking to a working group on 19 February 1990, Gorbachev argued for a power which can react rapidly and for a strong executive mechanism. See Democratizatsiya, vol.2, no.2 (spring 1994), p.331.
considered again in 1964 when Khrushchev proposed it to the commission that was preparing a new constitution. A chapter was drafted accordingly but the discussion lapsed when Khrushchev himself was forced out of office later in the year.\textsuperscript{12} In 1985, after Gorbachev had become the General Secretary, the idea was put forward once more by two senior members of the leadership, Georgii Shakhnazarov and Vladim Medvedev. Gorbachev, however, was still committed to a system of elected Soviets and in a system of this kind there was no place for presidency.

The idea of presidential government was discussed again before and during the Nineteenth Party Conference in the summer of 1988. In this, some had argued for a return to the practice of Lenin's day when the party leader was also the head of government; others wanted to separate party and government entirely; others still favoured the introduction of Soviet presidency. But presidency, Gorbachev argued, would "concentrate too much power in the hands of a single person", and in the end it was decided to introduce a different position, a Chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet, or in effect, a parliamentary speakership. The position, however, proved an unhappy compromise and the discussion continued. Andrei Sakharov suggested the direct election of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet in his

\textsuperscript{12} The institution of a presidency was also briefly considered during the discussion of the 1977 Brezhnev constitution.
election address in the spring of 1989; and in the draft constitution that he proposed later in the year he included a President of the Union of Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia, who would be elected by the population every five years and would hold “supreme power in the country, not sharing it with the leading bodies of any party”.13

It was already clear to Gorbachev’s associates that they would have to recapture the initiative on political reforms by introducing presidency as part of the larger series of changes in the structure of government. He was finally convinced of the need to move to a presidential system at the discussion with his closest advisors that took place after the second Congress of People’s Deputies in December 1989.14 The presidential option looked increasingly attractive to overcome the crisis of governability in Russia. At the third Russian Congress of People’s Deputies in May-June 1990, all factions had united in front of a strong leadership and with Yeltsin’s election to the post of Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet in May, a significant step was taken towards the development of presidential system in Russia. In 1990, the Russian parliament passed some 150 acts

13 See Literaturnaya Gazeta, 16 August 1989, p.10.
affecting virtually every aspect of Russian life. Even then Yeltsin insisted that crisis of executive power remained acute.\textsuperscript{15}

One of the problems Russia faced immediately after the break-up was that after Yeltsin’s election his conservative opponents began to have second thoughts about the merits of a presidential system. They were outmanoeuvered, however, by the opportunity offered by Gorbachev’s referendum on 17 March 1991 about the desirability of a renewed Union. In this referendum, second question was added to the ballot in Russia asking ‘Do you consider necessary the introduction of the post of the President of the RSFSR elected by universal suffrage?’ Russians voted by the same margin for the Union and a directly elected President of Russia.\textsuperscript{16}

At the third (emergency) Russian Congress of People’s Deputies in March-April 1991, Yeltsin turned the tables on his opponents who had sought to curb his powers and emerged a candidate for a strengthened presidency. For the Congress and Yeltsin, the day proved decisive. The conservative bloc “Communists of Russia” with their allies in the Rossiya Faction tried to keep the question of the presidency off the agenda. However, the balance shifted in Yeltsin’s favour and not only were the preparations for the constitutional changes affecting the powers of the


presidency accepted and arrangements made for the election on 12 June, but Congress on its last day on 5 April 1991 accepted Yeltsin’s surprise demand for immediate power to issue presidential decrees within the framework of existing legislation to hasten economic and political reforms in Russia. The necessary amendments were made to the constitution at the fourth Russian Congress of People’s Deputies in May 1991 extending the powers of the presidency and accepting the law on the election of the President. The Supreme Soviet meanwhile was asked to prepare a law on the Presidency as well as an amendment that might be necessary to the Russian constitution. The changes concerned were duly approved on 24 April 1991 and by the full Congress on 22 May 1991. It was agreed that the candidates for the Russian Presidency must be citizens aged between 35 and 65 and that they could hold the office for no more than two-five year terms. Nominations could be made by political parties, trade unions and public organizations or by other groupings that were able to collect 100,000 signatures in their support. The President, for his part, could not be a deputy or a member of a political party; he enjoyed the right of legislative initiative, reported to the Congress once a year and appointed the Premier with the consent of the Supreme Soviet. Yeltsin’s own standing was strengthened further when he headed the resistance to the attempted coup of August 1991 (Gorbachev by then losing his extraordinary powers).

Yeltsin’s dominant role in leading resistance to the coup seemed to demonstrate the effectiveness of presidential forms of power. As an aide of Yeltsin put it, ‘a Parliamentary Republic appeared unsuited for our severe social climatic conditions’. Yeltsin’s decisive victory with 57 per cent of vote provided him with the popular legitimacy that helped him withstand the August coup. He was no longer simply Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet but President of Russia, with an appeal and legitimacy derived from the mandate he had received from the people.19 Victory in Russia’s first direct elections to the presidency allowed Yeltsin to free himself from the Russian parliament, a mandate finally to deal with the power usurped by the CPSU. Yeltsin owed much of his authority to the fact that he had been directly elected unlike Gorbachev, who had been chosen – in the first instance by the Soviet parliamentarians. Nevertheless, Yeltsin and his entourage were all aware that there had to be a legal framework and limits to the presidential power. While they defended strong executive power, they also recognized the need for some separation of powers to avoid a return to a new form of despotism as a result of which Russia would once again be excluded, as they put it, from civil society.20 The President had realized that he had to govern through a Congress of People’s

19 See Sakwa, n.17, p.47.
20 See ibid.
Deputies that had also been chosen by a popular vote, and which was able to claim the same right to represent the will of the electorate.\textsuperscript{21} The Congress had initially been supportive, electing Yeltsin its chairman, approving a declaration of Russian sovereignty in June 1991 and then granting him emergency powers the following November. Yeltsin, however, used his position to launch a programme of radical economic reform under the guidance of Yegor Gaidar, who was acting Prime Minister from June 1991. The parliamentary resistance to his programme strengthened as the consequences of those reforms became clearer. Gaidar was forced to stand down at the seventh Congress in December 1992. At the eighth Congress in March 1993, the President was stripped of his emergency powers and ordered to act in accordance with the constitution of 1977, in terms of which the Congress was itself, the ‘supreme body of state power’ and the President, merely the Chief Official. Yeltsin’s supporters had already talked of emergency measures and on 20 March 1993 the President called publicly for a special form of administration under which the Congress would be unable to challenge his decrees. The Congress hurriedly convened for an emergency session, voted to impeach the President but not by the necessary two-thirds majority; the outcome was an

\textsuperscript{21} See White, n.14, p.45.
agreement that a referendum, originally approved the previous December, would be held on 25 April 1993 to decide who would rule Russia. 22

Yeltsin’s emphasis on the strengthening of presidency in Russia was not a new phenomenon. He had begun the year 1991 with a public position that sought to reconcile Russian autonomy with maintenance of a confederal variant of the USSR. On 17 March 1991, he had called upon the voters to endorse Gorbachev’s referendum on behalf of a ‘renewed union’. To quote him:

I support the Union. But only one that the republics would join of their own free will and not by force... Even today there are several republics that have declared their intention to secede from it. The only power that is strong is power based on the support of the people. Therefore, we believe that the President of Russia should be elected not by a narrow circle but by all citizens of the Republic, by the whole people. The introduction of the post of President will make it possible to strengthen the sovereignty of the Republic...... The election of a President of Russia by means of a vote of all the people is only the start of strengthening of executive power in the Republic... I view your ‘Yes’ (vote) as support for reforms in our Republic, as your personal contribution towards strengthening Russian statehood, which will enable Russia to be a full participant in a renewed Union of sovereign states. 23


Thus, the practical dilemmas of reconciling Soviet statehood with the growing demands for republican sovereignty or independence set the stage for a competition among ambitious politicians. That competition created incentives for Yeltsin repeatedly to trump Gorbachev's positions in his debate. Yeltsin's personal ambitions and evolving beliefs, in turn, influenced the extent to which he upped the ante and his determination to push for a very strong Russian executive.24

The referendum, in any event, did little to resolve the continuing impasse. Voters were asked if they had confidence in Yeltsin as Russian President and if they approved the policies that the government had been pursuing; they were also asked if they favoured early presidential or parliamentary elections. The turnout was a respectable 64 per cent. Of those who voted, 58.7 per cent supported the President and his policies; as many as 49.5 per cent favoured early presidential elections and a much more substantial 67.2 per cent early parliamentary elections. But in both cases this figure fell short of the majority of the electorate that was necessary for constitutional changes. For Yeltsin and his supporters this was a verdict that justified pressing ahead with a constitution that provided for a presidential republic with a much more limited legislature and by the end of the year they had attained their objective. It was inevitable, Yeltsin

24 See ibid.
reflected later, that at the end of the Soviet period there would be a conflict between 'two systems of power'. "The Congress", he complained, "tended just to reject, just to destroy. Too many deputies engaged in cheap populism and open demagoguery ... and in the final analysis, the restoration of a totalitarian Soviet-Communist system".25

For parliamentarians and their speaker, Ruslan Khasbulatov, the issue was a rather different one, whether government should be accountable to elected representatives and whether a broadly representative parliament should be allowed to act as a counterbalance to what would otherwise be overwhelmingly powerful executive. For Khasbulatov, Russian history and then Marxism-Leninism had combined to exaggerate the power of a single 'Tsar'. It was essential in these circumstances to establish a secured division of powers and then to develop the role of parliament as a representative organ of the whole society. Parliament, in particular, could serve as a counterweight to the executive, exercising its influence over public spending, legislation and the composition of government as parliaments did in other countries. Opening the Russian parliament in March 1992, Khasbulatov accused the government of an attack on democracy and complained that individual ministers had a dismissive

attitude towards representative institutions in general. He insisted that government should be accountable to the Congress and Supreme Soviet rather than to the collective Rasputin, that surrounded the President.

These differences, in the end, were resolved by force, when parliament was dissolved by presidential decree on 21 September 1993 and then seized by the Russian Army on 4 October 1993 following an attempt by parliamentary supporters to occupy the Kremlin and establish their own authority. Yeltsin had produced his own draft of a new constitution in April 1993, on the eve of the referendum, and constitutional conference which met in June-July with a number of Deputies in attendance produced version that was in Yeltsin's view neither presidential nor parliamentary.

Yeltsin, however, predicted a 'decisive battle' between the supporters and opponents of his programme of reforms, and in the different circumstances that obtained after the suppression of what he described as a parliamentary insurrection, it was rather more centralist draft that was published in November 1993 and approved at a referendum the following month. There was, in fact, some doubt if the constitution itself was constitutional.* Under the law on the referendum a majority of

* Whereas the new constitution was definitely presidentialist, the electorate was not. In a Public Opinion Survey conducted during this period, only a quarter said they believed the President should be more important than the parliament, and a similar proportion favoured parliament being more important. The largest group thought the two should have equal powers, see figure 1.1. in page 105.
the electorate, not just the voters, had to indicate their support, and there was some evidence that the turnout had in any case fallen below 50 per cent. This became Russia's first post-communist constitution and its final adoption in April 1993 appeared to have shifted Russian politics decisively towards what an Izvestia journalist described as a 'Super-Presidential Republic'. In Russia, there is no clear mechanism for smooth succession in the event of the President's death or incapacitation. Leadership succession has historically been a bone of Russian politics and it was one of the most
significant source of instability during the Soviet period. The absence of vice presidency under the current Russian constitution is a glaring institutional flaw that guarantees the persistence of a high-level of political uncertainty.

The experience of Russian presidentialism in its early years suggested a number of points that were general to the presidential systems, but also a number of features that were distinctively Russian. One of the strengths of the presidential system was that it had given Russia at least a temporary stability. Yeltsin represented a clear choice in favour of 'reform', 'democracy' even if the President was not always true to such values himself. In this sense he had allowed Russians to choose the political future that corresponded to his wishes. The Russian Presidency reflected long standing tradition of a single ruler, a 'Tsar' but it also reflected the particular circumstances of early post-communist Russia and the search for some form of political order.

The likely consequences of a Russian presidency were a little more remote, but they provided further evidence of the 'perils of presidentialism'. The existence of an elected President with an exceptionally wide range of powers, in conjunction with an elected parliament, exposed at least three serious difficulties in this connection.26

26 See White in Taras n.2, pp.38-61.
All presidential systems depend heavily upon the person of the President. The Russian system, particularly during Yeltsin's tenure, depended more than many others and in terms not simply of the President's policy choices but also of his physical health and personality. The 1993 constitution added to these concerns by abolishing the position of the vice President.\textsuperscript{27} Under the constitution, the President relinquishes office ahead of time in the event of his resignation, impeachment or "inability to perform the duties of his office for reasons of health". In these circumstances the powers of the President pass on a temporary basis to the Prime Minister, and new elections have to be called within three months (Article 92). But who was to decide if the President was totally unable to exercise his powers. The President himself, by signing a decree or the Prime Minister or a special conference of doctors? Including whom? or perhaps, a presidential assistant - but which one? As long as there were no answers to such questions, there was a 'real possibility' that the President could be isolated from power and the country governed in his name by powerful "backstage figures"\textsuperscript{28} Yeltsin himself complained that as soon as (he went) on holiday, speculation (began) about (his) health. But there were many such absences, and several occasions on which the President's health

\textsuperscript{27} In the post-communist world only Bulgaria, Korea, Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan retained a position of this kind.

\textsuperscript{28} See Moskovskie Novosti, 75 (1995), p.5.
was acknowledged to be the reason; and it was not surprising that every visit to the hospital was accompanied by arguments and rumours that undermined his authority.29

The complex and unsatisfactory relationship between the President and the Parliament was a much more general feature of presidential systems. The December 1993 constitution was intended to resolve any tension in favour of the President. It certainly endowed him with extensive powers to nominate the Prime Minister, the government, to dissolve the Duma if it repeatedly refused to endorse his choices and to issue his own decrees with the force of law. In 1994 and 1995 alone Yeltsin put more than a hundred draft laws to parliament, and vetoed more than a third of the draft laws that were submitted for his signature after the Federal Assembly had approved them. Indeed, the President’s frequent recourse to decrees, appeals, constitutional messages and statements in the mass media made him appeal a source of legislation in his own right, a clear violation of the principle of separation of powers.

In the backdrop of the above discussion of the evolution of the institution of presidency, we take up an analysis of the powers and functions of the President under the Constitution of 1993 in the following pages.

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IV. POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE PRESIDENT UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF 1993

The Constitution of 1993 enumerates extensive powers for the President which makes him even more powerful than the President of the United States of America. Chapter IV of the 1993 constitution deals with the institution of presidency of the Russian Federation. Russian Federation through the constitution of 1993 created a presidential form of government in Russia where Article 80 makes the President the head of the state and the guarantor of the constitution and of the human and civil rights and liberties. In accordance with the procedures established by the constitution of the Russian Federation, he takes measures to protect the sovereignty of the federation, its independence, its state integrity and he also ensures the coordinated functioning and interaction of all bodies of state power. He is elected for a period of 4 years by the citizens of the Russian Federation by secret ballot and on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage. The procedure for electing the President of the Russian Federation is determined by federal law.

Articles 83-93 deal with broad and exhaustive powers of the President, which make him really powerful. According to Article 83 of the constitution, the President of the Russian Federation;

(a) appoints the Chairman of the government of the Russian Federation with the consent of the State Duma;
(b) makes decisions on dismissing the government of the Russian Federation;

(c) presents to the State Duma a candidate for appointment to the position of the Chairman of the central bank of the Russian Federation;

(d) acting on a proposal by the Chairman appoints the federal ministers.

(e) presents to the Council of Federation, candidates for appointments to positions as judges of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, and also a candidate for Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation; submits a proposal on relieving the Russian Federation Prosecutor General of his duties, appoints judges for the federal court;

(f) confirms the military doctrine of the Russian Federation; and

(g) appoints the Supreme Command of the Russian Federation Armed Forces and relieves its members of their duties.

According to Article 84, the President of the Russian Federation:

a. schedules elections for the State Duma in accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation and federal laws;

b. dissolves the State Duma, in instances and according to procedures stipulated by the Constitution of the Russian Federation;

c. schedules referendums in accordance with the procedure established by federal constitutional laws;

d. submits draft laws to the State Duma;

e. signs and promulgates federal laws.

The President again has the right to suspend acts of bodies of executive powers of the members of the Russian Federation if these acts are at variance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the federal laws. The President also exercises the leadership in Russian Federation
foreign policy and he is the supreme commander in chief of the Armed Forces.

The President has the power to declare martial law throughout the Russian Federation or in specific localities, giving immediate notification of his action to the Council of the Federation and the State Duma. Under circumstances and in accordance with the procedures stipulated by the federal constitutional law, the President of the Russian Federation may introduce a state of emergency throughout the Russian Federation or in specific localities, giving immediate notification of his action to the Council of the Federation and the State Duma. Article 90 empowers the President to issue decrees and directives, which are binding throughout the Russian Federation. However, these decrees and directives may not be at variance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation or the federal laws.

The procedure for the removal of the President is made more complicated. The President of the Russian Federation may be removed from office by the Council of Federation only on the basis of an accusation that charges the President with high treason or the commission of another grave crime, an accusation brought by the State Duma and confirmed by the findings of the Russian Federation Constitutional Court. The proposal
must be adopted by two-thirds vote of the total number of members of each chamber and initiative of at least one-third of the deputies to the State-Duma, and there must be a finding by a special commission formed by the State D

The decision by the Council of the Federation on removing the President of the Russian Federation must be adopted no later than three months after the State Duma brings an accusation against the President. If failed, the accusation against the President is considered to have been dropped.

The system established by Yeltsin’s constitution, in fact, can most succinctly be described as “super-presidentialism”. However, the Russian system is not a separation of powers system on American model. Law making and law executing powers are fused, since the President can legislate *Ukaz* (decrees). Moreover, the checks and balances work solely for the President. He may veto legislature and dissolve an obstructionist assembly, but the legislature can not block his decrees. The greatest technical deficiency of the new constitution lies in the lack of any procedure for resolving conflicts between parliamentary laws and the

30 See Article 93 of the Constitution.

presidential decrees because the constitution does not clearly delineate mutually exclusive spheres of competence. Article 90 says that presidential decrees can not contradict federal laws. But there is no practical way for the legislature to overrule the President in case his Ukazi contradicts their laws. Such questions can be referred to the Constitutional Court (Article 125), but the court is unlikely to have political strength or independence to exercise the ultimate power to decide the future of such laws. For this reason, the system established by Yeltsin is described as "superpresidentialism".

V GROWTH OF HEGEMONIC PRESIDENCY IN RUSSIA

During 1993-99 President Yeltsin maintained his power in the midst of considerable political and economic turbulence, but the team he led was subject to constant recomposition. The evolving coalition spanned a wide range of political interests, including long term associates from the Soviet period such as Yuri Petrov, Perestroika generation academics and politicians.

Considered from a policy perspective, the history of this changing team reflected a complex and dynamic balancing of reformist, centrist, and even opposition ideological orientations.


33 See ibid.
Certainly the present constitution makes it extremely difficult for the parliament to remove the President. There are large swaths of executive power where the parliament's influence is diminished because they are directly overseen by the President. In his capacity as guarantor of national security, chief of the armed forces, and architect of the main directions of foreign policy, the President is directly responsible for the "power ministries" (defense, interior, foreign affairs, and the successor agencies to the KGB) which former acting Prime Minister Gaider had called "presidential ministries".

The 1993 Russian constitution formally conferred on the federal President extensive decision-making powers. Boris Yeltsin assertively used all these powers, while adversaries, even if highly critical of his policies could show little ability or willingness to constrain his actions. The contemporary institution of presidency and executive branch constitute a large pyramid of power, which dwarfs that of all other institutions and branches. The executive branch is powerful not only because the President's political position is legally superior to that of all other institutions, but because the President enjoys considerable institutional independence and freedom of manoeuvre.34 The President has an almost

unrestrained ability to direct the decision-making process. Moreover, he is supported by a large set of agencies and officials which link him to all federal and major sub-federal institutions and actors.

Under the 1993 constitution, the President defines the basic directions of the domestic and foreign policy of the state and also represents the Russian Federation domestically and internationally. The President enjoys direct influence over the government through the supervision of the Prime Minister and other high level ministers. He has the power to appoint and remove the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and other federal ministers, as well as dismiss the government overall. Indeed, he has some influence over the composition of minister's staffs. This could be seen from the way Prime Ministers were selected and sacked in quick successions during Yeltin's presidential years. The President also nominates other top federal officials including the State Bank Chairman, members of the Constitutional Court and Supreme Court and members of the Security Council. He initiates legislation, reports to legislature on the government's domestic and foreign policy, while in certain conditions he can dissolve the State Duma. He can call referendums, while as commander in chief, he can introduce a state of emergency. Much policy making occurs through presidential decrees, which have the force of law and which allowed Yeltsin to set policy unilaterally in many areas. Presidential
decision-making powers also extend to include dispute mediation between federal and regional bodies and the voiding of actions by regional executive bodies. The procedures for impeaching the President are cumbersome, time consuming, and involve numerous top federal offices.

While the hegemonic presidency is grounded in wide ranging unilateral decision making prerogatives, it is also based upon a large and growing presidential administration which includes over forty advisory bodies, policy making and policy implementing agencies, and a massive support staff. The centrality of the federal executive to all aspects of the decision making process encouraged expansion of agencies comprising the presidency. These included the Presidential Council, Information Administration (April 1994), the Security Council etc.

A hallmark of the Yeltsin presidency had been a constant rotation of personnel within executive branch position as political circumstances and policy needs necessitated. During the regime's first two years, politicians advancing the shock therapy programme assumed a decisive position within the governing coalition with most key policy posts held by reformers. The broad contours of the Yeltsin's radical reform programme emerged at this time, with Gaidar as the Prime Minister and other presidential advisers notably Gennady Burbulis, Yuri Petrov. By the spring of 1992 mounting pressure from the parliament forced personnel changes to
broaden the coalition base of Yeltsin. The deepening conflict with the Parliament led to further accommodation with centrists by the end of 1992. In particular, Chernomyrdin replaced Gaidar as Prime Minister. He was known to favour greater state control and a slower pace of reform, but his appointment was balanced by the selection of a leading reformer, Boris Fedorov, as Deputy Prime Minister for financial and economic policy.

This set of personnel changes, reflective of changes which continued till Yeltsin stepped down from power revealed a strategy for bolstering the Yeltsin coalition's standing with powerful institutions and political interests: the use of personnel rotation to balance apparently counterpoised institutional, sectoral and ideological interests within the governing coalition.35

During his last few years in power President Yeltsin's leadership had been inconsistent on both substantive and procedural matters, including vision, priorities, ambition and effort. He had periodically compromised with the legislature, including the former Supreme Soviet and with the sub-national governments, including the most autonomy minded republics. He had influenced government officials directly through political negotiation and indirectly through public opinion. But at times Yeltsin used few of his

35 See Wallerstan, n. 34, p.52.
enumerated powers, even vis-a-vis his opponents. He flaunted the most rudimentary principles of the separation of powers, and federalism.

Significantly, presidential patronage and loyalty to the President are strongly supported in the present constitution. Yeltsin exercised virtually unlimited powers to staff the national executive and judicial bodies as well as, until 1996, the upper house of the legislature, which consists of many leading regional administrators directly elected by their constituencies but initially appointed by the President (especially Articles 77, 78, 83, 96, 117, 121, 128). For example, if the State Duma expresses no confidence in the government the President can either dissolve the State Duma or 'dismiss' the government (Article 117.3). The President appoints the Prime Minister with merely the consent of the State Duma, and if this consent is withheld three times, the President can dissolve the State Duma and appoint the Prime Minister of his choice (Articles 83b, 109.1, 111.4, and 117). He can also call for fresh election of the Duma. The President not only 'presides' at cabinet meetings but can dismiss the whole government without the consent of either branch of parliament (Articles 83b and 117.2). Furthermore, the independence of the judiciary is seriously undermined by many corrupt judges and the intimidation, even murders, of honest judges, as well as by the power to 'terminate' or 'suspend' judge under 'federal law'
which the President could easily decree or either chamber of parliament could legislate, (Articles 120.1 & 121.2).36

Chief executives and legislators exercise self-restraint, especially in parliamentary democracies, because they know that their party will eventually fall out of favour with the electorate and will benefit from a quid pro-quo with competing parties. In Russia, however, neither party discipline nor other governmental bodies can effectively restrain the President's decree - issuing authority under the present constitution. Two Russian commentators observed about the separation of powers. The constitution, according to them:

will not only de-sovietise Russia but also codify the supremacy of presidential power over representative power. The (constitution) virtually precludes the possibility of forming a coalition government a practice that many democratic countries use to attain civic harmony. Emphasis is placed not on having various political parties represented in the cabinet - especially since Russia does not even have real political parties yet - but on having a unified, functional body that acts in accordance with the President's political will.37

For these reasons, the system established by Yeltsin's constitution was described as a super - presidential system.38 Paradoxically, swollen

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38 See Holmes, n.32, p.123.
presidential powers were tailored to fit a man who had repeatedly said that he did not want to run for office again. Many of Yeltsin's supporters claimed that such a system would enhance political stability. Plebisctry Caisarism, as is well known, can produce incalculable results if there occurs a sudden mid-term death or incapacitation of the leader. Since the office of the presidency occurred in an unique manner (at the backdrop of a power struggle between President and parliament), such elementary problems were ignored. The new constitution created a single function system designed expressly to solve the most pressing problem of the last two years: legislative - executive deadlock. To this extent, the Russian people ratified a retrospectively crafted constitution. Its framers decided to punish the new parliament (elected under presumably democratic conditions in the new Russia) for the sins of old parliament. (a hold over from an entirely different country).

The flip side of the growth of super-presidentialism as an institution, therefore, is fig leaf parliamentarism.\(^{39}\)

Another feature of the Russian institutional development has been a constant fluctuation of the popular support rendered to its institutions like presidency or parliament. Mikhail Gorbachev's popularity steadily declined

\(^{39}\) See ibid, p.124.
over time, particularly after mid-1990 when Yeltsin emerged as a serious alternative. Further, after the events in the Baltic states in January 1991 and the subsequent resignation speech of foreign minister Edward Shevardnadze which labeled the Soviet President as a dictator, there was a steep decline in the popularity of this office. Yeltsin's popularity suffered from a similar downward spiral that influenced the evolution of this office. (See Figure 1.2).

At the start of 1992, when the programme of rapid economic reform was launched, Yeltsin was considerably less popular than he had been in the aftermath of the coup. Before August, when Yeltsin had only limited power, he was able to assign blame for unpopular policies elsewhere. Inevitably as soon as he gained decision-making power, his actions were unable to meet the aspiration of all Russians.

The end of 1992 saw something of a personal humiliation for the President when the seventh Congress of People's Deputies refused to accept Gaidar, Yeltsin's nominee for Prime Minister, and instead appointed Chernomyrdin, a much less radical figure. The conflicts with the eighth and ninth congresses in March 1993 over the powers that should be granted to
Figure 1.2
The Declining Popularity of Yeltsin

Source: VTsIOM, 38 nationwide stratified random sample surveys with about 2,000 interviews each.

Note: Regression line values: $R^2 = .63$, slope = .042. Rating scale: 1–10.
the executive and legislative branches, culminating in Yeltsin's declaration of 'special rule', parliament's attempts to impeach the President and then the referendum of 25 April saw a rise of sympathy for Yeltsin. His action to try to end the situation of dual power and political gridlock was popular. However, the aftermath of the October crisis when the White House (Russia's Parliamentary building) was bombarded, saw a noticeable decline in the presidential rating. Public opinion approved the initial decision to dissolve the Russian parliament. A typical national survey carried out in October 1993, found that 53 per cent approved of this and just one in three disapproved. However, the subsequent bloodshed was not acceptable. Asked 'How would you evaluate the storming of the 'White House' was the action necessary', should it have been avoided, or was this action unacceptable in principle, just 14 per cent of Russians thought the act to be necessary, while 44 per cent felt that it should have been avoided, and 37 per cent said that it was utterly unacceptable. This blow to the President was reinforced by the political setback for Yeltsin in the election of December 1993, which the calmer political atmosphere of the first half of 1994 did little to reverse.40 Further, the erratic performances of Yeltsin

during 1998-2000 showed a growing dissatisfaction with this institution and the ultimate stepping down from power.

In the context of falling production, high inflation and rising unemployment, crime, social tension and continuing concern about the President's health, the overall stability of the institution of presidency depended on many other factors important than these structural explanations. Perhaps important as rational and structural explanations in the consideration of how effectively Yeltsin performed the function associated with the role as a Head of the State, a sense that Yeltsin embodied typical Russian qualities - both good and bad was always a central part of his appeal.41

Whatever be the case, the national polls that asked about voting intention or trust in Yeltsin or presidential institution as the most popular institution, it was not uncommon for more people to say that they would vote for nobody or did not trust any institution.42

-- Russia at the End of Yeltsin Presidency

Boris Yeltsin's sudden resignation as president of Russia on 31 December 1999 and his choice of Vladimir Putin as the successor to power

41 See ibid., p.94.
42 See ibid., p.96.
provides a fitting moment to look back on his performance and legacy as
the first President of post-Soviet Russia.

During 1987-1991, Yeltsin established himself as the hero of the
anti-communist opposition to Soviet rule. After his overwhelming electoral
victories of March 1991, his authority at home and abroad had become
legendary. He had evolved into a charismatic leader of mythic proportions.
His success during 1990-91 in decoupling the concept of ‘Russian’ from
that of ‘Soviet’ as well as his insistence in March 1991 that Russia choose a
president by popular election for the first time was both intellectually and
politically inspired. In this sense, he proved to be a successful President
who achieved much through his extraordinary political traits. The
evaluation of the institution of presidency would therefore be a positive one
where he is credited with having pursued policies that included:

♦ prevention of communist and rightwing nationalist reaction and
territorial disintegration of the Russian Federation during his years in
power;

♦ foundation of a new political and economic order based on principles of
liberal democracy, civil liberties, competitive elections and market
economy; and

♦ assisting the integration of Russia into the western international
organisations.

However, Yeltsin’s enfeebled and erratic performance during 1997-
1999, coupled with the Russian financial crisis of August-September 1998
threatened to dilute this performance of 1987-1991 and to saddle his presidency with a negative evaluation of his effectiveness as a President and leader. Given the timing of the policies intentionally pursued by Yeltsin as the first President of new Russia, it is too early to render a general verdict on his presidency, for it is not yet clear whether the current travails will destroy or reverse the major projects of his presidency. There were many circumstances and he had opportunities to do things differently. Indeed, it was Yeltsin himself who rendered a precise verdict on his leadership of Russia. Announcing his resignation on 31 December 1999 he said:

I want to ask you for forgiveness, because many of our hopes have not come true, because what we thought would be easy turned out to be painfully difficult. I ask you to forgive me for not fulfilling some hopes of those people who believe that we would be able to jump from the grey, stagnating, totalitarian past into a bright, rich and civilised future in one go.

I myself believed in this. But it could not be done in one fell swoop. In some respects, I too was naïve. Some of the problems were too complex. We struggled on through mistakes and failures.43

While Yeltsin destroyed the communist and imperial system and perhaps prevented their restoration now or in the near future, the alternative system that he created is far from the ideal of market. In sum, Yeltsin was a brilliant revolutionary leader during 1987-1991. Thereafter, he was

successful in some policy areas, unsuccessful in others. He manipulated his accumulated executive authority but proved to be exceptional in keeping his opponents off-balance and consolidated his power. If things improve in Russia, he may be credited with great accomplishments than he is credited with. If things go haywire, however, he is likely to be condemned for having created a fragile system at an exorbitant cost.

- Putin’s Ascendancy to Russia’s Presidency

Vladimir Putin’s election as President of Russia was hailed as the start of a new era in Russian politics. He stepped into the Kremlin once Boris Yeltsin resigned prematurely in the wake of a melt down of Russian economy and polity that began in May 1998.44

A careful analysis of the campaign and the election process of 26 March 2000 presidential election shows that Putin drew support from a variety of bases. A strong initiative group of 110 members comprising of deputies of St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly, Sergain Mronov and Igor Matveyev, St. Petersburg Writers Union Chairman Mikhali Chulaki, the

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44 Putin’s personality is little known, but whatever is known (through his colleagues) of this 47 years old Leningrader, the Security Service Officer, shows him to be a very private person, secretive, rarely thaws, but with few, and is ‘tough, cynical and ambitious’ with colossal capacity for work; bit of a snob, and values technology for professionalism. For a profile of Vladimir Putin, see “Vladimir Putin: The Road from St. Pete to Moscow”, Moscow News, nos.1-2 (19-25 January 2000)
Unity movement north west division leader Boris Gzyzlov, St Petersburg’s State University Chancellor Lyndmilla Verbitskaya, Mining Institute Dean Vladimir Ltnhenko as well as Directors of leading enterprises such as Krishin Efteergsyntez (krishin refinery), Glynozen (black soil), Joint stock company and Lenteransgaz (Gas transportation Company) supported his candidature. The parties which supported Putin’s candidature were All Russia Movement of Yakovlev, Our Home is Russia of Victor Chernomyrdin, Democratic Russia, Common Cause leaders, Peasants Party of Russia and Free Democrats. Ex-Prime Minister, Primakov also made an announcement that the Fatherland Movement would take a positive attitude towards Putin. In the presidential election of 26 March 2000, Putin led a comfortable majority with 52.64 per cent out of the 95.51 per cent of the votes counted. Communist candidate Grennady Zyuganov was second with 29.34 per cent and liberal Grigory Yavlinsky, was third with 5.85 per cent. The other eight candidates lagged far behind.

Putin’s victory came as a relief to many Russians after the rule of former President Boris Yeltsin, whose unpredictability, poor health and allegations of corruption within his family contributed to his political demise towards the end of 1999. Putin is said to have won the hearts of

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Russians craving for a strong leader and law and order. This is the reason for his comfortable win in the first round itself. In all ways, the second President of Russia represented the sole choice of Russians for he is viewed as having everything which his predecessor lacked. Whereas Yeltsin was considered to be old, ill, impulsive, unpredictable, Putin is imaged as young, robust, pragmatic, reserved and self-disciplined. Thus the convincing victory of Putin was a vote in favour of putting an end to chaos, corruption and economic decline that marked the eight year rule of Boris Yeltsin. At the same time this was a vote against returning to a communist rule.

Putin has marked the start of his presidency with a series of dramatic gestures and long standing promises. High on Putin’s agenda has been his concern for the Chechnya problem. While the Russian army is still striving to subjugate the place by force, the President is struggling to explore political solutions in order to avoid the lingering problem of terrorism. While avoiding a hint to Yeltsin’s legacy in his public appearances, Putin maintained that central power under Yeltsin was feeble. Some regional leaders, he claimed, “forgot that there was a president”. He also viewed that until he became Prime Minister, Chechnya was handled with ‘amateurism’ and was left to fester to such a point that it became a deadly danger. His visit to Chechnya on the eve of new year was a gesture to improve the
situation in Chechnya. Rebutting the suggestion that he should not focus on the issue he said:

I am absolutely convinced that we will solve no problems—neither economic, military nor social—in the conditions where the state is falling apart. Therefore, I believe that there is nothing unusual in the fact that we are now currently attaching such an importance and paying such attention to the problem of fighting terrorism. We must solve this problem once and for all. This is why I made a trip there.46

He also issued directions for normalisation of social and political situation in Chechnya by supplying electricity to the Shali and Urus Martan administration districts and to the whole of Chechen plains not later than 15 March 2000. He ordered that by 1 September 2000 schools, oil institutes and universities should open.

State sponsored corruption and cynical manipulation of power by some officials including Yeltsin’s daughter Tatyana Dyachenko, his one time staff Valentin Yumashev and a number of powerful financiers including Boris Berezovsky is an issue which the new President has to deal with tough hand. After his election, Putin maintained that he was bringing in as investigators, former KGB colleagues who are untarnished and have no connection with corruption.47

46 Ibid., p.44.
47 Putin as told to Ted Koppel on ABC’s Nightline on 31 March 2000, quoted in Time, 3 April 2000, p.41.
Vladimir Putin campaigned on a platform of restoring strong state
governed by law and building a social oriented market economy. In the
field of foreign policy, he preached putting Russia’s relation with other
countries on a business-like, pragmatic footing to help the economic revival
of Russia.\textsuperscript{48} For the ‘near abroad’, he wanted that the CIS should integrate.
In a CIS council meeting he discussed the free trade zone, which was not
on agenda and set up an ‘expert group’ from among representatives of the
commonwealth countries to perfect free trade mechanisms. The Russian
military doctrine is also in for further change and in this a reemphasis on
the nuclear arms has been announced. A foreign policy reorientation with a
clear westernized slant is also high on Putin’s agenda. He also foresaw an
expansion of NATO with Russia’s willingness to join it.\textsuperscript{49}

One of the important issues to be addressed by Putin is the issue of
economic reform. Russia’s economy has shrunk almost every year since the
collapse of communism. Output has fallen by about 53 per cent in ten
years. The living standard has fallen for the vast majority of the population.

\textsuperscript{48} In an interview just after his election Mr. Putin said that his ultimate goal was to raise
people’s well being by promoting massive investments into Russia’s aging industries, which
in turn calls for political stability. There will be no major investment until we have a solid
political system, stability and a strong government defending the market and creating
favourable conditions for investments. See “Can Putin Turn Russia Around”, \textit{The Hindu}, 2
April 2000 and ‘Russia on the Threshold of the Millennium’ at Website

\textsuperscript{49} In an interview to BBC Television’s ‘Breakfast with David Frank’ program on Sunday 5
March 2000, Putin clearly identified his priorities in foreign policy. He maintained: “I
cannot conceive our country isolated from Europe”. When asked if it was possible that
Russia would join the (NATO) alliance, the President replied: “Why not”?
Two areas which need immediate reform are tax and land. The enactment of a new and simpler tax code and a law to enable easy buying and selling of land are long overdue.\(^\text{50}\) Also Putin’s biggest and clearest test is in the judicial field. Several big cases are pending against oligarchs. Under Yeltsin they were safe from the courts at home and abroad. Now the challenge lies for Putin to bring them to book.

With all these challenges, Putin moved on to form a balanced cabinet that would co-operate him in these challenges. On 21 May 2000 he declared the formation of the government to be virtually complete and this was a positive message to society. To quote him:

> The formation of the new government is almost complete. I would like to thank (Prime Minister) Mikhail Mikhaylovich (Kasyanov) for his hard work in this area. It is important from the point of view of organizing our joint work, and it is important as a positive message to society. I want to express my hope that we will work long and fruitfully as a team.\(^\text{51}\)

The make-up of the Russia’s new cabinet suggests that the President has tried to balance interests of rival financial clans as he concentrated on tightening the grip on provinces. Putin appears to have opted in favour of keeping intact the system of checks and balances set up by his predecessor, Yeltsin. “The Family” including the Kremlin Chief of staff, Alexander Voloshin, Yeltsin’s daughter Tatyana Dyachenko, Boris Berezovsky,

\(^{50}\) See “Vladimir Putin: 100 Days and Four Years Later” in *Moscow News*, no.12, March 29-14 April 2000.

\(^{51}\) See *BCC Summary of World Broadcast*, 23 May 2000, SU/3847 (Third Series).
Roman Abramovich and Alexander Mamut have managed to take key posts in the new cabinet. The new cabinet also includes Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, the Interior Minister Vladimir Rushailo, the Atomic Energy Minister Yevgeny Adamov and the Railway Minister Nikolai Aksyonenko. However, “The Family” has lost control over the important Energy Ministry with its head Vicktor Kalyuzhny replaced by Alexander Garvin.52

Thus, we see that in his first few months of executive presidency, the President finds himself at the intersection of general waves of expectations. The first wave which had been building up in society for a long time is the demand for an effective and responsible political leadership. The second wave is the hopes and expectations for a just ruler. After years of turmoil, it is perfectly obvious that people have much expectations from Putin. He has already made much headway in one area: restoring Russians’ faith in themselves. His blunt, occasionally coarse, style and energetic demeanors so galvanized the electorate that he swung into office in the first round itself. He seems to be symbolizing the mixed ground of reform as well as restorations and hence receiving lot of popular acclaim for that in Russia. However, the real challenge for him lies in transforming this popular mandate into tangible policy achievements and moving Russia in the direction of a strong and stable nation-state.

To sum up the discussion in this chapter we find that the Soviet system relied upon strong political executives – well entrenched within the Communist Party apparatus – to direct the massive state bureaucracy. In 1985-91, Gorbachev realized that the reform of the executive branch and of the overall political process was necessary for the realization of his programmatic goals. These policy reforms required a strong chief executive not constrained by resistant subordinate institutions. In March 1990, the formal institution of a USSR presidency was created and by the end of 1990, decision making initiative had been shifted away from the party – state apparatus and to a rejuvenated governmental executive branch and reworked system of popularly elected Soviets.

The struggles and institutional changes of the 1985-91 period resulted in the forging of a new political system with new balance of power among executive, legislative and other institutions. Later Gorbachev period institutional arrangements such as granting of extra-ordinary decision making powers to the President, down-grading of the Council (renamed cabinet) of ministers, the institution of Presidential advisory bodies such as Presidential Council etc. were intended to help the political executive cope with mounting political challenges. However, the heightened authority of regional and local officials and the growing momentum of power decentralization and democratization led to the ultimate break up of the
USSR. In the post-Soviet Russian republic, the developments in 1991-93 underscored the need for a strong executive leadership. Yeltsin brought a commanding presence and considerable political authority to his position as the de facto successor to Gorbachev. However, the ineffectiveness of the regime's economic reform programme bolstered the position of political rivals and the struggles between Yeltsin and Khasbulatov, the parliamentary chairman, were quite pointed by late 1992. This contributed to a political gridlock that reflected not only the politics of personality but politics of fundamental system and institution – building. Such a conflict led to a crisis in late 1993 that ended only with the dissolution of parliament.

There was need for a strong executive in the midst of considerable organizational disarray for which Yeltsin Constitution of 1993 conferred formidable powers to the strong executive. The early years of Yeltsin presidency in the Russian Federation, the institution of executive operated on a system where competing actors, with independent bases of power could resist his policy preferences. Thus Yeltsin needed to use his considerable public standing and presidential prerogatives to build bridges to important political and societal elements. He exhibited considerable policy flexibility as he constantly adjusted his team and his policy line to accommodate dynamic domestic interests. In subsequent years Yeltsin’s
image shifted from being a President primarily representing 'Democratic Russia' to being a balancer of diverse reformist and centrist interests.

Finally, while the country was still trying to assess the distinct Yeltsin style of presidency, he, in a surprise move, gave way to Putin as he stepped down from power on the eve of new year 2000. Putin stands at the crossroads of a challenging centralized Russian presidency. As the new President of Russian Federation he inherits the political, socio-economic conditions requiring a strong executive. Yeltsin constitution was expected by many to be a transitional arrangement. But the smoothness with which Yeltsin has departed from the political scene and Putin has been elected as the new President of Russia, the hope of many foreseeing a shift-back of power for parliament, has been belied. Putin’s position has been further strengthened by the dominance of government supporting parties in the present parliament which is clear from a discussion on Putin’s power base. His real advantage is that, unlike Yeltsin, Putin does not have to face parliamentary adversity. Thus, the possibility of any debate in future regarding rebalancing the imbalance has been lost (for the time being at least). However, many are not so cynical about Putin’s personality. Political system in Russia seems to be attaining some degree of stability as far as these two institutions are concerned. Having discussed the institution of presidency we now move on to a discussion on the evolution of the institution of parliament.