



## REVIEW ARTICLE

### RUSSIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE

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#### ABSTRACT

Strategic Culture is the ability and the capability of the people and the society to develop power or force and to have political, social and economic will for effective use of that power. The Russian emphasizes on strategic culture. The Russian military culture has been analysed from two perpectives; (1) the traditional military culture and (2) the modern one. In both, the important aspect was the interplay of political, economic and foreign policies. The Russian military power is there to protect the people by threat or actual use of force for political purpose. The article deals with the Russian military culture after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and can it play the same role as it used to play before 1991.

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#### INTRODUCTION

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century strategic experts started talking in terms of culture and tradition related more to strategic or military thinking. Before we, further, discuss Indo - Russian relations it would be prudent to examine the respective countries strategic or military culture. War or military or strategic culture is the ability and the capability of the people and the society to develop power or force and to have political, social and economic will for effective use of that power. Basically, the term strategic culture includes social organization, tradition, shared and human behavior of a way of life, norms, values, religion, economy, the available strategic environment, psycho-culture that distinguish man from animal and symbolic culture in the form of ideology. The Russian emphasizes on the term "military" and not "strategic" culture. Russian military culture has to been seen in the form of (1) traditional military culture and (2) modern culture, particularly, after the Soviet Union's breakup in 1991. In both the cases, what is important is the interplay of political, economic and foreign policies. In Russia, military power is there to protect economic and foreign policies. In Russia, military power is there to protect the 'people' by threat or actual use of force for political purpose. Russia, as we know today, is a country in northern Eurasia.

It is a federal semi presidential republic, comprising of 83 federal states. From North West to south east, it shares borders with Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, China, Mongolia and North Korea. It has maritime boundary with Japan and the USA. It is still largest country having 6,592, 800 sq miles with 143 million people making the 9<sup>th</sup> populous country. It has the world largest reserves of mineral and energy resources and world largest forest reserves ([http://en.restec-international.co/projects/india/travel\\_services/](http://en.restec-international.co/projects/india/travel_services/)).

#### Main Features of Russian Culture

The main features of Russian culture are rooted in Slavic history, orthodox religion and specific geographical features. While Russia was growing through centuries, its leaders were traditionally associated with the state, religion and military. The first independent Slavonic State-Kievan Russia was founded in 862 AD with the capital in Kiev. Later, the centre of power shifted to the cities of Novgorod and Vladimir. They were subjugated by the Mongols from the 13 to 15 centuries. It was in 1480 Moscow state succeeded in uniting the Russian states. After liberating from the Mongols, Moscow strengthened its principality. The Russian Tsars such as Ivan the Great (1462-1505) and Boris Godunov (1598-1605) were respected historic personalities. The orthodox church was against influence in society. The Russian history was marked by repeated attempts to catch up with the west-economically,

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politically and culturally. Peter the Great (1697-1725) started westernization. But it was done by autocratic and barbarian means. He proclaimed Russia as Empire in 1721 and made St. Petersburg as its new capital. Later on, Catherine the Great (1762-1796) consolidated the Russian Empire. Throughout this period, Russia absorbed the basic values of both the West and the East. It served as a bridge between Western and Eastern cultural traditions. These characteristics attracted much attention from the 18<sup>th</sup> cent to early 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to V. Kluchevski, Russian historian of the 19<sup>th</sup> cent, national character were combined with the qualities of struggle against hardship, ability to concentrated efforts and ability to cooperate within larger geographical space (See, 1904). P. Chaadnev defines contradictive Russian national character in the form of brutality and culmination to violence, impersonal collectivism, internal freedom, kindness, humanism, and search for truth (Chaadnev, 1991). In early 1920s under communism, these Russian characteristics were enforced by the specific totalitarian traits such as perception of hostile and dangerous environment, society supremacy over individual goal and relativistic view of morality.

### **Russian October Revolution**

Following the Russian October Revolution, Russia became the largest and leading communist state, the world's first constitutionally social socialist state and later on a great superpower. The credit for bringing overall change in Russian military culture goes to Great October Revolution. The Great October Revolution comprised of workers and peasants of Russia, overthrew the capitalist and landowner rule, broke the fetter of oppression, establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and created the Soviet state with the aim of building socialism and communism.

The strength of socialism was demonstrated by the Soviet people and their people in the Great Patriotic War. The essential feature of the Soviet socialism were as follows (www.departments).

- The Soviet people developed a socialist society.
- It was a society in which powerful productive forces and progressive science and culture were created under favourable conditions.
- It was a society of true democracy and more participation of the working people in running the state.
- The Supreme goal of the Soviet State was to build a classless communist society, focused on communist society and on communist self government.
- The Soviet people were: Guided by the idea of scientific communism and true to their revolutionary tradition.
- Relying on the great social, economic and gain of socialism.
- Taking into account the international position of the USSR as part of the world system of socialism.
- Preventing the continuity of the ideas and principles of the first Soviet constitution of 1918, 1924 Constitution of the USSR and the 1936 Constitution of the USSR.

To understand the military culture one has to examine terms such as Soviet military doctrine, military policy and military

science. In Soviet literature, these concepts overlaps considerably and the Soviet military theorists stressed their interdependence. Military doctrine represented the official view on the nature of future wars and on the methods of fighting. Military policy offered practical guidelines for structuring the Soviet armed forces and for building Soviet defense. Military Science is the study of concepts of warfare and of the weapons needed to accomplish military mission. It supported the formulation of doctrine and policy. Military doctrine and military policy directed the findings of military science toward fulfillment of the political goals of the CPSU.

### **Military Culture: 1917-1953**

Soviet military doctrine as studies by Lenin was in the form of dialectical approach towards the fulfillment of political goal.<sup>5</sup> He revealed the substance of war as extremely complex social phenomena. The real context employed the dialectical method. On that basis he made a distinction between the just and unjust war, reactionary and progressive wars, revolutionary war's and so on. He laid emphasis on the historical conditions which have given rise to war, what classes are waging it and for what ends. In Marxian theory war and revolution are interchangeable terms. Therefore, in dialectical method, class contradiction and class policies are important to analyze the history of warfare. In such a situation civil war waged by an oppressed class, by slaves against slave holders, by serfs against landowners and by wage workers against the bourgeoisies were fully legitimate, progressive and necessary. Furthermore, Lenin contribution to history was that he credited a scientific theory of imperialism. The important features of Imperialism were economic gain and exploitation of the weaker sections. What Lenin, showed to the world how imperialist war could be converted into civil war-into a war in which the enemy destroyed itself. Hence, the transformation of imperialist confirmed by triumph of the great October Socialist Revolution.

### **War and Policy**

Regarding this, Lenin was influenced by Clausewitz dictum that war is an instrument of policy. In Lenin strategic writings policy occupy an important place in relation to war. The content of war, its essence, character and causes cannot be fully appreciated unless classes states were taken into consideration and also the study of the whole system of political relations that developed before and during the war (Lenin, 1917). Important issues to Lenin were the class character of war, what caused the war, what classes were waging in and what historical and economic conditions gave rise to it.

### **State and Foreign Policy**

The state policy played the dominant role and determined the content and character of foreign policy. Both foreign policy and domestic were intimately related to each other. War was the outcome of both domestic and foreign policy. The character of war influenced the attitude of the masses, the course of the war and the eventual result. Thus, to Lenin war was not simple policies carried out in special way by means of

armed forces. On the outbreak of war, armed violence became the main instrument of policies, Hence, military resistance cannot be broken by military means. Armed struggle was subject to special objective law studied by military science (Ibid, 1917). Stalin's importance in the development for military lies in his effort to industrialize the Soviet Union and train the Soviet population for industry and modern war. He emphasized the need to transform Russia from an agrarian power to a great industrial power. For that, he psychologically prepared the resources and the manpower of the Soviet Union could be properly exploited so as to fulfil the country's vast military potential.

### Stalin's effort towards Military Policy

The importance of Stalin was his contribution towards building the political system. Hence, the theory of socialism in one country was propagated by him. The reason was his fear of capitalist encirclement. While propagating theory of socialism he did not renounce the idea of world revolution, But, world revolution was secondary to the consolidation of socialism in USSR. By this theory, he was confident that the Soviet State was destined to become the stronghold of the new socialist order. He also observed that the Soviet Union would never be safe until there was a ring of brother states (Rice, 1986). To promote his theory of socialism he advanced united front strategy. It was basically a relationship between military strategy and policy. Military strategy was that which chalked out the direction of attack at a certain stage of a proletarian revolution. It planned the relative deployment of revolutionary forces that would be carried out in the entire course of armed struggle. On the other hand, policy was that which prescribed the line of operations for the shorter period of time in which the tide of a proletarian revolutionary rose. In short, to Stalin, policy was a part of military strategy (Stalin, 1969). Such, was the relationship between policy and strategy in the Soviet Union. It continued throughout Stalin's period. Policy and strategy was closely related to make military victory possible. It was policy which determined the objective to be attained and strategy role was to serve at one moment as a shield and at another moment as a sword of that policy. Thus, in the inter war period, the Soviet military culture was borne out by:

- An uniform doctrine – which was conceived by Marx, further elaborated by Lenin and put into operation by Stalin.
- Uniformity of power since 1917.
- Uniformity in the training of political and military leaders.
- Uniformity in the training of army and the nation.

### Development after 1945

The year 1977 is important. First, it was in 1977 Jack Synder brought the strategic culture into the realm of modern security studies. Strategic culture was seen as a subset of belief and values of a society that relate to the political system. Its importance was seen in the application of democratic principles and institutions, the principle of morality, the use of force, the right of individuals and collectives and the country's role in international politics. The question was what was the

objective of politics-objective was to preserve political power by effective means i.e., through military power or use of force. Second important development was that in 1977, the USSR came up with another constitutions – An analysis of the constitution would enable us to explain the Soviet military culture. Art, 1,2,3, and 4 are devoted to the well being of the people. The Constitution called the USSR a socialist state, power belong to the people, speak of democratic centralism and the role of CPSU which was of serve the people. Under Art. 6, the CPSU determines the general perspectives of the development of society and the course of domestic and foreign policy of the USSR.

Art. 10, speaks of the Soviet economic system. It was based on the socialist ownership of the means of production in the form of state property, collective farm and cooperative property. It common property of the Soviet peoples were the principle form of socialist property i.e., its land, minerals water and forest are exclusive property of the state. Art. 19 speaks of elimination of class differences and of the equal distinction between town and country, between mental and physical force labour and bringing all under one nation that is USSR. Art. 28 speaks of Soviet foreign policy which pursued a Leninist policy and stands strengthening the natural security international cooperation. The foreign policy aimed at ensuring international conditions favourable in building and achieving complete disarmament. Art. 31 was there to protect to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state by use of force. The framing of the new constitution was the outcome of the global strategic environment that prevailed after 1945. On the one hand we saw the development of a country's strategic culture which appeared in the writings of the Western writers. To them, Soviet threat was the basic assumption. The only way to contain the Soviet Union was through unacceptable punishment through the doctrine of deterrence. So far the Soviet Union was concerned military doctrine and policy were largely influenced by the Soviet leadership effort to end the US nuclear monopoly.

For a very brief period the world was unipolar world where the US had nuclear monopoly. With the Soviet development of nuclear weapons, the world became a bipolar world. Initially, it was a tight controlled by a superpowers. This remained till Stalin was alive. After his death, change in Soviet foreign policy resulted in loose bipolar world where France and China challenged the US and the Soviet supremacy in their respective camps. The cold war was transformed for inter to intra cold war. To the western countries deterrence became the hallmark of political and military strategy to check Soviet ambitious designs. The Soviet military policy and military science rested on different rationale. The Soviet Union laid stress that the best way to contain a nuclear attack against the USSR was to be supremely prepared to fight, survive and even if possible win the nuclear war. This was Soviet's position in mid 1950s. Sign of relaxation in Soviet political and military policies soon surfaced after the death of Stalin. Shortly afterward, Khrushchev declared that Leninist's prophecy of an inevitable war between capitalism and communism had been outmoded through modern technology. In 1956, Khrushchev enunciated the principle of peaceful coexistence. He believed that peaceful coexistence with continued political and ideological

competition was the preferable alternative to a restrained arms race, political-military confrontation and relaxation of tension. In any case, Khrushchev tilt towards political and military relaxation coincide with US President Kennedy's strategy for peace policy. In 1961 Kennedy warned that within 60 days of an atomic attack some 500 million to 750 million people would perish and concluded that sober calculation of the consequences of nuclear war is an indispensable requirement for pursuing a consistent policy of preventing war (Pravda, 1961). It was soon realized in both the countries that in nuclear war there would be no gain and no victory. The best example was the Cuban missile crisis. Initially these principles fostered a growing economy but emphasis was on military spending and the lack of production of consumer goods crippled the economy. There were simply not enough capital or resources to support the type of economy that the government desired. Because the government controlled the prices of consumer goods and usually fixed them above or below the market value the economy was unbalanced. Hence, the economic system began to stagnate and Brezhnev's policies only pushed the economy further into decline.

In 1982s, there were other problems that started during the Brezhnev's rule. The government continued to harshly oppress the people and even often terms refused to enact policies that were aimed at improving life. This was against the spirit of constitution. The ethnic equalization aspect of Soviet ideology played an important role in the rapid breakdown of relations between the communist party within the USSR. The Soviet Union was comprised of several separate entities that represented a handful of different ethnic groups. These groups had different languages, cultures and histories and each wanted to maintain their cultural identity within the Soviet backup. While the government made an attempt to unite the people under the Soviet flag but they failed to instill a sense of nationalism in the people. Thus, cultural nationalism ordered the collision between the Soviet government and the people.

1. It was at this backdrop of economic decline and political instability that Mikhail Gorbachev stepped in. He moved away from Stalinist thinking. To him, Stalinist thinking was not workable and hence a shift in ideology in order to save the Soviet system from within (Ibid, 1986). Faced with many problems Gorbachev tried hard to make some changes in the foreign policy, particularly towards the West. The basic problem still remained the development of military power. These conditions gave Gorbachev an incentive and need to reform the system. Why reform – to gain the confidence and support of the people. It appeared that most of his policies were based on to improve life in the Soviet Union and worked for human rights.

## Reforms

2. Gorbachev reforms were based on glasnost and perestroika. Glasnost is defined as openness. It allowed greater freedom in the press and better flow of ideas and awakened people from their social slumber. Perestroika focused on restructuring the economic and promotion of growth. This was necessary for the proper development of Russian socialist society. The society is ripe for change. Gorbachev drew a parallel between Perestroika and Lenin's New Economic Policy. Supporting

Lenin policy Gorbachev distanced away from Stalin (Ibid, 1986). Furthermore, glasnost allowed the Soviet people to finally see what life was like in democratic countries. The cultural exchange fostered unrest in the people because the contrast in the luring conditions of USSR and western countries. Finally urban contends that democratic broadcast like Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty in fostering a sentiment of revolt in the people and encouraged them to rise up against the communist system. Communisms, built on the concept of military doctrine, policy and science, failed to complete with the strength of democracy and fell party because of it.

## Russian Military Culture

The leads to the last segment of our discussion on the military culture under the Russian federation or Russia. The focus of the constitution of the Russian Federation is on the welfare of the people. But what is needed is good governance system or political system. The political system has been a major factor in the development of Russia military culture. In this theoretical framework what is the status of Russia today? The traditional view of Russia political system have favoured a strong autocratic rule. But Gorbachev's reforms started the process which marked the end of authoritarian rule and open the road to democratization. In Russia there are some who believe the Russia political culture or system has seen changes. There are two reasons for it – (i) centuries long experience of autocratic tsarist rule and (ii) was the nature of the Soviet regime. Therefore, they claim that true democracy has not yet taken place in Russia and it is even said that after 1991, Russia struggling to create a new national identity based on the blend of tsarism, communism and Stalinism. Hence, in this system, Russian political culture has not evolved. But there are others take Colon and Mc Faul surveyed that Putin and his supports were fairly supportive of democracy on the whole. Hahn in 2004 found that there still seemed to be a normative commitment to democracy. It was based on the Russian need for stability. Hahn further saw that Russia political culture would appear to be sufficiently hospitable to sustain democratic institutions. It was seen that before 1991 the strength of the USSR rested on the development of military power. But it put enormous burden on the country that it disintegrated. The Russian Federation believes that the behavior able elements of traditional culture will go into deep hibernation.

The salient features in Yeltsin period were:

- Russia must become a normal country with genuine market economy.
- Russia should see USA not as a threat but as a source of help.
- The Russia military power may be needed to keep Russia from further disintegration (Ermarth, 1978).

But the reality was that at the attitudinal level element of the old military culture remained alive due to deep resentment about the breakup of the USSR, strong perception on threat from the West, China and Islamic World and intervention against Russia's historic friend in the Balkans and Serbia. It

was also found that the Russian ideology of their political system still rested on nationalism. But this time not on Communist ideology. Nationalism based on Russian interest security could advance a multipolar world and could contain USA interest and establish a Eurasian geopolitical identity distinct from the West. It could also combat perceived threats from Western culture and Islamic terrorists. It seems that with the coming of new governments have enhanced the prospects of democracy. Here, two factors become important: (i) is the process of modernization and (ii) concomitant rise in levels of education. Education is the critical intervening variable between development and political system. Hence one could argue that because of high levels of education during the Soviet era, a new political culture was already being formed and with the rise of generations who has not known Soviet politics this process might continue in a democratic direction. Many scholars believe that without a vibrant civil society, the chances for the success of a transition to democracy are severely diminished. Thus, a state needs healthy and functioning links with a significant number of people involved. The concept like "social capital" is also important in understanding the Russian political culture. It refers to the network of ties that keep people engaged in various kinds of cooperative endeavors which in turn affected the functioning of government. A low level of social capital in a society is an indication of poor government. At this juncture we do not find high level of social capital. It appears that Putin wants a pseudo-civil society which is subordinate to the state. Hence, if voluntary participation remains low and if opportunities for independent organizations are curtailed then Russian political culture may stay with this low level of equilibrium trap.

### Conclusion

Hence, what is important in the Russian modernization strategy? Modernization is one of the most popular terms in the Russian political dictionary. It is designed to pursue the objective of radical technological rejuvenation of the national economy, its structure reforms and the creation of a society disposing of human capital with top qualifications.

As regard this, there are two different school of thought: (i) the optimists believe in relentless political will to solve the problem as well as the administrative and financial capabilities to pursue a consistent policy for these ends. On the other hand, the pessimists cite the absence of institutional preconditions for a viable modernization policy. They point out the impossibility of economic and technological modernization without a collateral liberalization of the country's political and economic life. The fact that modernization was promoted to the top of the political agenda by Russia's political leadership is basically due to global economic and financial crisis. It would be wrong to assume that the Russian political elites did not realize the importance of global change. Hence, it was the global change that we saw major shift in the Russian struggle culture.

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