

One Hundred Years after Lenin: The Necessity for a Leninist Global Strategy

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A prophet is without honor only in his own land and his own home, said Jesus according to the Gospels. Initially welcomed by Nazareth as a native son, Jesus had delivered a radical sermon based on a reading of the prophet Isaiah, and then been nearly lynched by a mob.

The hometown response to prophets tends towards hostility probably because prophets carry more baggage when entering their homes, which view their prophets through uniquely subjective lenses.

So too with Lenin in Russia on the centenary of his death. He is viewed through a particular set of lenses pertaining to the Russian Revolution. Oddly enough, the post-Soviet Russian response to Lenin resembles, in many ways, the response of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor to the imprisoned young preacher and miracle-worker.

The Grand Inquisitor visits the prisoner, whose identity he immediately recognizes. After genuflecting, he berates the Christ-figure for returning, explaining that it took a thousand years to restore order and stability after the upheaval unleashed by Jesus's original visit. This time around, Christ would not be allowed to unleash the same chain-

reaction and would therefore be executed the next day. Upon hearing this, in a characteristic gesture of forgiveness, the Christ-figure kisses the Grand Inquisitor.

Contemporary Russia similarly fears sowing the seeds of instability, upheaval, revolt, rebellion, revolution. Thus, Russia, which decries the ‘cancel culture’ of the West, has canceled Lenin a hundred years after his death.

And yet, Russia may have very good reason to consider resurrecting certain aspects and postulates of Leninist strategy and international policy.

Consider the several Leninist paradoxes of the current historical moment.

Firstly, two defining wars are being fought—Gaza and Ukraine—whose underlying concept owes its parentage to Lenin (and only a few years later to Woodrow Wilson): national self-determination.

Russia’s case in the Donbass is based on the right of self-determination. (So is the case of Catalonia.) But there is currently underway a greater, wider application, however unconscious, of Lenin’s concept of self-determination: its application to colonialism, yielding the “national-colonial question.” The preeminent example is the Palestinian struggle against occupation, and its enormous resonance not only in the global South, but also among the youth of the West, including the U.S. and UK.

Ho Chi Minh famously said that, while first reading Lenin’s theses on the *National and Colonial Question* (1920), he exclaimed “this is our path to liberation.” It is the ideological osmosis of Leninist teaching on national liberation that has shaped the consciousness of South Africa’s ANC, and Latin America’s leftist governments, on the question of Palestine.

Secondly, the key conceptual pillars of Russian foreign policy, namely the formulations ‘RIC’ (Russia-India-China) and ‘World Majority,’ are correctly associated with and attributed to Yevgeny Primakov, but they also derive directly from Lenin’s last published writings in 1923.

Thirdly, Lenin provides a “master category” and macro-framework for understanding the collective West’s escalating multidimensional aggression against Russia: imperialism.

Fourthly, Yeltsin's appeasement and collaborationism were founded on antipathy to Lenin, the Bolsheviks, and 1917. So long as that antipathy spills over into contemporary Russian policy, it will be impossible to defeat the imperialist offensive against Russia. To do so, the anti-Leninist foundations of Yeltsinism must be eradicated.

Fifthly, those within and outside Russia who correctly predicted or warned about what is happening now—the Western offensive—were all, broadly speaking, Leninists. This speaks to Leninism's value as a source of strategic illumination.

As such, the continued "cancellation" of Lenin and Leninism may not be affordable when Ukrainian pilots are proudly training on their NATO supplied F-16 aircraft and American Abrams tanks are being held back only until the weather changes.

SYSTEM, NOT POLICY

There is a moment that unfailingly arrives during any discussion of Russia-West relations, when the Russian speaker bitterly recounts just how far Russia was willing to go in the early 1990s, even to the extent of unilateral "compromises" and a subaltern partnership with the West, which were bewilderingly spurned.

This bewilderment is caused at least partly by the absence of an overall framework for understanding the West and the world, after the earlier such framework was abandoned.

By contrast, with the outbreak of the First World War—which by definition was historically unprecedented, and in which socialist and workers' parties all supporting their own governments rather than each other—Lenin overcame his initial, momentary disbelief by studying imperialism and formulating his theory of it. Imperialism, he insisted, was not a policy, but a stage and a system.

Liberals like Hobson had preceded Lenin in understanding the new trends of global capitalism. Within international Marxism, Rosa Luxemburg had already theorized global capitalism's need for an archaic hinterland to exploit. Within the Bolshevik party, Bukharin grappled with imperialism in parallel with Lenin.

However, it was Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* that burst onto the scene with its identification of imperialism not as a policy but as a system, its description of global capitalism's new features, its explanation of the World War as a struggle to redivide the world, and its attribution of Western social democrats' treachery to their partaking of the super-profits sucked out of colonies and semi-colonies.

Lenin's explanatory framework proved definitive for decades, during which generations of scholars built upon it in different directions. Sadly, in today's Russia there is no such general theory, or if there is one (e.g., the 'civilizational' explanation), it is self-limiting. Lenin's theory of imperialism was transmitted horizontally and vertically, across the world and down the generations, precisely because it was universal and scientific; without even a speck of cultural or civilizational specificity, leave alone centrality.

In the face of the Western offensive, it is in Russia's interest to return to and advance from the Leninist perception of the problem, rather than attributing it to Western caprice and perversity.

However radical or "totalitarian" Soviet Russia was, it struck a powerful chord within the societies of not only the West, but also the East and the global South, because it stood for universal ideas. For instance, Oppenheimer and some of his colleagues at Los Alamos harbored a soft spot for the USSR. Paradoxically, modern Russia, which is far less radical and dictatorial, has almost no resonance in the West.

This cannot be attributed to the "decadence" of Western society, as Palestine has inspired massive waves of solidarity, even in the West's most elite educational citadels. Rather, it is not only the West that has changed, but Russia, too: by becoming less universalist, more "culturalist," it has also become more involuted. Therefore, it does not concertedly project its ideas at a planetary level, and it enjoys hardly any of the solidarity that the USSR inspired. There are no tunnels of support and sympathy snaking behind enemy lines. Leninist internationalism can counter this syndrome of (self-)isolation.

COLOR REVOLUTION CONFUSION

The Leninist strategy for confronting the imperialist world order was multi-dimensional: the management of interstate relations through the

Ministry (Commissariat) of Foreign Affairs; the building of networks of likeminded political and social movements through the Communist International (Comintern); the secret services; and (in the post-Lenin Soviet period) the peace movement and global federations of writers, journalists, women, youth, trade unions, etc. Today, in the face of the Western offensive, Russia lacks such a developed system for interacting with the world.

There are contradictions that need resolving in Russia's resistance to the Western offensive. On the one hand, Russia stands for a transformation of the international order from unipolarity and hegemonism to multipolarity. On the other hand, Russia opposes change in the domestic orders of various states, damning any popular uprisings as color revolutions. While some are indeed color revolutions, not all of them are, and the withdrawal of anti-imperialist forces from the struggle only enables the imperialist forces to manipulate and even monopolize the uprisings.

The presence of certain undesirable elements within popular uprisings does not warrant their condemnation as color revolutions. No less an anti-imperialist and a revolutionary, Lenin himself provided a Realist approach to revolutions that could helpfully inform contemporary Russian policy and prevent it from falling behind global dynamics, especially among the youth.

Pardon me for a lengthy extract, but this is what Lenin emphasized about the Irish Rebellion of 1916:

“...The term ‘putsch’, in its scientific sense, may be employed only when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses... Whoever calls such a rebellion [as the Irish Rebellion] a ‘putsch’ is either a hardened reactionary, or a doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of envisaging a social revolution as a living phenomenon.

To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression...—to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So, one

army lines up in one place and says, 'We are for socialism,' and another [lines up] somewhere else and says, 'We are for imperialism,' and that will be a social revolution! Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a 'putsch'.

Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which all the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these there were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. But objectively, the mass movement was breaking the back of tsarism and paving the way for democracy; for this reason, the class-conscious workers led it.

The socialist revolution in Europe cannot be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it—without such participation, mass struggle is impossible, without it no revolution is possible—and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But objectively they will attack capital..." (Irish Marxist Review, 2015).

I would suggest substituting 'color revolution' for the term 'putsch' that is denounced by Lenin.

A related problem is Russians' partiality for conservative, right-wing, and even far-right forces in the West, and their aversion to the left. This contradicts realism. In the crucial struggle in support of Palestine and against the West's support for Israel, the vanguard has consisted of left-oriented forces, ranging from Latin American 'Pink Tide' governments and South Africa's ANC to the progressive wings of the U.S. Democrats and UK Labour. In reality, it is left-oriented governments, movements, and personalities that are more inclined towards a multipolar world, not the global Right that contemporary Russia seems to prefer.

In short, Russia's goal of a multipolar world contradicts its preference in political allies. This contradiction can only be solved by applying Primakov's concept of a multi-vector approach, of outreach

around the political compass, especially to those who actively resist imperialism and support a multipolar world order.

LENINISTS WERE SMARTER

Soviet illusions about relations with the West, and the possibility of prevailing over it in “peaceful economic competition”, originated in 1956 with the 20th Congress of the CPSU. More accurate predictions about Western behavior, and about the consequences of the USSR letting down its guard, came from the more Leninist elements: Molotov, Kaganovich, Marshal Grechko, Andropov, and finally Sergei Akhromeyev. The ones who got it very wrong were those who revised Lenin (Khrushchev, Gorbachev) or reviled him (Yeltsin). So why should Russia retain the anti-Leninism of those who bet on the West, while junking the Leninism that informed those who foresaw its aggressive character?

The Leninist perspective’s importance for lucid prediction is especially well-evidenced by two public incidents.

In 1973, at the Non-Aligned Summit Conference in Algiers, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi propagated the line: “the two superpowers, the USA and the USSR”, both of which should be opposed by the Third World. Fidel Castro opposed this, cautioning that if OPEC had asserted itself (as it just did in 1973) in a world without the socialist USSR, then Western imperialism would have redivided the world by military force. Fidel argued that the world should be grateful for the existence of the USSR and should never equate it with the USA. This proved tragically prophetic, as wars, the dismemberment of states, and the lynching of leaders following the USSR’s collapse and the West’s compulsion to ‘redivide the world’ as Lenin described. Western behavior after the fall of the USSR in 1991, including U.S.-NATO aggression and escalation in and through Ukraine, can only be understood as the imperialist effort to redivide the world through wars.

The predictive superiority of the Leninist method is also evidenced by Fidel Castro’s speech in Moscow in 1987, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the October 1917 Revolution. In it, he said: “We would not be surprised to wake up one morning and learn that the Soviet Union has disappeared.”

THE NEW MAIN VECTOR

By 1921, Lenin had understood that his primary strategy had to be changed, as the revolution's march westward had been halted and reversed, beginning with the Red Army's failure in Poland. Lenin shifted to a united front, even with former foes, in the face of rising counter-revolution and incipient fascism. The united front was broader still in the case of colonies and the fight against imperialism.

The primary axis of Lenin's global grand strategy shifted to the East. This was evidenced in his last published writing, *Better Fewer, But Better* (1923), which would eventually give Yevgeny Primakov a prescription for Russia's path after the Soviet collapse.

Focusing on "the system of international relationships which has now taken shape," Lenin concludes:

"...The outcome of the struggle as a whole can be forecast only because in the long run capitalism itself is educating and training the vast majority of the population of the globe for the struggle.

In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be" (Lenin, 1923).

A genius of revolutionary Realism, Lenin goes on to say: "... what interests us is not the inevitability of this complete victory of socialism, but the tactics which we, the Russian Communist Party, we the Russian Soviet Government, should pursue to prevent the West-European counter-revolutionary states from crushing us" (Ibid).

He is examining the question of how time can be bought, but what is most compellingly relevant is his identification of what will be the decisive or dominant contradiction driving world history in the era of imperialism: "... To ensure our existence until the next military conflict between the counter-revolutionary imperialist West and the revolutionary and nationalist East, between the most civilized countries

of the world and the Orientally backward countries which, however, compromise the majority..." (Ibid).

Before the Sino-Soviet split, Mao Zedong had tried to win acceptance for this Leninist postulate, as did Fidel Castro and Che Guevara later, with their emphasis on the "tricontinental" focus of the anti-imperialist struggle. The CPSU rejected it.

Today, in the face of the West's grand-strategic offensive against Russia and Israel's monstrous overkill in Gaza (which has plunged the greater Middle East into chaos), the key strategic vector must be recognized as that which Lenin identified just before his death 100 years ago: "...the next military conflict between the counter-revolutionary imperialist West and the revolutionary and nationalist East..."

Lenin's pivot to the East was not a sudden Damascene conversion after an epiphany that the revolution would not take place in the West. He had dialectically inverted Marxist orthodoxy as early as 1913 with the essay *Backward Europe, Advanced Asia*: "...Everywhere in Asia a mighty democratic movement is growing, spreading and gaining in strength. The bourgeoisie there is as yet siding with the people against reaction... And 'advanced' Europe? It is plundering China..." (Lenin, 1913a).

After the October Revolution, but before the Red Army's defeat in Poland and before the revolution in the West had fully receded, Lenin completed his decisive pivot to the East. In November 1919, Lenin addressed the 2nd All-Russia Congress of Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East, convened by the Bolsheviks in Moscow. There he said: "The subject of my address is current affairs, and it seems to me that the most essential aspects of this question at present are the attitude of the peoples of the East to imperialism... The period of the awakening of the East in the contemporary revolution is being succeeded by a period in which all the Eastern peoples will participate in deciding the destiny of the whole world, so as not to be simply objects of the enrichment of others. The peoples of the East are becoming alive to the need for practical action, the need for every nation to take part in shaping the destiny of all mankind" (Lenin, 1919).

It is clear from Lenin's writings that the 'East' must be understood as the Greater East, the periphery and semi-periphery of the imperialist-

dominated world system. It is not enough to limit strategic policy to RIC, as if such a closed trinity is sufficient. Even before WWI, Lenin wrote:

“...The opportunists had scarcely congratulated themselves on ‘social peace’ and on the avoidability of unrest under democracy, when a new source of global turbulence opened up in Asia. The Russian Revolution [1905] was followed by revolutions in Turkey, Persia and China. It is in this era of storms and their ‘repercussions’ in Europe that we are now living. No matter...the fate of the great Chinese republic, against which various ‘civilized’ hyenas are now whetting their teeth, no power on earth can restore the old serfdom in Asia or wipe out the heroic democracy of the masses in the Asiatic and semi-Asiatic countries...

...The fact that Asia, with its population of 800 million, has been drawn into the struggle...should inspire us with optimism and not despair.

The Asiatic revolutions have again shown us the spinelessness and baseness of liberalism...” (Lenin, 1913b).

This exaltation of the revolutionary tempests in Turkey, Persia, and China was not a digression or aberration, but part of a symbolically-important essay on the 30th anniversary of Karl Marx’s death, reflecting the conceptual core of Leninism. Lenin underlined it in a pre-1917 polemic with Karl Radek on the subject of imperialism and national self-determination: “...First of all, it is ‘Parabellum’ [Radek] who is looking backward, not forward, when...he looks towards Britain, France, Italy, Germany, i.e. countries where the movement for national liberation is a thing of the past, and not towards the East, towards Asia, Africa, and the colonies, where this movement is a thing of the present and the future. Mention of India, China, Persia, and Egypt will be sufficient” (Lenin, 1915).

Lenin’s references to Turkey, Persia, China, India, and Egypt, in these two publications (1913, 1915), combined with the focus on RIC and national liberation in his very last publication (1923), highlight the main vector of a Leninist foreign policy for the present “era of storms.”

A COUNTER-HEGEMONIC CRESCENT

Russia faces an immediate enemy that is propped up and propelled by a superpower and a global system. NATO has supplied Ukraine

with offensive weaponry, including F-16s, to attack Russia. Whatever the pauses and reverses, the collective West (within which the former Soviet satellites are the most hostile) is determined to wage an endless war against Russia and maintain an open-ended offensive posture.

Resistance to unipolar hegemony exists, but that resistance must be global. It can be globalized (just as the war against Russia is globalized) only if Russia supports that resistance, sometimes as vanguard and sometimes as rearguard.

Leninist methodology demands grasping the greater Middle East as the weakest link in the chain of Western imperialism and doing everything possible to strengthen counter-hegemonic national liberation struggles everywhere, especially in Palestine, the storm-center.

This would mean a strategy of concentric circles, supporting and strengthening an “Axis of Resistance” (including Iran), while working closely with countries, such as Turkey, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia, which have proven their solidarity with Palestine.

Brzezinski coined the concept of the ‘Crescent (or Arc) of Crisis’ to justify his successful strategy of provoking and entrapping the USSR in Afghanistan. To return the favor, this time around, a ‘Crescent of Crisis’ should face Russia’s main strategic adversary and that adversary’s brutal ally in the Middle East.

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