

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
School of Social and Political Sciences
Centre for Russian, Central, and East European Studies

&

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Faculty of Social Sciences
Johan Skytte Institute for Political Studies
Centre for Baltic Studies

Roberto A. Castelar
2135854

THE MILITARISATION OF SOCIALISM

A STUDY OF THE BOLSHEVIK THEORY OF WAR

Thesis in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the conferral of
International Masters in Russian Central and East European Studies
Master of Arts in Social Science: Baltic Sea Region Studies

Supervisors:

Dr Vladimir Unkovski-Korica (University of Glasgow)
Dr Lauri Mälksoo (University of Tartu)

Tartu, 2016

Word count: 23,404
(excluding references)

This thesis conforms to the requirements for a Master's thesis,

Dr Lauri Mälksoo, University of Tartu

Submitted for defence: 29/08/16

I have written this Master's thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

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Roberto A. Castelar

ABSTRACT

Taking as starting point the assumption that a number of debates connected with the problem of war had a significant impact on the central events of the Russian Revolution, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the understanding of these events by re-examining the visions of war in the leadership of the Bolshevik movement, particularly in the thought of Vladimir Lenin. It offers a general critique of existing accounts by arguing that they have been based on a simplistic notion of the relation between ideology and expediency, and of the Bolshevik views on history, and that their tendency to identify the Bolshevik approach to war with Clausewitz's theories has distorted the revolutionary undertones of Bolshevism. It proposes, in turn, an alternative interpretation, in which ideology and expediency are seen as mutually constitutive, the Bolshevik approach to history and its relation to their military views are clarified, and the impact of the revolutionary commitments of that political movement on their approach to war is stressed. This interpretation, it is argued, provides the best framework for understanding the Bolshevik position in the various debates over war issues, and reason why this movement diverged from other socialist approaches to war.

EPIGRAPHS

From an European War a Revolution might surge up and the ruling classes would do well to consider this. But it may also result, and for a long period, in crises of counter-revolution, of furious reactions, of exasperated nationalism, of stifling dictatorship, of monstrous militarism, along a chain of retrograde violence...

— Jean Jaurès, 1907

Lenin's militarization of Marxism involved a substantial shift in the place of war in socialist ideology. War, while previously seen as a social evil imposed upon the working class, had never stood at the center of Marxist analysis of capitalism. Lenin put it there.

— Jacob Kipp, 1985

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many debts of gratitude are owed to the various scholars, colleagues, and institutions that supported in diverse form the process of research that culminated in the redaction of the present dissertation. Special mention should be made to the support offered by Vladimir Unkovski-Korica from University of Glasgow, and Lauri Mälksoo from University of Tartu, who supervised this project, and to Geoffrey Swain, who offered insightful guidance during the first months of research, before retiring from University of Glasgow.

Corresponding gratitude is manifested to the academic and administrative staff of the Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies at University of Glasgow, the Centre for Baltic Studies at University of Tartu, and the Centre for European Studies at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, who allowed the author to conduct research and work on this dissertation in their libraries, laboratories, and facilities, and offered invaluable help during my stays in the United Kingdom, Estonia, and Poland, respectively. The last phases of research and redaction took place at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs in Oslo, and the author is also grateful to the researchers that supported him in that institution.

Thanks should also be given to the IMRCEES consortium, particularly to Luca Anceschi, Convenor of the Programme, to Heiko Pääbo, who helped in arranging academic mobility and the academic aspects of the second year of studies, and to Margaret Baister, who helped with administrative procedures. Likewise, the author would like to thank the various scholars and fellow students who offered their comments and help during the entire process, particularly Dr Katre Luhamaa from the School of Law at University of Tartu. I express gratitude to the Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission, who provided the complete funding for this research through the Erasmus Mundus Programme of academic mobility. Lastly, but not least, the author thanks his family for their unfailing support despite geographical distance.

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INTRODUCTION

The major events that led to the rise and consolidation of the Soviet state were all connected in some form with the problem of war and, as a consequence, the various crucial points of that process were characterised by divergences over the interpretation of its implications and demands. It was the problem of war that ignited the general discontent against tsarism, both in 1905 and 1917, which contributed to the downfall of the monarchy.¹ It was the problem of war which, in the eve of the First World War, divided the socialists in Europe and led to the collapse of the Second International Socialist, initiating the parting of ways between Bolshevism and European Social-democracy.² The context of war, in addition, convinced Lenin to push ahead the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917.³ Opposed opinions over war had a role in the collapse of the Provisional Government,⁴ and in the failure of the coalition between Bolsheviks and Social Revolutionaries that provoked the Russian Civil War in 1918.⁵

Nevertheless, in-depth study of the visions of war of the main actors of these events, in sociological and theoretical —as opposed to strategic— terms,⁶ has been hitherto scant. The most recent historical studies on the Russian Revolution, and on Bolshevik ideology in particular, make due reference to the contextual role of First World War and of the aforementioned controversies, yet most of them do not seek to provide a more detailed assessment of the various theories of war at the time, and their

¹ See Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution 1900-1927*, 4th ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 16.

² For a succinct and classic summary of this controversy see E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, vol. III (London: MacMillan & Co Ltd, 1953), 555-566.

³ See Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2015, fp 1993) 195-196.

⁴ See Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution*, 64.

⁵ See Geoffrey Swain, *Russia's Civil War* (Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2008), 26.

⁶ This dissertation concerns itself with theoretical aspects of war that usually fall within the domain of political theory and international theory, namely, the conceptions, place and role of war in a political ideology, including ideas about its origins, possible eradication, and social implications, leaving aside aspects of strategic planning which are more a concern of military theory.

possible influence in the events. A significant reason for this is, probably, the general assumption that the input of ideology in political action has historically been rather minimal and incapable to compete with the more demanding considerations of *realpolitik*, or the assumption that the relevance of social and economic factors would necessarily imply a diminished function of ideological factors.⁷ Studies on this subject seem to be confined to the Cold War era, in which the political pressures made the ideological factor highly relevant.⁸

There might be substantive advantages, however, in taking a fresh look at the theories of war that were current during the time of the Russian Revolution, particularly those of Bolshevism, insofar as a better comprehension of the ideological factors might shed light on the dynamics of relevant historical events. In support for this methodology the result of recent scholarship that stresses the role of ideological aspects might be invoked, particularly the work of Michael Freeden,⁹ and the postulates of constructivism in International Relations theory that have recovered the connection between ideas, identity, interests, and action.¹⁰ In addition, the application ‘contextualist’ approaches to the study of ideas, such as those developed by Quentin Skinner¹¹, might help to overcome the deficiencies of unhistorical character of many of the works produced during the Cold War era.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to this task by examining the historical development and ideological structure of the views on war in the leadership of the Bolshevik movement, from its beginning to 1922, and to determine the impact that these views had in the development of the main events of the Russian Revolution, broadly conceived. It concentrates mainly in the views of Vladimir Lenin, on account of his dominant role in the intellectual and political history of the movement and his decisive influence in its mature theoretical outlook, and secondarily in the views of Lev Trotsky, whose role as head of the Red Army and Commissar of Foreign Affairs was crucial for

⁷ See Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution*, 6.

⁸ The most comprehensive study is Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War, Peace and Neutrality* (London-Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975). E.H. Carr provides a good summary with a more historical approach in ‘The Marxist Attitude to War’, in *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III, 549-566.

⁹ See Michael Freeden, ‘Thinking Politically and Thinking about Politics: language, interpretation, and ideology’ in Marc Stears and David Leopold (eds), *Political Theory: Method and Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2008), 196-215.

¹⁰ See Christian Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, in Burchill, S., et al, *Theories of International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 198.

¹¹ See Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory*, 8 (1), 1969, 3-53.

the Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War.¹² The views of party members such as Kamenev, Bukharin, and Zinoviev will be referred to in the pertinent sections, primarily as laying an alternative perspective to that of Lenin, but they will receive less attention as their theoretical contribution appears to be less prominent in the subject of war than in other subjects.

The title of this dissertation alludes to a characterisation made by historian Jacob Kipp's of Lenin's and by extension of Bolshevik mature thought on war,¹³ the main trait of which was the placement of 'revolutionary war' at the heart of the socialist Revolution, in contradistinction to what it has been interpreted as the understanding of war in Marxism and Western European socialism. This investigation aims at unearthing the ideological and historical sources that provide the best explanations of this development, in critical interaction with the scholarship produced on the subject in the Cold War era and after, but intending to advance a new interpretation that overcomes weaknesses of previous accounts. It purports to accomplish this by assessing the subject with the aid of the methodological assumptions developed recently in the discipline of intellectual history, and with the help of contemporary perspectives on international relations theory, particularly constructivism.

This investigation proposes three main contributions to current scholarship. Firstly, it departs from the common view that associates the Bolshevik outlook and Lenin's in particular, in the subject of war, with Clausewitz and his theories and legacies, arguing that such association—based mostly in taking Lenin's statements in a face value—has led more to distortion than to understanding. From the well-known fact that Lenin profusely read and claimed to have adopted Clausewitz's theories, especially the latter's classical *dictum* 'war is the continuation of policy by other means', a direct influence has often been maintained, even if Lenin's original modifications to the theory were also pointed out.¹⁴ This interpretation, it is contended here, is in risk of blurring the revolutionary undertones of the Bolshevik approach to war. The latter is better understood, instead, as Anatol Rapoport has argued, as part of the so-called

¹² See Geoffrey Swain, *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2014), 210.

¹³ Jacob Kipp, 'Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism 1914-1921', *Military Affairs*, October 1985, 189.

¹⁴ Kipp argued, for instance, that 'Lenin embraced Clausewitz in a fashion never done by Marx or Engels. [...] Lenin's reading of Clausewitz assumed central significance with the increasing militarization of Lenin's thought [...].' See Jacob Kipp, *Lenin and Clausewitz*, 186.

‘eschatological school’ of the philosophy of war, the main tenet of which is the belief in all-out war as necessary for a critical moment which will bring about a future scenario in which war is abolished altogether.¹⁵

The dissertation, hence, takes Jacob Kipp’s ‘militarization of Marxism’ as main theme, but offers an alternative interpretation of it than Kipp’s and the many authors who have written in a similar vein. The argument is not a restatement of Rapoport’s claim, however. A distinctive interpretation of the place of Bolshevism in this ‘eschatological’ tradition is offered here, and it is argued that this distinction is not of mere academic interest, but has rather significant implications for the understanding of the relation between Bolshevism and war. In connection to this, the second contribution consists in the claim that the Bolshevik theory of war is better understood in connection with the Bolshevik view of history, and that the decisive point of the latter was not a faith in the inevitability of communism, as has been argued, but rather the belief of the imperatives of a revolutionary time or moment. The implications of this distinction for Bolshevik military theory are correspondingly laid out.

The third main proposed contribution concerns the relation between ideology and experience in Bolshevism, both in general and in relation to the problem of war in particular. This dissertation rejects the positions of both those who claim that during the Russian Revolution ideological commitments had prominence over expediency, and vice versa,¹⁶ and argues that both are based on an inadequate abstract separation which cannot accurately represent the complex form in which these two elements interact in practice. Relying on constructivist scholarship developed in International Relations theory, an interpretation is proposed here, instead, that conceives of ideology and experience as mutually —yet not in a uniform or constant way— constituted. Historical circumstances had a decisive role, it is contended here, but they were read and interpreted through the prism of ideology, and the latter was appropriated and emphasised according to the necessities imposed by action.

¹⁵ Anatol Rapoport, ‘Introduction’ in Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, J.J. Graham translation (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1968) 15.

¹⁶ For a general summary of the debates on the role of ideological factors in the study of the Russian Revolution, see Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution*, 6-8. A thorough summary of the Cold War era debates on ideology and expediency in the Soviet Union is offered in Robert A. Jones, *The Soviet Concept of “Limited Sovereignty” from Lenin to Gorbachev: The Brezhnev Doctrine* (New York, NY: St Martin Press, 1990), 97-103.

The research problem, methodology, literature review, and main argument are described in the first chapter. In order to reconstruct the main elements of the intellectual context in which the Bolshevik approach to war developed, the second chapter briefly outlines the main theoretical traditions of war in 19th century Europe and Russia, and culminates with an exposition of the approach to war in the socialist tradition, particularly in Marx and Engels. The third chapter traces the development of the Bolshevik views on war from the beginning of the political movement to the eve of First World War. The fourth chapter focus in the theoretical developments brought about by the latter, and the interaction of ideology and experience in the Russian Revolution and the Russian Civil War. The fifth chapter, finally, is concerned with the mature form of the theory as manifested in the foreign policy of the early Soviet State and the Comintern.

CHAPTER ONE

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter lays out the contours of the problem of investigation, the main research questions, the objectives, the relevance of the topic and the methodology employed. It sketches the main structure and purposes of the process of research that has taken place for the writing of this dissertation, and raises the main questions that the argument that is offered in the next chapter is seeking to address.

Research Puzzle

The majority of European socialist movements of the late 19th and early 20th century shared a more or less substantive agreement in a number of general principles on the character of war. They tended to associate war and social violence with underlying economic and social problems, and argued that only a radical solution of these problems would bring about an enduring peace,¹⁷ and condemned militarism, military culture, and the arms race.¹⁸ Nevertheless, more concrete points such as the role of war in the socialist revolution, the duties of the socialists in regard to the military affairs of their own countries, the socialist position in relation with international conflicts, the defensive/aggressive war distinction, and others, were object of sharp disagreement among both non-Marxists and Marxists, and within the Marxists themselves, and these disagreements were tied to the events that led to the estrangement of the various socialist movements in pre-Fascist Europe.

¹⁷ W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels, and Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 68.

¹⁸ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III, 549.

Claiming fidelity to and the rightest understanding of Marxism, and in opposition to the European socialists whom they saw as traitors of the cause on account of their attitude towards First World War,¹⁹ the Bolsheviks consolidated almost in isolation their own tradition of socialism and their own revolution in Russia, developing an articulated and aggressive military outlook and praxis. War accompanied the whole Bolshevik experiment: they adopted the idea of the inevitability of the civil war in a revolution,²⁰ seized power and engaged in a long and bloody civil war in order to consolidate their dictatorship,²¹ established a standing army, and conducted an aggressive —yet short-lived— foreign policy in Eastern Europe with the purpose of establishing new Communist regimes, in the context of what they believed to be an imminent world socialist revolution.²² Thus, the Bolsheviks developed military institutions and practices similar in appearance to those which socialism condemned among the capitalists, but which they sought to justify on the grounds of different principles and purposes.

The diverging paths among the socialists were not only reflected in the general Bolshevik outlook and in its European socialist criticism. As said before, various crucial events in the historical process that led to the consolidation of the Soviet state were decisively influenced by disputes, both domestic and international, over the most convenient position for the socialist movement in face of war, disputes in which more general ideological considerations were often invoked, and which determined the ultimate fate and political success of Bolshevism. Among these, the most salient were:

1. *The aftermath of Bloody Sunday (1905)*. The national uprisings that followed the massacre convinced the Russian socialists that the opportunity had arrived for the overthrowing of the monarchy and the establishment of a democratic republic. However, while the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries insisted in focusing on activities such as propaganda and agitation, and strategic accommodation in the incoming republic, Lenin argued that the impending task

¹⁹ Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War: the Collapse of the Second International* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 219.

²⁰ Israel Getzler, 'Lenin's Conception of Revolution as Civil War', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 74:3 (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, 1996), 464-5

²¹ Geoffrey Swain, *Russia's Civil War*, 21.

²² See Geoffrey Swain, *Russia's Civil War*, 65-8

was to arm the workers and to prepare an immediate armed attack on the monarchy, since civil war was a necessary step in the way towards socialism. Given that this revolutionary moment ended in no more than a few liberal concessions from the monarchy, the significance of the dispute is not strong, but it certainly contributed to the estrangement between the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries.

2. *The collapse of the Second International (1914)*. The socialists had been divided over the socialist position towards a possible European war since the time of the First International.²³ A crucial question for them was whether the workers of the various countries should be encouraged to perform their patriotic duties or should instead be called for anti-war action. French socialists such as Jaures and Vaillant insisted in organizing a general strike against the war, but they met with the opposition of the German socialists, who were afraid of the potential political consequences.²⁴ Others insisted in complete neutrality, or in the duty of national defence. Lenin, in turn, argued that the context of the international war should be used for provoking internal revolutions. When the Germans voted for war credits, Lenin accused the European socialists of capitulating to imperialism and chauvinism. Lenin's position was decisive for his revolutionary movement. This controversy established a deep hostility between Bolshevism and European socialism, a hostility that will subsequently increase as many European socialists opposed the Bolshevik seizure of power.
3. *The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918)*. After seizing power in 1917, the Bolsheviks were forced to back down and agreed to form a coalition government with the Social Revolutionaries. This coalition, however, collapsed after Lenin decided to seek peace terms with Germany, a decision which no Social Revolutionary could support, and that was at odds with the view of fellow Bolsheviks such as Trotsky and Bukharin. This collapse provoked the formation of a competing Social Revolutionary government and the onset of the Russian civil war.²⁵ It turned the Allies against the Bolshevik too, given that they were interested in supporting the side that could maintain the Eastern front opened.

²³ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III, 552.

²⁴ Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, 21.

²⁵ Geoffrey Swain, *Russia's Civil War*, 26.

4. *The Westward offensive of the Red Army and the Comintern (1918-1923)*. Notwithstanding the problems associated with an internal civil war, foreign intervention, and a chaotic administration, the Bolsheviks decided to pursue an aggressive foreign policy in Eastern Europe, aiming at fostering Communist revolutions in the territories liberated from German occupation after the end of the war.²⁶ The results of these campaigns, and particularly of the subsequent war with Poland, were decisive in shaping the character, policies, and expectations of Bolshevism, and its state. It marked the ‘turning inward’ of the post-Leninist Bolshevik foreign policy that lasted until 1939. They were coordinated through the Third International Socialist or Comintern, in which aspects concerning the relation between war and the world revolution were also a matter of controversy.

It is clear thus that the Bolshevik positions—or in most cases the positions formulated by Lenin—on issues that were connected with war, both domestic and international, was crucial in determining the direction and effects of events that, in turn, proved to be necessary for the Bolshevik political survival and ultimate—albeit fragile—success. That position materialized in the context of disputes with political rivals, unstable allies, and enemies, in which issues on the interpretation of the Marxist canon, socialist ideology, and the particular conditions of Russia were intensely ransacked, and in which general aspects on the character of war were often discussed. Illustrating the origins of these positions, both intellectual and historical, therefore, might help to better understand these events, and the general history of the Russian Revolution and its consequences as a whole. This dissertation seeks to contribute to this task by helping to recover the historical evolution of the Bolsheviks views on war.

Research Questions

The starting point of this dissertation, as described above—that debates on war issues were influential for crucial historical events, and that understanding these debates might help the comprehension of these events—and the focus on the Bolshevik positions in

²⁶ For a summary of the Bolshevik views on spreading the revolution through military intervention see Robert Jones, *The Soviet Concept of ‘Limited Sovereignty’*, 31-35.

particular, raises an initial general problem: can these Bolshevik positions be explained solely in reference to the situation to which they were connected, or to put it in more familiar terms, were these positions the pure fruit of *realpolitik*, of seeking the most expedient advantages of particular situations? Or, on the contrary, it is possible to admit a decisive influence of such factors as ideology, or intellectual context, economic factors, and so on? If the first question is answered in the affirmative, the task would be simply to determine how the agents manipulated their ideology as to suit the situation; if the second is given a positive response, then, a study of ideological structures and their consequences is required.

This dissertation seeks to provide an answer to these questions by examining to what extent dynamic ideological structures influenced the corresponding events. The assumption that rules out the possibility of admitting a decisive role to ideology, or only accepts to give to it a significantly diminished function, is then rejected as a matter of principle, and the methodological grounds for this rejection are laid out in the second chapter. Given that, in examining ideological structures, this dissertation assumes a unitary group-agent —the Bolshevik movement— and a unitary tradition —Bolshevism— it also seeks to provide an account of their general intellectual development. A second general problem that concerns it is, therefore, the identification of the sources of the mature military outlook and praxis of Bolshevism, considered against the background of the broad socialist tradition, and its relation with the process of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet experiment, as a whole.

The research questions could be, then, summarised as follows: firstly, why the Bolshevik took these positions on war issues?; secondly, what input did the ideology had in these positions, and in which terms?; thirdly, what explains the process of ‘militarisation’ of Bolshevism?; and fourthly, what the possible answers to these questions say about the historical process of the Russian Revolution? More specific questions, derived from the latter, include: (a) what is the relation between the Bolshevik theory of war and the intellectual sources of socialism, and specifically Marx and Engels?; (b) what is the role of the distinctive historical aspects of the Bolshevik experience in its doctrinal evolution concerning war?; (c) which factors explain the distance between the approach taken by the Bolsheviks and those taken by other

European socialists, in relation to the problem of war?; and, finally, (d) which alternative approaches to war were discarded by the Bolsheviks, and why?

As will be manifested below, this dissertation contends that the existing literature provides valuable insights on these questions, but these insights are insufficient to produce an entirely satisfactory answer to all of them. Building upon the results of the revision and analysis of the primary and secondary sources that constituted the main task of this research project, this dissertation proposes that the general argument sketched in the introduction and described at length in the second chapter provides the most convincing explanation of all these problems, and seeks to illustrate it in the subsequent chapters. Some connected aspects still require further research as, for example, the role of economic and social factors, but the conclusions proposed here provide a solid basis for reference for future work.

Object and Purpose of this Investigation

The object of study of this dissertation is constituted by the meaning and forms of the idea of war, broadly conceived, in the thought of the leadership of the Bolshevik political movement, from 1902 to 1922. The timeframe starts by 1902 because in this year was published Lenin's famous pamphlet '*What is to be done?*' which laid out the basis for Bolshevik political thought, especially through the formulation of doctrine of the vanguard party of professional revolutionaries which was a centre of the Bolshevik/Menshevik split in the following year. The investigation ends by 1922, in turn, because in that year the transition from post-revolutionary Bolshevism to the consolidated Soviet state was already in march and such changes as the end of the Civil War, the waning of Lenin's authority, and the New Economic Policy involved a political and ideological transformation that changed the Soviet approach to war in substantive aspects.

The main purpose is to elucidate the evolution of the ideas on war in Bolshevism, and the interaction of these ideas with relevant historical facts, in order to enhance the comprehension of both Bolshevism and the general events to which these facts were connected, particularly the Russian Revolution broadly conceived. On

account of this purpose, the investigation is focused in those ideas that were influential in the movement, namely, the ideas of Lenin. The ideas of figures such as Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev, Radek, and Zinoviev, are referred to in connection to some relevant events only. Trotsky and Bukharin are highly relevant, but limitation of space has prevented more attention to them. The investigation focuses in both the events that are crucial for the history of Bolshevism in general, and those that are connected specifically to military issues. It should be pointed out, finally, that this dissertation concerns itself with the theoretical or ‘philosophical’ aspects of war —its origins, causes, and role in history— rather than with strategic issues. Given the limitation in space, and considering methodological convenience, the connection between these two domains is not included within its scope, and should be reserved for future research.

Relevance of the Subject

Revisiting the historical development and ideological content of Bolshevik theories of war might provide valuable contributions to the fields of (a) Russian and Soviet history, (b) global socialist history, and more generally to (c) the intellectual history and history of political thought, particularly in relation to traditions of war and peace. The main reason for the relevance of the subject has already been sketched in the introduction, namely, the opportunity of enhancing the understanding of the Russian Revolution, a theme that has regained attention as the centenary of its main events is approaching. It might be added that the results of this investigation might be helpful for the understanding the place of the idea of war in the socialist tradition, broadly conceived, and of the political thought that was generated in response to First World War.

Its contribution to the historical study of political thought in connection with war might prove relevant, primarily, because most of the available intellectual histories of the philosophy and theory of war have been centred in canonical works that were influential in Western Europe and the United States, at the expense of other less influential speculative traditions, including Bolshevik and Soviet thought. The study of the latter has mostly been confined to area studies where the subject has certainly been explored with rigour, but without the methodological benefits of the comparative and

interdisciplinary approach of intellectual history. This neglect is not insignificant, if the role of the early Bolshevik state and the Soviet Union as international actors in the twentieth century is taken into consideration. That the Bolshevik theory of war is relevant to the understanding of Soviet military history is made clear by the canonical character which Lenin's work possessed during the Soviet experience.

Secondly, the works covering the history of philosophical and theoretical approaches to war are considerably less numerous than the works devoted to technical and strategic military aspects, and to the political history of wars. The reason for this situation is, perhaps, that most treatments of war in political thought have been secondary to the theoretical systems of the respective authors and, besides Carl Clausewitz, few of these thinkers developed systematic theories of war. In addition, as Martin Wight famously noted,²⁷ the historical speculative tradition on the international—and it might be added here, of the phenomenon of war—is considerably weaker than the speculative tradition on the character of the state, and new intellectual histories on the philosophy and history of war, such as the present investigation, might contribute to fill this vacuum. And thirdly, the discipline of intellectual history is of recent origins and possesses an expanding research agenda,²⁸ and new venues of research might be opened for it through efforts of this character.

A potential result with outcomes of more contemporary relevance that can be offered by this investigation is the framing of historical considerations and interpretations that can prove insightful if they are connected with recent debates in political theory, especially in relation to the nature of revolutionary politics, the problem of political violence, and the transformation of war ethics. Significant research has been recently conducted on the multiple forms in which the agents of political violence rationalise, justify and excuse their actions,²⁹ and the case of Bolshevism can provide interesting data. Political theorists and philosophers that are discussing the classic approach of war ethics and its suitability or unsuitability for the current conditions³⁰ might find interesting to explore how historical movements interacted with traditions

²⁷ Martin Wight, 'Why is there no International Theory?', *International Relations*, 2:1, 1960, 38.

²⁸ David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

²⁹ See, for example, Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchins, 'Argument and Rhetoric in the Justification of Political Violence', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 6:2, 2007, 180-199.

³⁰ See, for example, Helen Frowe, *The Ethics of War and Peace: an Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2011).

such as Just War theory, and this research might provide solid information on that subject.

Methodology and Possible Limitations

The logical structure of this work might be summarised as follows: the first chapter describes the research problem, whereas the second chapter delineates the argument that is proposed as providing a compelling interpretation of the historical data and solution to the research questions. The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters offer a historical narrative and analysis in the context of which evidence for the argument is illustrated. The second chapter was elaborated during the last phases of research and, hence, the general argument which it presents is the product of a previous process of assessment of the historical data; in the dissertation, nevertheless, the general argument is offered at the beginning in order to permit a reading of the historical data through its lenses. This research process has relied on methodological assumptions taken from recent historical scholarship, particularly in the fields of intellectual history and Soviet history, and from constructivist work as developed in International Relations Theory.

This is essentially a process of research focused on ideas, but which seeks to depart from a fundamental feature of the traditional approach of what has been called ‘history of ideas’, namely, the tendency to define ideas in detachment from the context in which they emerged. This objective is pursued by employing the methods of the emergent discipline of intellectual history which aims at understanding ideas in connection with historical context. There has been, in this sense, a careful attention in determining how the ideological development described is interdependent with historical circumstances in which it took place, and how these factors were mutually reinforced. The aforementioned method has been complemented with a more theoretical hermeneutics that seeks to understand the internal consistency or inconsistency of the various historical arguments, in order to clarify the role that these features had in subsequent historical and ideological developments.

The recovery of ideas has been done through the examination of primary sources in interaction with scholarship both from the Cold War era and contemporary. The

sources have not been consulted in the original languages, but they are available in English through publications made by the official Soviet publishing houses and many Western publishers. The risk that these translations might have inaccuracies or distortions as a result of the ideological biases of the translators and publishers, considering especially that many of these publications date from the Cold War era, should certainly be acknowledged. Nevertheless, the English translations are of widely use in scholarship by sympathizers of Bolshevism, critics and ideologically-uncommitted scholars alike, and hence it has been assumed in this dissertation that such risk might be safely estimated as not very significant.

Most of the secondary literature consulted is the product of the American, German-American and British scholarship produced in leading centres for Soviet and Russian Studies, both from the Cold War era and contemporary. The main limitation for this project has been the extensive process of synthetisation of information that was forced by its scope, a process that might have unintendedly excluded relevant information, or allowed insufficient data to support conclusively a determinate conclusion. Consequently, efforts have been done in order to appropriately support the main contentions of this work despite such conditions. An obstacle has been, evidently, all the limitations that are tied to the interpretations of texts, particularly in connection with issues such as purpose of discourse, intention, power relations involved in speech, personal honesty, and biases. The methodology employed has helped to overcome some of these problems by making the process more historically sensitive.

Given the structure of this thesis, in which a framework of interpretation is given initially and historical facts are subsequently assessed through its lenses, the main of the potential risks of it that might come to the mind of the reader is the possibility of imposing upon the facts an artificial schema, or transposing conceptual structures to a time in which they were not relevant, then finding in the facts what the author expects to find rather than what the facts say about themselves. The author of this dissertation is aware of this danger but, nevertheless, should reiterate that the argument was the result of an initial assessment of the sources rather than the starting assumption for this investigation, and it is presented here as a convincing outcome of what the source can tell the modern reader. Whether this dissertation succeeded in overcoming this and the

previously-mentioned limitations, as it claims to have done, it is for the specialists to say.

The clarification should be made that this dissertation is not made with the purpose of exposing the crimes of Bolshevik militarism, nor much less to provide justifications for Bolshevik practice. Its unique purpose is to contribute to the understanding of a historical process that can offer valuable lessons for contemporary issues. The legitimacy of exposing crimes in processes of a very tragic character, such as the Russian Civil War, is certainly not denied here, but the intention of pursuing historical scholarship for this purpose might often contribute to obscuring the complexity of historical events, as critics of the works of Richard Pipes have insisted. Unfortunately, ideologically-uncommitted scholarship conducted for the sake of understanding is often accused of containing subtle apologies for atrocities when it is not energetic enough in exposing crimes. In some cases, this accusation can be reliable, but it should be made clear that all these purposes are foreign to the motivation of this dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ‘ESCHATOLOGICAL’ APPROACH TO WAR: A NEW ARGUMENT

This chapter describes the main argument of this dissertation, the content of which has already been sketched in the introduction. It is proposed here that this argument best explains why the leadership of the Bolshevik party took the above-described historical positions on the issue of war that were decisive in the historical process of the Russian Revolution. The argument possesses three main components connected, respectively, with the overarching vision of war, the relation between the latter and theory of history, and the relation between ideology and experience. But before these three components are described, this chapter offers a review of the existing literature, and proposes arguments to prove why this literature cannot provide a sufficient and comprehensive response to the research questions. This literature review shows the vacuum in the existing scholarship that the contribution of this dissertation seeks to fill out.

Literature Review

As is well-known, western scholarship on the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union in general had been roughly divided between the traditional Cold War era —often called the ‘totalitarian’³¹— ‘school’ that relied on the assumption of the primary importance of politics, and the so-called ‘revisionist school’ which, in the context of the emergence of social and cultural history in the 1960s and 1970s, relied more in the role of factors such as economy, and social movements and processes.³² Proponents of the ‘revisionist school’ reacted against what they took as being a distorting influence of Cold War

³¹ David Rowley, ‘Interpretations of the End of the Soviet Union’, in Michael David-Fox et al, eds, *After the Fall: Essays in Russian and Soviet Historiography* (Slavica: Bloomington, IN), 209.

³² See Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution*, 5.

ideology in Russian studies, whereas their critics in the ‘totalitarian school’ charged them of downplaying the ruthlessness and authoritarianism of the Bolsheviks. Scholars such as Robert Service and Orlando Figes have recently proposed a more eclectic approach that incorporates the insights of both ‘schools’.³³

Undoubtedly, works produced by scholars in the two aforementioned traditions, both in reference to the whole process of the Russian Revolution or specifically to the issue of war in Bolshevik thought, offer substantive information and convincing arguments in many aspects. Nevertheless, it is contended here that they are not entirely capable of offering specific and sound responses to the research questions raised above. Scholars working of high politics have analysed Bolshevik and Soviet ideology intensively, but most of them have not gone deeper in exploring Bolshevik thought in particular, and when they have done so, they have produced works that lack a proper historical dimension, or have a too simplistic understanding of the relation between ideology and practice. Social historians have been too ready to deny the role of ideology or ideas in general, a role that has been properly rediscovered in other fields, as it will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

In the literature at least two ‘grand’ interpretations of Bolshevism have been set forth, the core of which had significant implications for the understanding of the Bolshevik ideological and material militarisation. The first one is that the most salient aspects of Bolshevik politics were clearly devised in their ideological statements and, hence, their politics was no more than the practical application of their views. According to this view, it is possible to find in Bolshevik ideology all the elements that originated the main features of the dictatorship established in Russia after 1917. Most works that can be associated with the ‘totalitarian’ school sided with this line of interpretation. Thus, for example, in respect to war and Bolshevism, historian Israel Getzler has argued that Lenin stood apart from other revolutionaries for ‘his simplistic, narrow and brutal understanding of revolution as civil war *tout court*’ and that ‘[c]ivil war is what Lenin wanted and civil war is what he got’.³⁴

³³ See Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution*, 8.

³⁴ Israel Getzler, *Lenin’s Conception of Revolution as Civil War*, 464-5.

Bolshevik ideology was not, of course, perceived as static, and its evolution was taken into account when this argument was made. Werner Hahlweg³⁵ and many others pointed to Lenin's encounter with Clausewitz's writings as a turning point in the development of the Bolshevik view of war, whereas Jacob Kipp highlighted Lenin's rediscovery of Hegel and dialectics.³⁶ A variant of this position was the claim that there were two intellectual and political traditions in conflict in Bolshevik ideology, namely, an articulated and systematic 'orthodox' Marxism and an impulsive Russian Jacobinism, and that the latter factor eventually imposed itself, and became dominant in the dictatorship and militarisation established by the Bolsheviks.³⁷ In this schema, the Bolshevik approach to war might be seen, to some extent, as an outgrowth of the tradition going back to radical French revolutionaries that identified civil war with national liberation.³⁸ Other authors focused less in the ideology and more in the Bolshevik personal intransigence and ruthlessness as the source of their most warlike ideas.³⁹

The other 'grand' view was based on the assumption that Bolshevik dictatorial politics and its militarism were not so much the result of ideological presuppositions, but rather of historical contingencies. In this sense, it was said that the Bolsheviks were forced by the historical circumstances to adopt more dictatorial practices and to follow the path of militarisation.⁴⁰ Statements in this direction can naturally be found in the writings of the apologists of the regime, but also among sympathetic scholars such as E.H. Carr,⁴¹ and even among critics of the regime such as Bertrand Russell.⁴² The argument was often the result of the intention of separating Bolshevism from its ideological origins in socialism and Marxism, in order to dissociate the latter from the ruthless Bolshevik politics. In this line of interpretation, Bolshevik methods and military

³⁵ Werner Hahlweg, 'Clausewitz, Lenin, and Communist Military Attitudes Today', *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, 1960, 105:618, 221.

³⁶ Jacob Kipp, *Lenin and Clausewitz*, 186.

³⁷ See Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought, vol. I: Theory and Practice in the Democratic Revolution* (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1977), 2.

³⁸ See E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol III, 549.

³⁹ See Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 33; Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, 3.

⁴⁰ For a summary and criticism of this position, see James Ryan, 'Lenin's The State and Revolution and Soviet State Violence: a textual analysis', *Revolutionary Russia*, 20:2, 2007, 151.

⁴¹ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. I (London: Macmillan, 1950), 246.

⁴² Bertrand Russell, *The Theory and Practice of Bolshevism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962, fp 1920), 17.

praxis have been compared to the methods Fascism, the adoption of which was allegedly the outcome of the pressure of the time.⁴³

Generally, the latter argument was framed either in terms of necessities for survival, in the context of the civil war and the intervention of the entente, or in terms of pure opportunism of the Bolsheviks, who were portrayed as experts of *realpolitik* for whom war and terror were means to be freely employed as long as they were expedient, and who adapted their ideology to make it suitable to their objectives at the moment.⁴⁴ Social historians and ‘revisionists’, have often tended to offer support for this interpretation, insofar as they try to stress the social and cultural influences of the events, rather than the ideas of the agents. Sheila Fitzpatrick has described the dictatorial and militaristic practices of Bolshevism, in this sense, as the product of unforeseen contingencies.⁴⁵

As mentioned before scholars such as Robert Service and Orlando Figes have sought to bypass the divisions both between the ‘totalitarian’ school and the ‘revisionists’, and between those who stress ideology and historical experience, by presenting an eclectic framework of interpretation. Robert Service, for instance, has argued that ‘[t]he revisionists were right to broaden the scope of factors explaining the outcome of October Revolution; their critics were equally correct in insisting that Bolshevik doctrines and policies were always highly authoritarian.’⁴⁶ Many of these authors highlight the need to take into account both ideology and expediency in the analysis, but they do not offer a full account of how the relation of these elements should be understood in connection to the historical events, and their broader historical implications.

In addition, as the enthusiasm of the ‘archival revolution’ after the collapse of the Soviet Union waned, recent scholarship on Bolshevism has moved to positions in which the ideological origins of its practices have been reaffirmed, albeit overcoming the lack of historicity and detachment of context that was bothersome to social historians. The works of James Ryan, who has insisted in the intellectual origins of

⁴³ A. James Gregor, for instance, argued that ‘the Bolsheviks were forced to assume similar postures [to Fascism] by the course of events.’, quoted in Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: the inner history of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 32.

⁴⁴ See, Neil Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, vol. I, 5.

⁴⁵ See Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution*, 6.

⁴⁶ Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution*, 8.

Lenin's approach to political violence, are an example of this trend.⁴⁷ Before them, authors such as A.J. Polan⁴⁸ and Neil Harding had already convincingly demonstrated the influence of Bolshevik ideology, its articulateness and complexity—but not necessarily consistency, though—against those who tried to explain Bolshevik politics solely in terms of the psychology or lust of power of its practitioners.

This dissertation shares with both many Cold War era works and the recent scholarly trend described above the assumption of the relevance Bolshevik ideology for their own historical positions, particularly on the issues of war. The work of social historians and 'revisionists' is highly valuable for the present purposes, but their tendency to downplay the role of ideology is, in conformity with the latter general assumption, rejected. Nevertheless, in overall terms, it is contended here that the existing works on Bolshevik thought, both old and recent, cannot offer a proper and satisfying answer to the various research questions proposed previously, and this dissertation seeks to offer what its author considers to be the most appropriate framework of interpretation.

Old works on Bolshevism can certainly be valuable and insightful, but as children of their time, they share with their contemporaries certain features that have subsequently been discredited by advances in scholarship. These include not only the already mentioned lack of historical perspective and the tendency to define ideas in isolation, but also a problematic hermeneutics in which the concerns of the time of the scholar were often transposed into the mind of the author, then blurring his/her original intention, a problem that became acute in the context of the Cold War. It can be argued, also that their arguments were often built upon a simplistic understanding of ideas and causation that could not capture the complex process in which ideas are translated into reality.

These problems are particularly evident in the case of the treatment of Lenin's encounter with Clausewitz's writings, and the alleged absorption of his ideas by Bolshevik political thought. Although the modification of Clausewitz ideas by Lenin is often acknowledged, the distance of both systems of thought is often not taken into consideration, and dependence of their ideas is not critically assessed. This has resulted,

⁴⁷ See James Ryan, "'Revolution is War': the Development of the Thought of V.I. Lenin on Violence, 1899-1907." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 89:2.

⁴⁸ A.J. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics* (London: Methuen & Co Ltda, 1984)

in estimation of the author of this dissertation, in the transposition of problems and tensions that are proper to Clausewitz into Bolshevism, for which, having a different ideological framework, most of these tensions were foreign. Reading Lenin through the lenses of Clausewitz, however, or seeking intellectual origins of Lenin's actions in Clausewitz's ideas, as is arguably the case in a significant number of authors, is accompanied by the risk of losing sight of the distinctive aspects of Bolshevik ideology, particularly its revolutionary character, which is an aspect totally absent in Clausewitz.⁴⁹

In addition, the forms in which the problem of the relation between ideology and experience has been framed are not entirely satisfactory. This dissertation places itself in the tradition of those who have sought an eclectic solution to this problem by giving explanatory historical value to both ideas and experience, but is built on the assumption that recent authors have not expressed that correlation with enough clarity and precision. The topic of war, considered in its political aspects—as opposed to strategic—has not figured among the main concerns of these recent works, although the topic hitherto covered—such as political violence—are indirectly related. Thus, there is also a need to bring into the topic of war what recent scholarship on Bolshevik and Soviet ideology has achieved by the implementation of new methodologies, particularly those of intellectual history.

More specific shortcomings of the existing literature on the Bolshevik approach to war are not difficult to identify. Most of these works are not systematic in nature, or not focused in war in particular. And systematic treatments such as Peter Vigor's,⁵⁰ notwithstanding their comprehensiveness, fail to incorporate an appropriate historical dimension, and it is difficult to draw concise explanations of specific historical facts from their generalisations. Other works, including monographs and articles such as those already cited by Carr, Hahlweg and Kipp, are thoroughly historical but their ideological genealogies focus in particular sources and ideas, and leave outside some aspects that are highly relevant. Thus, for instance, there has been little attention of

⁴⁹ Clausewitz concerned himself with the nature war and the art of fighting, but the questions that fascinated some of his contemporaries, such as those related to the origins and possible abolition of war, or the relation between war and radical political change—which is at the heart of revolutionary politics—have no place in his thought. See W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 61-63.

⁵⁰ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War, Peace, and Neutrality* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975)

Engels' views on the possibility of a World War, and the possible influence of these views on the Bolsheviks.

There are a number of additional circumstances that could make this topic worthy of a fresh look. The many studies on the Russian Revolution contain significant details about First World War and its relation with the Revolution, but they often do not give substantive consideration to the Bolsheviks' views of war, and how they interacted with their political strategies. Studies on the Bolshevik theories of war, in turn, often fail to explore deeply the implications of the Bolshevik approach to war for the events of the Revolution, and to elucidate thus what the distinctive input of that approach was. In addition, studies on Bolshevik ideology often fail to place it in the broader context of the European socialist tradition, and thus miss the opportunity of elucidating how it developed in interdependence and opposition to rival accounts. A new evaluation of the subject that considers how European debates affected Bolshevik thought on war appears to be opportune.

Main Argument

This dissertation offers an alternative interpretation of the Bolshevik approach to war than those proposed by these writings, especially those that placed it as an inheritor of Clausewitzian warfare, seeks to bring to fore its revolutionary underpinnings and its overarching implications for both theory and practice, and argues that this interpretation allows to better understand the Bolshevik approach within the framework of its ideological universe, and hence, it can provide a better explanation of the historical positions taken by the Bolsheviks on the issue of war. The three key elements of this interpretation have been sketched in the introduction in order of relevance. In the following section they are described in inverse order, inasmuch as the two last elements described in the introduction work as precondition for the first and main contribution.

a) The Mutual Constitution of Ideology and Experience

The author of this dissertation accepts neither the theories which explain the Bolshevik approach to war in terms of ideological commitments alone, nor those that explain it solely in terms of experience or interest. The claim that ideology has legitimising and mobilising function, but has no bearing on or no predominance in the definition of policy or in political action seems to be still widespread,⁵¹ probably as a result of intellectual legacies of ‘orthodox’ Marxism itself, but cannot be accepted. As David Comey has argued, the Bolshevik dealings with issues such as the collectivisation of agriculture cannot be understood without including the input of the ideology,⁵² and some of the Bolshevik policies, particularly those related to the peasantry,⁵³ or the westward offensive of the Red Army during the civil war, were clearly dysfunctional and risky for the regime, suggesting that expediency was not a lonely voice for Bolshevik policy-making.

Nor it is possible to isolate the ideas and to define them in a sort of trans-historical form, and to admit that the Bolshevik approach to war was entirely the product of a planned and already-established ideology. The changing character of Bolshevik policy, its responsiveness and adaptation to the situations, the pragmatism and the art of *realpolitik* that was notable in the Bolshevik leadership as well as the well-attested fact of the revision and modification of the ideology to suit the political needs of the moment,⁵⁴ suggest that the Bolshevik experience is as much a product of their time and their circumstances. More insightful are the accounts that assumed a mutual interaction between ideology and *realpolitik* or experience in Communism.⁵⁵ The possibility of this interaction in Communism was allowed, it can be assumed, by the fact that Bolshevik and Soviet ideology was strongly orientated towards action.⁵⁶ The authors who proposed this model, however, often failed to give a more

⁵¹ Dave Renton’s book on Fascism, for example, argues that to focus in the content of the ideology of Fascist movements is not appropriate for understanding the operation of their regimes. See Dave Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

⁵² David Comey, ‘Marxist-Leninist Ideology and Soviet Policy’, *Studies in Soviet Thought*, no 4, 1962, 301-19, 302.

⁵³ See Geoffrey Swain, *Russia’s Civil War*, 55-59.

⁵⁴ See Robert Jones, *The Soviet Concept of “Limited Sovereignty”*, 107.

⁵⁵ R.N. Carew Hunt, ‘The Importance of Doctrine’ in *Problems of Communism*, March 1958, 15.

⁵⁶ Robert Jones, *The Soviet Concept of “Sovereignty”*, 99.

sophisticated account of how the ideology, interests, and experience actually interacted in the concrete process generation of policy.

Instead of the aforementioned model of the interaction between ideology and experience, this dissertation proposes a model of mutual constitution, in which ideology and experience are not only interactively involved in the generation of policy and political action, but also exert an influence upon each other and mutually shape their content, mediated through the notion of perception. A methodology which assumes a dichotomy between ideology and experience, and seeks to identify the ways in which these two elements compete for authority in the generation of policy and political action, it is contended here, is in risk of imposing upon reality a conceptual framework that dilutes its actual dynamics. The assessment of political experiences shows —and this will be illustrated throughout this dissertation— that both ideology and experience operated simultaneously in the definition of political action, and not as separately as it is assumed in traditional models.

The ideology, especially when it is highly articulated, comprehensive and all-demanding —as in the case of Bolshevism— imposes a filter or tunnel-vision that affects the way in which experience is perceived. The effect of experience and interests in political action is then, often mediated by the ideological lenses, which determine what a given fact means for an agent in the language of his/her own ideological universe. Thus the constitution of experience in the mind of the agent is mediated by the ideology. In turn, the relation between the agent and the ideology is mediated by experience, which determines the aspects of the ideology that are emphasized or deemphasized, confirmed or denied, reorganized or dissolved. The constitution of the ideology, hence, is also shaped by experience, and ideological evolution and historical factors are by this process dynamically intermingled.

Employing this model, this dissertation argues that the ‘militarisation’ of Marxism that took place in Bolshevism was the product of both Bolshevik ideology and historical experience, but not by a sum of these factors, nor by the separate effect of them, but by a mutual constitution. It was a product of Lenin’s revolutionary theory as much as was a product of Tsarism, the First World War, and the Civil War. But it was the Bolshevik ideological perception of these events that was crucial, since it emphasized the elements of their ideology which pointed towards militarisation. But

these ideological elements could not have been emphasised in absence of these events. The constructivist scholarship, as developed principally in international relations, could be invoked in support of this model, inasmuch as it has shown how the processes of perception shape the way in which agents understand themselves and the world, how ideas influence perception, and how perception shapes the definition of interests, and hence, of policy, and has thus overcome the one-sidedness of realist and liberal accounts.⁵⁷

b) Visions of History and War

This dissertation argues likewise that the Bolshevism's view of history had a significant role in shaping its attitude and outlook towards war. This is, of course, not a surprising and original statement per se. It is a truism that the Bolshevik judged things and events 'by whether it served to turn the wheel of history forwards or backwards.'⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it is contended here that when this argument is made, in most cases, it is often based on a simplistic understanding of the Bolsheviks' relation to history that imposes a conceptual framework into reality, rather than deriving the former from the latter. The dominant view is that the Bolsheviks were totally convinced of the inevitability of the advent of Communism, of the triumph of their revolution, and that they acted according to all the patterns that are implied in such belief. A typical statement is found in François Furet, who argued that Communism was some sort of illusion that prevented the correction that comes from experience, and a deification of history.⁵⁹ Even a very recent scholarly collection takes the belief in the inevitability of Communism in Bolshevism as a general assumption.⁶⁰

More sophisticated accounts of this problem, of course, have been elaborated by a number of scholars. Neil Harding provided a framework for the interpretation of Lenin's thought that explained it not in terms of a blind belief in the inevitability of

⁵⁷ See Christian Reus-Smit, *Constructivism*, 196.

⁵⁸ Robert Jones, *The Soviet Concept of "Limited Sovereignty"*, 35.

⁵⁹ François Furet, *Le Passé d'une Illusion: Essai sur l'idée Communiste au XXe siècle* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont S.A., 1995), 13,

⁶⁰ Tony Brenton, ed, *Historically Inevitable? Turning Points in the Russian Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2016).

Communism, but rather in terms of careful study of the present through the lenses of a Marxist teleology of history. For Lenin, he wrote: '[e]ach phase was significant and important only insofar as it contributed to the final denouement [...] the key element of his thought was a dialectical teleology.'⁶¹ Political action was, then, deduced from a correlation between the study of the facts and the expectation of the fulfilment of a pre-established theoretical model of history. Nonetheless, in the view of the author, Harding's assumption cannot explain entirely the Bolshevik *modus operandi* in such fateful events as Bloody Sunday and First World War, what Lenin called 'revolutionary times' or 'revolutionary moments', because it did not explore fully how that view affected Bolshevik outlook in these conjunctures. It is within these contexts, it is argued here, that the influence of Bolshevik teleology became particularly pronounced in their political action, particularly in relation to the issue of war.

But, what did this teleology consist in? The teleological undertones of Marxism and Bolshevism are certainly well established. Nevertheless, the arguments that suggest that the Bolsheviks acted with the consciousness of having 'history' on their side, entirely sure of their final victory, must be qualified. Soviet propaganda at the time of Stalin and Khrushchev presented a version that is similar to that: Marxism-Leninism had 'scientifically' discovered the true 'laws of history', and this factor assured the invincibility of socialism and its imminent world triumph.⁶² Nevertheless, the sources suggest that the actual understanding and the teleological orientation in both Marxism and Bolshevism had different orientation. Notwithstanding their claims on the imminence of Communism, Marx and Engels left no concrete and specific route to arrive at that historical point, and demonstrated awareness that revolutionary processes might fail and collapse,⁶³ if certain conditions are not met, as Engels' text on the European War showed.

Bolshevik texts also suggest that the most important leaders of the movement did not believe that the triumph of their revolution was inevitable. Speaking in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday (1905), when it was widely believed that a revolutionary moment had arrived in Russian and that the monarchy would be soon replaced by a

⁶¹ Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, vol. I, 80.

⁶² B. Byely et al, *Marxism-Leninism on War and Army*, (English translation reproduced by the printing services of Naval Force of the U.S. Army, 1972), 30.

⁶³ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 20, 24.

bourgeois democratic government, Lenin argued that the question of whether an armed uprising of the people was inevitable was irrelevant, and that what mattered was simply that it was necessary,⁶⁴ and refused to be overly optimistic about the possibility of victory, stating simply that there at least some tendencies that made it possible.⁶⁵ He did not manifest any view that the revolution would necessarily succeed. When he has already achieved his revolution, he did not express that such event had been inevitable, but rather that it has been a ‘miracle’ —not, of course, of a divine kind— because they could stand firm in war against ‘the whole world’ for three years and to emerge victorious from it.⁶⁶

Bolshevik teleology, as Harding argued in the case of Lenin,⁶⁷ was teleology of development in which historical economic and political processes were scrutinized to determine their progressive potential, and political action was ordered to prepare the context for the advent of the new historical phase when such potential was at its fullest level. Bolshevik historical reason, then, was not a mechanistic reading of history in which predetermined historical scenarios were simply to be discovered or reached at given conjunctures, but rather a constant search to meet the historical conditions with the right revolutionary activity to foster historical development. In other words, what mattered for the Bolsheviks in those moments that they called ‘revolutionary’ — namely, the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, and the context of First World War— was not that a given historical order was arriving in these circumstances, but rather that what they took as the most necessary conditions for revolution were present in them.

This dissertation argues, thus, that what was crucial for the Bolshevik view of war was not the belief that Communism was inevitable, but rather, the belief that with First World War the proper time for their revolution had arrived, that that was *their time*, that they should make their revolution at that moment for no other moment could arrive in the future, and that militarisation was needed for that purpose. This belief took a form similar to that of the Greek concept of ‘kairos’, which meant ‘the right moment’,

⁶⁴ V.I. Lenin, ‘Two tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution’, 1905, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 69.

⁶⁵ V.I. Lenin, *Two tactics of Social-Democracy*, 57.

⁶⁶ V.I. Lenin, ‘Speech at a Plenary Meeting of the Moscow Soviet of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies’, 1921, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 32 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 153-154.

⁶⁷ Neil Harding’s *Lenin’s Political Thought*, vol. I, 109.

or ‘the opportune moment.’⁶⁸ This belief is to be distinguished from pure *realpolitik* — in which circumstances are assessed and the best advantage is taken out of them—inasmuch as it imposes upon the judgement of the agent a meta-historical necessity for political action in a given scenario. The factor was not so much that the conditions were there, but that they *believed* that they were there for a passing moment, and that they could lose everything if they missed them.

Thus, unlike Harding, who argued for a steady correlation between the study of the present conditions, strategy, and developmental teleology in Lenin’s thought, this dissertation argues that the Bolshevik view of history leads to points in which the teleological factor becomes dominant and imposes upon strategy the necessity of intensive activity, a point in which the conditions for progressive action become critical and demand the utmost sacrifices, the payment of all costs, and the most resolute efforts to achieve the objectives. These points are the ‘revolutionary moments’, the instant of time in which a Revolution is possible, that might not come again, and thus collapses strategy into fast, risky, all-cost, and all-effort action. The concrete implications of this factor for the Bolshevik view of war are set forth below.

c) The Eschatological Approach to War

Anatol Rapoport distinguished between three major philosophies of war: the cataclysmic, the political, and the eschatological. The cataclysmic, which is symbolically represented by Lev Tolstoi, understands war as irrational and purposeless, but having deep and lasting consequences for humanity; the political, which is represented by Clausewitz, sees war as a normalised instrument of the national state to achieve a definite set of objectives—which might be either ethically permissible or not; and the eschatological,⁶⁹ which sees war—or a determinate war—as the violent culmination of a historical process, which is ordained to given origin to a radically renewed historical order. He summarised this schema by stating that ‘in political

⁶⁸ For a general reference on the Greek concept of ‘kairos’, see Erich Charles White, *Kaironomia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 13.

⁶⁹ ‘Eschatology’ means, literally, the study of the last things, and refers to the religious and philosophical speculation about the end of human history. Here, the word is used in a metaphorical sense: it refers to the notion of the last/ultimate/definitive war that is implied in this tradition.

philosophy war is compared to a game of strategy (like chess); in eschatological philosophy, to a mission or the dénouement of a drama; in cataclysmic philosophy, to a fire or an epidemic.’ And he places Marx and Lenin in the eschatological tradition.⁷⁰

Rapoport essentially departed from the common interpretation of the Bolshevik approach to war, the core of which has been constantly seen as deeply influenced by Clausewitz’s theories, a tendency which in turn can be understood as the consequence of taking Lenin’s continuous praises to him as indicative of the authentic character of his own view of war. Vigor exemplifies this common view by stating that ‘[...] though Clausewitz was not, of course, a Marxist, a great deal of thought is inherently congenial to Marxism; and he is accepted by Marxism-Leninism as one of its prime authorities on war.’⁷¹ Werner Hahlweg had stated the same before him: ‘Lenin incorporated Clausewitz’s basic thoughts into the Marxist Leninist system, which can no longer be imagined without them.’⁷² Jacob Kipp likewise argued that ‘Lenin’s reading of Clausewitz assumed central significance with the increasing militarization of Lenin’s thought [...]’.⁷³

The extent to which Lenin actually relied on Clausewitz will be explored in the second chapter. It should be stated here, simply, that associating Lenin and the Bolsheviks with the Clausewitzian tradition might significantly blur the revolutionary undertones of the ideology and practice of the former. This dissertation argues that the Bolshevik military ideas and praxis during their most important political events, and particularly during the Russian Revolution, cannot be accurately understood in Clausewitz’s sense of war as a tool of policy for the normal objectives of a nation state. Simply stated, the warfare of the Bolsheviks was, within the framework of their own ideological universe, *a revolutionary warfare*. Inasmuch as the Clausewitzian model does not possess revolutionary aspects in any sense,⁷⁴ it is incapable to account for the ideological structure and main implications of Bolshevik warfare.

Rapoport’s classification of the Bolshevik approach to war as ‘eschatological’ is, in view of the author of this dissertation, more accurate than the common view referred to above. Nonetheless, not being a specialist on Bolshevism, Rapoport’s interpretation

⁷⁰ Anatol Rapoport, *Introduction*, 13-17.

⁷¹ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 241.

⁷² Werner Hahlweg, *Clausewitz, Lenin, and Communist Military Attitudes*, 223.

⁷³ Jacob Kipp, *Lenin and Clausewitz*, 186.

⁷⁴ W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 63.

of the Bolshevik view falls into the simplistic understanding of Marxism and Bolshevism described in the previous section. Moreover, he fails to make proper and necessary distinctions, such as that between revolution and war, and presents many concepts in a level of generalisation that seems to be required for his classification but which cannot express the features of Bolshevism in their proper particularity. Thus, this dissertation takes his main assumption, but seeks to move to a more accurate understanding of the specificities of Bolshevism, and to develop the implications of this ‘eschatological’ reading of the Bolshevik view of war.

In the perspective of the author of this dissertation, there are at least four characteristics of an approach to war that can be considered ‘eschatological’: firstly, *significant threat*: the context in which warfare takes place is perceived as threatening the existence and purpose of the group; *absolute promise*: the context offers the only opportunity to achieve the proper objectives of the group; *historical uniqueness*: the opportunity to achieve the objectives is perceived as unique and unlikely to happen again; *definitive struggle*: the war is perceived as the last war, the war that would put end to all wars; *violent pathway*: the context forces the group the resort to war to achieve their objectives, for only through it can survive violence, and this is justified inasmuch as these objectives will abolish war altogether.

It is the general contention of this work that the interpretation of many events of the time —imperialism, militarism, the arms race, but principally the onset of First World War— in Bolshevism, led the main leaders of the movement —particularly Lenin— to the belief a critical point had been reached, in which their Revolution was truly possible but at the same time radically threatened, a point which might not come in the future, and hence should be taken advantage of then or missed altogether. The promise was a World Revolution that would quickly spread throughout the globe and totally abolish war by uprooting the class division that were its true cause. But in the context of war, survival and success of the movement could be achieved only through war: war would be abolished through war. This, it is argued here, explains the ‘militarisation of Marxism’.

It is only when the Bolsheviks realised that their Revolution did not happen, that the threat was not absolute, that their opportunity was not unique, and that the Great European War was not to be the last war, that he moved from an ‘eschatological’ to a

more 'political' understanding. Freed from the demands of the 'revolutionary moment' of which Lenin had convinced himself, Stalinist and Soviet warfare in general adopted contours more similar to the Clausewitzian view of war as instrument for the purposes of the state, albeit preserving the rhetoric and warfare concepts inherit from the 'revolutionary' generation. The absence of the aforementioned process among European socialists explains, in turn, why their analyses of the situation of the time differed from Lenin's. The next three chapters illustrate how this interpretation is supported in the facts.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIALISM AND WAR IN THE 19TH CENTURY

This chapter describes the broad intellectual context in which the Bolshevik approach to war developed. It presents, initially, the main conditions and aspects of modern warfare, and the philosophical and theoretical traditions that emerged in response to them. It later presents a general introduction to the views of war in socialism, and finally an assessment of the views of war of Marx and Engels. The first and second sections will allow appreciating the background against which Bolshevism emerged, and to compare and contrast the latter with alternative traditions of war. This comparison will serve to support some arguments of this dissertation. The third section allows assessing the relation, as far as the political aspects of war are concerned, between Bolshevism and the authors whom they took as their canonical authorities.

Traditions of War

Warfare was profoundly transformed in modernity by many factors, particularly the rise of the national states, the formation of professional armies, and technological advancement. Throughout the Middle Ages, changes in the technology of warfare and in the methods of fighting were not significant,⁷⁵ and the character of war remained relatively static, if compared with the changes of modernity. Canonical and civil law regulated the exercise of war according to principles of the 'just war' tradition as formulated by Augustine of Hippo and developed by moral theologians. The armies involved had personal allegiance to the ruler rather than to the community as a whole, and their allegiance could be negotiated and changed. From the 16th century onwards,

⁷⁵ Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1989), 1, 22.

there would be a tendency to substitute mercenary armies by citizen militias, and to move the allegiance from the ruler and dynasty to the state.

These changes emerged progressively between the 16th and 17th centuries in a process that has been called the ‘military revolution’,⁷⁶ the decisive fact of which was the development of firearms. Traditional chivalry, which stood at the heart of warfare for many centuries, would be turned obsolete by the new arms, and radical changes in terms of strategy and operation would be made necessary. Military thought had taken inspiration from Ancient Rome’s warfare,⁷⁷ but in this period it would be forced to rethink its own presuppositions and fundamental principles. These transformations notwithstanding, and perhaps with the exception of the wars of religion, the warfare that emerged was characterised by limited mobilisation and ideological commitment. Firearms forced a retreat from all-out warfare and open military clash, and strengthened manoeuvre and politics. As Azar Gat has pointed out, in the period from 1648 —the symbolic year of the emergence of the national state— to the French Revolution, most wars were limited and rather conservative in objectives.⁷⁸

The French Revolution and later on the Napoleonic campaigns, in turn, would provoke radical changes in the visions and practice of warfare. Along with French Revolution, national armies with a definite ideological commitment to a community and intense level of popular involvement and mobilization emerged. National mass armies replaced the old armies of professional fighters. Napoleon demolished the manoeuvre warfare of the Ancien Regime that sought to provoke the retreat of the enemy by strategic moves or politics, and put in its place an all-out warfare based in the total concentration of forces, the open military clash, and the destruction of the enemy. The two events, in sum, implied a change from the predominance of limited war and manoeuvre to ‘total’ war, a configuration that will predominate throughout the 19th century and until First World War.

It was in response to the many concerns imposed by these historical facts that the modern philosophical and theoretical traditions on war developed. Philosophers who debated on war generally gravitated around series of major topics, the most important of

⁷⁶ See Geoffrey Parker, “‘The Military Revolution’ 1560-1666—A Myth?’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 48:2, 1976, 195-214.

⁷⁷ Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 2.

⁷⁸ Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 95.

which probably were the causes of war, the possibility of abolition of war, the rationality/irrationality of war, the relation between ‘total’ and ‘absolute’ wars and ‘limited war’, and the permissibility of war. One of these traditions, which might be called the ‘realist’ view, and which is symbolically represented by Machiavelli and Thucydides, perceived war as a normalised feature of the human experience, and saw history as an endless alternation between peace and war.⁷⁹ The task of the philosophers was conceived as devising forms of limiting and rationalising the exercise of wars and preventing escalation. Causes of war were attributed either to human nature, or the laws of history, and the possibility of its abolition was thus dismissed.

The predominance of limited warfare and the constraints imposed by manoeuvre and politics on warfare seem to have contributed to ‘realist’ accounts of war. Another tradition, which might be called —albeit anachronistically— ‘liberal’, postulated that it was possible to significantly limit war or to abolish it altogether, be it through the formation of a big world empire, or a system of balance of power, or through a confederation. Canonical authors associated with this tradition include Kant, Rousseau, and Abbé Saint Pierre, all of whom seemed to be concerned with the devastation produced by the wars of religion. Some of these authors connected war with political structures, and preached the promotion democracy or republicanism as antidote.

Another relevant tradition comes from the Enlightenment, which in keeping with its own principles and aims, sought to discover the universal laws of war that, so they assumed, would explain all wars from all ages, and will help to subject the participation to the dominion of rationality.⁸⁰ As in other disciplines, Enlightenment military thinkers were fascinated by the precision of natural sciences, and were interested in applying mathematical models to warfare. Their ideal was to manoeuvre as to force a retreat of the enemy and prevent full-scale war. These theories were discredited with Napoleon’s demolition of war of manoeuvre. Believing that Napoleon had revealed the true general principle of war, the so-called German military school emerged as a reaction to the Enlightenment, and insisted in the historicity, particularity, and the multiplicity of factors of each war, and the role of experience.

The rise of Clausewitz within the German military school overshadowed the Enlightenment and German thinkers, and most other philosophers of war ever since,

⁷⁹ See W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 133.

⁸⁰ See Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 113.

rivalled perhaps, in the pure philosophical plane, only by Lev Tolstoy. Clausewitz derived from the Napoleonic experience the idea of all-out war, open military engagement, and total destruction of the enemy as the inherent tendency of war, but a tendency that was limited by the influence of politics.⁸¹ Lev Tolstoy was to some extent also a reaction to the Enlightenment, but from a different angle. Against the Enlightenment belief in the possibility of subjecting war to reason, Tolstoy insisted in the incommensurable number of factors involved in war, its unpredictability, and the deceptiveness of military history that made appear that most facts of war were the result decisions of generals alone.

Most of these traditions shared the assumption that it was possible to argue morally about war, and to judge the motivations and outcomes of each particular war according to ethical principles. The tradition that rejected this assumption was pacifism, which was based in a condemnation of war without reservation, and which had philosophical roots in utopian, anarchist, and religious roots. The French Revolution also gave origin to another relevant approach: that which understood war as a tool of the oppressed for liberation, for emancipation from despotic rule.⁸² This tradition introduced a strong dichotomy between wars unleashed by monarchs and those fought by oppressed nations, and challenged the notion of aggressive/defensive war distinction, for aggressiveness was understood to be rooted not in the opening of military hostilities but rather in the structure of long-term oppression.

Socialism and War

The general attitude of socialism —broadly conceived— towards war has been accurately portrayed by E.H. Carr:

[...] war was the necessary consequence of capitalism. National wars were waged at the behest of capitalists and for their advantage. The coming of socialism would remove the fundamental cause of war and its sole incentive. [...] The socialist tradition always embodied a strong

⁸¹ Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 204

⁸² E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III, 549.

element of opposition to war, based on a specific interest of the workers in the maintenance of peace; it thus ran parallel to the liberal tradition of the later nineteenth century which attributed war to autocratic government [...].⁸³

Despite their manifold divisions, the various traditions of socialism shared, thus, a more or less general agreement in most of the issues that concerned philosophers. The causes of war and the possibility of its abolition were clear for them. War was a disastrous event, but could be explained in terms of a grand underlying factor. National wars, unleashed for the interests of the rulers, should not concern the workers who shared a solidarity among them that knew no borders. But the translation of these general ideas into practice proved to be tragically contentious. Socialists had different and often conflicting understandings of what the position of the workers in face of existing military conflict should be, of what strategy should be followed by the socialist parties in the time of war, and what was the role of war in the historical process towards socialism.

In the classical 'just war' theory, wars were judged according to their origin and their purpose: wars of aggression are judged as immoral, and defensive wars as just. The socialists preserved this level of analysis, but many of them sought to modify their content, according to their own principles, and to move beyond the aggressive/defensive distinction, which Karl Kautsky deemed as 'outdated'.⁸⁴ This has as a primary purpose to support and legitimise the wars of national liberation and anti-colonial wars, which in many cases had started as a result of an initial uprising of the subjected people. Nevertheless, the classical theory was not totally rejected, and served as a *lingua franca* to criticise aggressive militaristic campaigns, and ended up in a rather uneasy and imprecise position within the European socialist intellectual universe.

To this first level of analysis —wars judged according to their origins and purposes— many socialists added two more levels, namely, one in terms of global historical effects of war —whether a given war was 'reactionary' or 'progressive', whether it turned the clock of history forward or backward— and the other in terms of the opportunities brought by war for the cause of socialism —whether a determinate

⁸³ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III., 550.

⁸⁴ Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, 25.

war could provide the necessary context for a national transition to socialism. Nevertheless, the relation between war and the transition towards socialism, as well as the position of socialism towards existing wars never received an answer that was acceptable for the various socialist leaders. Marx and Engels, as it will be shown below, emphasised the second level of analysis. The European socialists in the eve of the war eventually ended in some form of the first level, whereas the Bolsheviks turned entirely towards the third level of analysis.

The socialist critique, however, was essentially directed towards economic and social aspects, and the issue of war was just a derivative aspect of that, for them. It was the force of the circumstances, the increasing awareness of the intermingling of military, social, and economic aspects, and the profound impact that the crudest wars of the time had in domestic and international politics, that led the socialists to focus in the issue of war.⁸⁵ The definition of the stance of the worldwide worker movement in face of the military conflicts that afflicted Europe was a controversial issue since the time of the First International Socialists. Discussions on disarmament, pacifism, and the workers' course of action in relation to the conflicts in which their countries were involved, were object of strong disputes, particularly among Marx and Engels, and the proponents of pacifism that took their inspiration from the writings of Pierre Joseph Proudhon.

Despite their condemnation of war and contempt of militarism, Marx and Engels strongly clashed with the pacifists and those who argued in favour of disarmament for, in their view, any plan to eradicate war besides that of constructing socialism would be inevitably destined to fail. Disarmament only would leave the workers defenceless,⁸⁶ and every war contains the seeds of new wars, he argued. Marx and Engels ultimately distanced themselves from classical theories by dismissing the distinction between aggressive and defensive wars as 'illusory'.⁸⁷ These divergences were not solved during Marx and Engels' life, and were inherited by the Second International. As Karl Kautsky argued in 1907, socialists seemed to agree in the condemnation of war only, but disagreed in most other things.⁸⁸ Marx and Engels' works would eventually become canonical for a large number of socialists, and many of them would look at these works

⁸⁵ See W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 69.

⁸⁶ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III, 552.

⁸⁷ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III., 560.

⁸⁸ Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, 24.

in their disputes, in order to find support for their own ideas —Kautsky and Lenin, principally. In Marx and Engels could be found, thus, not only the source of most dominant socialist ideas on war, but also the source of their most fateful disagreements.

Marx and Engels on War

Marx and Engels could not provide the socialists who looked back at them for guidance in topics connected with war with substantive answers to most questions, since they did not leave any systematic treatment on war and peace for posterity, and their ideas were scattered throughout in their various writings.⁸⁹ Their ideas were expressed with clarity in many instances, but it is necessary to extract them from the particular argumentative context in which they were framed to derive general principles that are valid for other contexts. In the other hand, the way in which they both addressed the topic of the relation between the socialist revolution and war is not entirely consistent. As the philosopher W.B. Gallie pointed out, war is treated in their writings variously as a stumbling block for the workers' movement that might be either surmountable or might threaten it entirely, a catalyst for the revolution, an accelerator of the decadence of old reactionary institutions, and even a tool for revolution.⁹⁰ These inconsistencies are, understandably, at the root of many disagreements among their followers.

The main tendencies in Marx and Engels' writings on war, as illustrated by their interventions in the controversies of the First International, can be summarized as follows: first, war is the consequence of the division of classes and, hence, capitalism is the cause of modern warfare; second, only the advent of socialism will eradicate war and bring a perpetual peace, and before that event war is unavoidable and any peace is temporary and limited; third, a particular war should be judged both by the purpose of its agents and by its consequences, the two first dimensions mentioned at the beginning of the first chapter : (a) in the first case, wars are 'just' and 'progressive' for the oppressed nations which fight against their oppressive landlords and colonizers, and 'unjust' and 'reactionary' for the imperialist nations that wage them for the sake of territorial expansion, plunder, colonization, and so forth; (b) and in the second case,

⁸⁹ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 240.

⁹⁰ W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 72.

wars whose consequences helps the historical progress toward socialism are to be supported, and those that obstruct it are to be opposed.⁹¹

It was the judgement of war through its consequences, nonetheless, that constituted the most distinctive aspect of Marx and Engels's approach to war and peace, and this aspect show how theory was deeply attached to practical considerations in Marxist ideology. They maintained that, if the expected consequences of the triumph of one party were beneficial for the proletarian revolution, that party should be supported, even if it were the case of a war between two bourgeois countries. In the Franco-Prussian war, for instance, they decided to support Prussia, believing that its triumph would help the worker movement both in France and Germany⁹². Marx had sustained that wars 'put nations to the test' and destroyed institutions that had become obsolete and backward and, hence, its effects could provide a very favourable backdrop from the emergence of the socialist revolution.⁹³ Lenin absorbed these general Marxist principles, including the consequentialist judgement of war, and built upon them a general theory that eventually succeeded as the dominant position of the Bolshevik Party.

What, then, proved to be divisive for socialists in this canonical corpus? The divisions of the socialists over the issue of war has attracted the attention of many writers, but in the estimation of the author of this dissertation is the merit of the W.B. Gallie in having provided the most convincing solution. He attributed these divisions to confusions generated by Engels' late writings.⁹⁴ During the last years of his life, and after the death of Karl Marx, the topic of war seem to have been a special preoccupation for Engels, and were his writings from that period, and not the early works produced in collaboration with Marx that had the strongest impact in the socialist outlook of war, although this has been greatly overlooked.⁹⁵ Some authors, such as Peter Vigor, have noticed that war was more a concern for Engels than for Marx, but fail to explore the content and implications of Engels's late writings, in part because these are often

⁹¹ Peter Vigor (*The Soviet View of War*, pp.16-32) provides a good summary of these positions. Although not approaching anything that can be considered a systematic treatment on war and peace, two of the works produced by Marx and Engels are of capital importance in the particular subject of war: Marx's *The Civil War in France* (1948), and Engels' *Anti-During* (1975).

⁹² See E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 554.

⁹³ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 17.

⁹⁴ W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 90.

⁹⁵ W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 67-68.

considered to be focused in technical and strategic aspects, and not the political dimension of war.⁹⁶

Certainly, Engels' late writings dug into several technical and strategic aspects that never concerned Marx, but they touch many political and theoretical aspects too, particularly the concrete relation between revolution and war. It is no fortuity, then, that it is to Engels and not to Marx that Lenin made reference when addressing the topic of war, and it was Engels who was hailed in the Soviet Union as the great founder of the Communist theory of war.⁹⁷ Engels argued that the replacement of professional armies for national armies and military conscriptions was highly beneficial for the revolution, inasmuch as it allowed socialist workers to penetrate the army, and military effectives would be more reachable and convertible to the cause. Hence, the army could be employed as a tool for the transition towards socialism. The socialists should, then, work for disarmament and the establishment of citizen militias.⁹⁸ Which concrete role these socialist armies should have, however, was not clear.

Engels' estimations of the outcomes of militarism and of a —by then— probable great European war appear to have been influential in shaping the socialist outlook on work, although, in the opinion of the author of this dissertation, many writers seem to have failed to grasp their full impact and implications. As a few authors in his time, Engels foresaw the unprecedented violence that would be unleashed in a general European war, but proposed two senses in which they it might affect the world socialist movement: it would destroy it altogether, or demolish all its achievements along with its prospects of success, or it would provide the conditions for its triumph. The first sense was expressed in an 1882 letter to Bebel and an 1888 letter to Storge. He wrote to Bebel that, should a European war take place, '[a]ll the work of the revolutionaries in Russia would be rendered useless; our party in Germany would be swamped and ruined [...] and it would be the same in France.'⁹⁹ In another 1888 work he wrote, in contrast: 'only one result [of the war] is absolutely certain: general exhaustion and the establishment of the conditions for the ultimate victory of the working class.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 10.

⁹⁷ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 9.

⁹⁸ W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 84, 94; in an 1884 letter to Bebel, Engels wrote: '[...] if the impulse arises from Germany, then the revolution can only start from the army.'

⁹⁹ Quoted in W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 92.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 93.

These two views —that the popular militias should be converted to the socialist cause, and that a great European war would cause either the utter destruction or ultimate victory of the workers— were decisive in shaping, albeit in different form, the approach to war and revolution of the European socialists and of Bolshevism, and was at the root of their bitter disagreements in 1914, as Gallie noted. How this process took place would be explained later, following the general lines established by the British philosopher. This dissertation goes beyond him by arguing that the second ideas was more relevant for Bolshevism, and shaped decisively its outlook. It provided with their *ultimate threat* and their *ultimate opportunity*. But for now, it is convenient to take a look at the intellectual origins of the Bolshevik approach to war.

CHAPTER FOUR

WAR AND THE FAILED REVOLUTION

There were three contexts in which the Bolsheviks were forced to give strong consideration to the political and strategic aspects of war: (a) Bloody Sunday and the 1905 Revolution, (b) the onset of First World War, and (c) the Russian Civil War. During the period following the 1905 Revolution until the Great War, the topic was naturally not among their main concerns, and this is, of course, reflected in their writings,¹⁰¹ except for the Stuttgart Congress which will be referred to in the next chapter. The most significant difference between the first two contexts and the last is that after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks were in position of controlling an army and to unleash and get involved in military conflicts, and this factor shaped their general outlook.¹⁰² This chapter focuses in the first of these contexts, and the other two are addressed in the fifth and sixth chapters, respectively. The content that follows covers the ideological and historical origins of the Bolshevik approach to war.

The Party as an Army

The Bolsheviks, as is well known, were the result of the split of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903. The main point of dispute between the two resulting wings —the Bolsheviks, dominated by Vladimir Lenin’s protagonist role, and the Mensheviks, under the leadership of Julius Martov— was Lenin’s plan of a centralised party of professional revolutionaries.¹⁰³ In the years preceding this event, the activity of the socialists in Russia had been mostly confined to intellectual affairs. The young

¹⁰¹ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 11.

¹⁰² Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 13.

¹⁰³ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 37.

Lenin rose to prominence among the socialists as a fierce opponent of the Russian populists or *narodniki*, a group which argued that the peasant commune was the pathway to socialism. Along with Georgi Plekhanov —a senior Russian Marxist whom was to become later his opponent— Lenin’s main task was to attack the populists and to prove them that the it was the proletariat, and not the peasantry, that was capable of leading the revolution, and that the peasant commune generated rather than prevented capitalism.¹⁰⁴

By the time of the split, Lenin’s main concern was to raise the ‘revolutionary consciousness’ of the proletariat, namely, to help the workers to be aware of their condition as a class, and of their revolutionary potential, and his activity, consequently, was focused in the organisation of the centralised elite party that he needed for that purpose. His intentions put him in contention with other groups of socialists, particularly those who became known as the ‘economists’ and the ‘terrorists’: the latter wanted a strategy based on the improvement of the economic situation of the workers, whereas the former preached an open violent confrontation with the monarchy. Lenin thought that the economists’ and the terrorists’ methods were ineffective and prevented the revolutionary development of the proletariat. Two of his most famous early works: ‘*Where to Begin?*’ (1901) and ‘*What is to be done?*’ (1902), are in substance an attack of both the economists and the terrorists.¹⁰⁵

Although this debate is not directly related to the question of war, it is possible to contemplate in it some elements that are indicative of what Lenin thought in the subject at this point. It is also opportune to compare Lenin’s strategy at this point with his strategy in 1905. The first thing that is noticeable in these early writings is that Lenin constantly employed military metaphors, terminology and symbols to refer to the group that he wanted to organise. The Russian students of Marxism were, for him, for instance, like ‘new warriors’ seeking to ‘take the field against the enemy’,¹⁰⁶ and he could call them as ‘our military forces [...] of volunteers and insurgents’.¹⁰⁷ Terror is defined by him as a ‘military action’ suitable for specific conditions. He did not reject it

¹⁰⁴ Neil Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, vol. I, 46.

¹⁰⁵ The details of this controversy are taken from Neil Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, vol. I, 151-169.

¹⁰⁶ V.I. Lenin, ‘What is to be done?’, 1902, in (1961) *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 441.

¹⁰⁷ V.I. Lenin, ‘Where to begin?’, 1901, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 20.

on principle, but he thought that it was unsuitable for the socialists at that point, as it might have ended up dispersing the group and weakening its capacity of action.¹⁰⁸

The military language consists mostly of metaphors of political action, but it is not clear how he understood the relation between civil war and revolution at this point. His argument against the terrorists, who for the most part belonged to the group that became known as the Social Revolutionaries,¹⁰⁹ is not that a direct assault was incorrect, but rather that it was imprudent. The objective of *What is to Done?*, he wrote, was to reject ‘an immediate *call* for assault’ and to demand that ‘all efforts be directed towards gathering, organising, and *mobilising* a permanent army’.¹¹⁰ In Lenin’s *Where to begin?*, nevertheless, the claim is made that tsardom will probably not fall as a result of a ‘regular siege or organized assault only’ and that such a view is ‘absurd and doctrinaire’, and that it will most likely fall as a result of ‘spontaneous outbursts and unforeseen political complications which constantly threaten it from all sides.’¹¹¹

The influence of Engels is revealed in a footnote where Lenin calls for taking advantage of the discontent among the military to gain their effectives to socialism, and to have ‘military organisations’ affiliated to the party,¹¹² though still not clear how he imagines their role. Be as it may, Lenin’s analogies between political action and warfare might suggest bellicose tendency in his personality, and might give some credibility to the theories that rooted his later militarism and ruthlessness in his personal traits. But it is interesting to note, nevertheless, that at this point Lenin’s military imagination seems to possess exactly the opposite features of Clausewitzian warfare. Clausewitz’s conception of war was based in the Napoleonic strategy of open and direct engagement, maximum concentration of forces, and total destruction,¹¹³ which is the kind of action that Lenin is reproaching to the terrorists. Lenin’s military configuration is more akin to the manoeuvre warfare against which Clausewitz was reacting.

¹⁰⁸ V.I. Lenin, *Where to Begin?*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22: the Collapse of Tsarism and the Establishment of Soviet Power*, European History in Perspective series, (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 14.

¹¹⁰ V.I. Lenin, *What is to be done?*, 510.

¹¹¹ V.I. Lenin, *Where to Begin?*, 24.

¹¹² V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, 468.

¹¹³ Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 199.

The Revolutionary *Momentum* of 1905

In 1902, radicals argued that Lenin's gradual strategy put the socialists in risk of 'missing' the Revolution, a claim dismissed by Lenin.¹¹⁴ By 1905, after the massacre perpetrated by the monarchy against a peaceful demonstration of peasants, and which sparked a chain of national uprisings, Lenin's position had been inverted and he was anxious about the possibility of missing the revolutionary moment. His tone and mood became extremely bellicose and warlike, but in this time the military language was not employed as a metaphor for political action: it embodied a genuine call for armed uprising of the people. The objective of the socialists was to overthrow the monarchy and to establish a bourgeois democratic regime. Lenin thought that the only suitable pathway for that outcome was an armed uprising that would provoke a civil war. In his *Revolutionary Days*, written from Geneva, he argued that the workers had learnt from the massacre that they were already in a war, and they must respond accordingly. 'Revolution is war', he said, and '[o]f all the wars fought in history it is the only lawful, rightful, just, and truly Great War. [...]'.¹¹⁵

The article of the same year entitled *The Revolutionary Army and the Revolutionary Government* contains a first sketch of what later would become Lenin's mature theory of war. Civil war, in his view, would be a 'higher form of revolutionary struggle' into which the workers were introduced after experiencing repeatedly military brutal repression from the hands of the tsarist government.¹¹⁶ Civil war is connected to the proletarian revolution as a necessary pathway, since 'exploitation cannot be destroyed without war', and the workers are compelled to wars that are 'always and everywhere begun by the exploiters themselves'.¹¹⁷ The aim of the article was to convince the forces of the popular opposition to organize in the form of a revolutionary army', and this purpose also animated another article entitled *From the Defensive to the*

¹¹⁴ V.I. Lenin, *What is to be done?* 512.

¹¹⁵ V.I. Lenin, 'Revolutionary Days', 1905, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 8, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 107, 109, 113.

¹¹⁶ V.I. Lenin, 'Revolutionary Army and Revolutionary Government', 1905, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 8 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 560.

¹¹⁷ V.I. Lenin, *Revolutionary Army and Revolutionary Government*, 565.

Offensive, but with a tone much more bellicose, since Lenin explicitly calls for the large-scale production of bombs for the use of this revolutionary army¹¹⁸

The strategy of ‘*What is to be Done?*’ was then turned upside down. There was no more need for cultivating the ‘revolutionary consciousness’ of the proletariat, because that could be gained in the revolutionary practice of the direct assault. Lenin now debated with the Mensheviks, who did not totally reject the armed uprising, but were more cautious and wanted to negotiate their place as opposition in a possible Constituent Assembly. Lenin accused them of seeking a deadly compromise with the monarchy. His plan was to arm the people for the overthrow of the Tsar, and to subsequently form of transitional government, a dictatorship, that would prevent the bourgeoisie from taking advantage of the revolutionary gains of the workers:

A decisive victory of revolution over tsarism’ is the *revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry*. [...] And such a victory will be precisely a dictatorship, i.e., it must inevitably rely on military force, on the arming of the masses, on an insurrection, and not on institutions of one kind or another, established in a “lawful” or “peaceful” way.¹¹⁹

Lenin writings reveal a careful attention of the past, and the need to learn from past experiences the necessary lessons. In this, at least, he approached Clausewitz. He considered—with a bit of precision—that the Bolsheviks were like the Jacobins, and the Mensheviks like the Girondins. But it was the crushing of the 1848 German Revolution that was more relevant, since it showed that the big mistake had been the passivity of the revolutionaries and their refusal to start an armed uprising. He accompanied this with a rather crude apology for violence, stating that ‘force alone settles the great problems of political liberty and the class struggle’, and that the action of the counter-revolution was the measure of the reaction of the revolution. He reiterates

¹¹⁸ V.L. Lenin, ‘From the Defensive to the Offensive’, 1905, in (1972) *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 9, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1972), 285.

¹¹⁹ V.I. Lenin, ‘Two tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution’, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 51, 56.

Engels' hopes that the popular members of the military might be attracted by the socialist cause and become aware of the exploitation of the people by the monarchy.¹²⁰

Two ideas that would become essential part of the Bolshevik outlook on war are clearly delineated in the writings of this time: the notion that counter-revolution will always be strong, and indefatigable, and hence there was a need to totally crush it, and notion that a 'revolutionary war' would make the distinction between aggression and self-defence meaningless. Yet this latter assertion relied in some form of the classic theory of just war, because it was affirmed that the war is always started by the oppressor classes. As the negotiations that followed Bloody Sunday failed, Lenin's call received some form of response in the Moscow Uprising that took place in December of 1905, and the events only confirmed him in his belief that, as in the French precedent, the pathway of war was made necessary by the circumstances. As he reflected on the experience of the Moscow Uprising, Lenin put forward explicitly his idea that the progress of the revolution was to be invariably accompanied by an increasingly violent response from reactionary forces, making the preparation of the workers for civil war an imperative:

[...] the sequence of events in Moscow in the December days, strikingly confirmed one of Marx's profound propositions: revolution progresses by giving rise to a strong and united counter-revolution [...] We would be deceiving both ourselves and the people if we concealed from the masses the necessity of a desperate, bloody war of extermination, as the immediate task of the coming revolutionary action.¹²¹

The identification of civil war with traditional warfare which is salient in Lenin's thought from his early writings is based, as E.H. Carr accurately noted,¹²² on the experience of the French revolutionaries, to which Lenin looked constantly as a solid precedent for revolutionary struggle. It was specifically the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, though, that was the most instructive for Lenin. Marx had seen in

¹²⁰ This is a summary of *Two Tactics of Social Democracy*.

¹²¹ V.I. Lenin, 'Lessons of the Moscow Uprising', 1906, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 11 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 173-4.

¹²² E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 3, 549.

the Commune the first revolutionary government in history. In his 1908 article entitled *Lessons of the Commune*, he asserted that the experiment of the Commune had failed as a consequence of the ‘excessive magnanimity of the proletariat’: ‘instead of destroying its enemies it sought to exert moral influence on them; it underestimated the significance of direct military operations in civil war [...]’. This is a lesson that the proletariat should bear in mind, as it did in the December Uprising of 1905, he added.¹²³

The Failed ‘Eschatological’ Judgement

The conflict between the Menshevik gradualist and manoeuvring solution and Lenin’s strong call for a popular armed uprising is the first historical over war that was set forth in the research puzzle of this dissertation. It raises the question of what explains Lenin’s bellicose ‘turn’, and why did the Menshevik reacted differently to the very same facts. What was the decisive factor? Why Lenin reversed what he had said in *What is to be Done?* A key, it is proposed here, is given in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy*. There Lenin rhetorically wonders if he is mistaken about the fact that the Revolution had started, and dismissed that possibility.¹²⁴ It was his belief that that moment was a *revolutionary moment* and that cannot be missed was decisive. The massacre perpetrated by the monarchy opened the door for the greatest threat, but also for the greatest opportunity, and the tool of the monarchy to crush the revolution was the tool to defeat the monarchy itself.

This belief seems to be the result of Lenin’s reading of past revolutionary experiences. In Lenin’s framework of understanding, both the German revolutionaries of 1848 and those of the French Commune missed their *revolutionary momentum* by refusing to wage a war against counter-revolution at the same level that it waged it against them. Both showed the absolute threat of counter-revolution, but their partial victory was also a witness of the great promise. Lenin, in turn, was convinced that the *revolutionary moment* has arrived for them, and should not be missed. The radical and abrupt reversal of the reflective and well-crafted strategy of *What is to be Done?*

¹²³ V.I. Lenin, ‘Lessons of the Commune’, 1908 in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 476-7.

¹²⁴ V.L. Lenin, *Two Tactics of Social Democracy*, 71-72.

suggests that Lenin's call for civil war in 1905 cannot be explained in terms of *realpolitik* alone, and that an ideological input is needed. Lenin's vision of history, his own *kairos*, led his correlation between careful study of the circumstances and developmental teleology to a collapse. The circumstances were petrified into a revolutionary *kairos* in his mind, and this required for him the most extreme, radical action.

The Mensheviks and other agents reacted differently to the same facts because they saw them through mental different lenses. As Alexander Wendt and other constructivist scholars have argued, the meaning of material structures is mediated by 'immaterial structures' of 'shared knowledge', and, hence, they can be interpreted differently, even in a condition of permanence.¹²⁵ The facts were, of course, necessary to turn Lenin's strategy upside down, but their influence was mediated by an 'immaterial structure', namely, his own ideology and his own interpretation of the Marxist canon and revolutionary politics. It was made possible, certainly, by his personal psychological disposition—which no qualms about paying the price, or to had others paying it, with comes with a civil war.

Nevertheless, as is known, the revolutionary time was missed. The monarchy agreed to make some liberal concessions, but retained his power, and the old order was preserved. The bourgeois democratic revolution failed to arrive, but the revolution was not crushed. Lenin had manifested before that every defeat of the workers' movement made it stronger, so he felt assured in resuming a more gradualist work. Another revolutionary moment will come in 1914, but this time its urgency will be stronger, both by the magnitude of the events and by the conjunction of different ideas, and the revolution will be victorious, at least partially.

¹²⁵ Alexander Wendt, 'Constructing International Politics', *International Security*, 20:1, 1995, 73.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM IMPERIALIST WAR TO CIVIL WAR

Before 1914, the fear of a Great European War and its possible consequences was a major concern among the socialists, to the point that the Second International Socialists became widely known for its intense pacifist activity.¹²⁶ But the understanding of war and the actions that were required in its context deeply divided the socialists. For Lenin and the Bolsheviks, however, internal concerns were more important, and only during the time of the onset of the War did they devote time to study the issue.¹²⁷ The War ultimately brought a Revolution and a civil war to Russia, a transformation of socialism, and a great number of changes in Europe. The Bolsheviks recognised in the Great War the most suitable time for seizing power, and they were successful. Their views and positions on war proved to be decisive. This chapter seeks to trace the development of these ideas.

The War Debate among the Socialists

The First International had ended with few pronouncements on war, and with general instructions calling workers in the various countries to adopt neutrality, and to promote strikes against war.¹²⁸ The Second International could not avoid the topic as the expectations of a great world conflict became realistic. In the Seventh Congress celebrated in Stuttgart, in 1907, a clash of opinions took place. Western social-democrats insisted on responding to any war with strikes, whilst others promoted pacifism. German representatives claimed that the workers should be allowed to fight

¹²⁶ Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, 11.

¹²⁷ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 11.

¹²⁸ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III, 552.

for their own countries, a position that disgusted Lenin intensely.¹²⁹ As a Marxist, Lenin believed that national wars were the product of the continuous manipulation of the masses by the bourgeoisie. These bourgeois elites deceived the workers to make them fight and die for bourgeois interests instead of the true interests of the proletariat.

Lenin had repelled any traditional moral duty to protect one's own country already in 1905, when he called the Russian workers to support the defeat of the tsarist armies in the Russo-Japanese war, since he thought that a tsarist defeat would benefit the proletarian cause.¹³⁰ He wrote in 1915 about the Great War that: '[...] the peoples are being deceived with "national" ideology and the term of "defence of the fatherland", by the present-day imperialist bourgeoisie, in the war now being waged between slaveholders with the purpose of consolidating slavery.'¹³¹ Lenin's proposal in the Stuttgart Congress was not to oppose the incoming wars, although he condemned them in principle as wars of oppression and plunder, but 'to utilise the crisis created by war in order to hasten the overthrow of the bourgeoisie'. He reiterated that '[...] war is a necessary product of capitalism, and that the proletariat cannot renounce participation in revolutionary wars, for such wars are possible [...].'¹³²

Divergence of opinions on this particular problem continued until the onset of the First World War, and eventually led to collapse of the Second International. 'Centrists' argued for pacifism, Kautsky supported a German victory as the most convenient for the proletarian cause—following the Marxist principle of supporting the side that best favours the Revolution—and Plekhanov maintained the old position of a general strike.¹³³ Lenin opposed all these ideas, and promoted instead the famous slogan of the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war, which implied the support of the defeat of the one's own country. In his view the pathway of the civil war was made necessary by the context of the war: '[a] revolution in wartime means civil war; the *conversion* of a war between governments into a civil war is, on the one hand,

¹²⁹ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III, 558.

¹³⁰ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III, 557.

¹³¹ V.I. Lenin, 'Socialism and War: the Attitude of the R.S.D.L.P. toward the War', 1915, in (1974) *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 301.

¹³² V.I. Lenin, 'The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart', 1907, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 80.

¹³³ E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. III, 561.

facilitated by military reverses ("defeats") of governments; on the other hand, one *cannot* actually strive for such a conversion without thereby facilitating defeat.¹³⁴

The proposal of the Bolsheviks to use the war as catalyst of Revolution was never popular among the European socialists. Jean Jaures believed that a Revolution would develop if the War was unleashed, but he held to the position of promoting a general strike against it.¹³⁵ Charles Rappoport warned that the War could be a wellspring for Revolution as much as a tool to crush it.¹³⁶ Otto Bauer believed that Revolution would be impossible during the War, because all the forces of counter-revolution would be concentrated.¹³⁷ Most European rulers and officials, in turn, underestimated the possibility of Revolution, as they underestimated most of the lasting effects of the War. The Bolshevik position was radically different. They held to the view that this War was the most indicated time to achieve their revolution, and such a time might not come again if missed.

Lenin and Clausewitz

The context of the Great War forced Lenin to focus in the problem of war and peace, and hastened the maturation and systematization of his thought on the matter. The scale of the violence and the unprecedented massive involvement of populations in the Great War, along with the failure of the Second International in achieving a consensus, pressed Lenin to seek precise and articulated responses to the questions that such event arouse for the interests of the Bolshevik movement. This was a period of intense study and literary production for him. Although the general ideas put forward in his early writings were to be preserved in essence, various factors converged to orientate the course of his thought in a concrete way and to give to it a distinctive shape.

Interested in acquiring a proper understanding of the political aspects of war, Lenin devoured a large number of books, including Clausewitz's *On War*. He became

¹³⁴ V.I. Lenin, 'The Defeat of One's Own Government in the Imperialist War', 1915, in (1974) *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 276.

¹³⁵ Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, 221.

¹³⁶ Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, 244

¹³⁷ Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, 222.

fascinated with this book and found its theories akin to Hegel, Marx, and Engels.¹³⁸ Part from his interest for this came from the fact that Marx and Engels themselves had shown some respect to him.¹³⁹ Lenin borrowed Clausewitz famous dictum that ‘war is the continuation of policy by other means’, and made it the very central slogan of his own philosophy of war, and it is by this slogan that such philosophy would be more widely known. Lenin’s admiration for Clausewitz, whom he called ‘one of the greatest authorities on military matters,¹⁴⁰ as well as the admiration of Marx and Engels, is intriguing, given the latter’s lack of anything closer to ‘revolutionary’ credentials.

There is much in Clausewitz with is similar to the main features of Lenin’s outlook. Thus, for example, pretty much like Lenin, Clausewitz disliked abstraction and valued theory that was deeply orientated towards action.¹⁴¹ Lenin’s use of the dictum ‘war is the continuation of policy through other means’ has been the source of much confusion, and it is arguably an example of a reading of a text that is made detached from context, without careful consideration of the meaning and purpose of the text in the context in which it emerged. As was argued in the second chapter, this tendency to assess Bolshevism through the lenses of Clausewitz’s has contributed to blur the latter’s revolutionary character. The Bolshevik approach to war has been seen as the employment of war as a tool for policy as best suited the interests of the party. In this view, however, the effects of the revolutionary commitments of the Bolsheviks in the outlook and practice are not captured.

Lenin's use of the dictum is understood if it is taken into account that his purpose was to refute the arguments of the European socialists about the nature of First World War. Peter Vigor acknowledged this, but did not fully develop the implications of this fact.¹⁴² The purpose of Lenin was simply to condemn the War completely and to refute the various arguments set forth by the European socialists who refused to accept his idea of using it as a catalyst for Revolution. By stating that war was the continuation of policy, Lenin was asserting that all European powers involved in the War were no more than pursuing their previous imperialist policies, and that there was no reason to support

¹³⁸ See Jacob Kipp, *Lenin and Clausewitz*, 186.

¹³⁹ For an account of the reception of Clausewitz by Marx and Engels, see Azar Gat, ‘Clausewitz and the Marxists: Yet Another Look’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27:2, 2002, 363-384.

¹⁴⁰ V. I. Lenin, "Left-Wing" Childishness', 1918, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 332.

¹⁴¹ W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*, 44-5.

¹⁴² Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 81.

any side in the conflict. The heated dispute with the European socialists and the urgency of his political agenda explains why Lenin insisted so much in the Clausewitzian slogan. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to take this principle as the key for the Bolshevik approach to war for the reason stated above.

Imperialism

More important for the development of Lenin's thought on war was, perhaps, his economic analysis of the causes of the First World War, which he divulged in his famous and influential work *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916). Applying Marxist theory to international affairs, in contrast with Western authors, he identified the causes of the war in the internal and inherent contradictions of capitalism: concretely, the necessities provoked by the accumulation of capital in of the dominant capitalist states. This economic analysis was crucial for his overall theory of war particularly for its emphasis in the proclivity to armed conflict of the capitalist nations, and the notion that as the crisis of capitalism would increase, the aggressiveness of capitalist power would steadily increase. This characterisation of the 'other' in the international realm as inherently aggressive and prone to unleash wars permeated the subsequent writings of Lenin and left an enduring mark in Soviet military theory.

Among the European socialists, consensus on the issue of imperialism was never reached. The notion of imperialism as a 'highest stage' of capitalism did not come originally from Lenin; it has been introduced initially in Germany by the socialist Georg Ledebour.¹⁴³ Only radicals such as Karl Radek and Paul Lensch tended to agree with Lenin in his assessment of the irreversible crisis of capitalism. Rosa Luxembourgh had also called the workers to hasten the collapse of capitalism.¹⁴⁴ For the majority, nonetheless, imperialism showed not only tendencies towards destabilisation but also to equilibrium, and the expectation of a balanced order, and international, did not seem so distant. Rudolf Hilferding argued that capitalism could be stabilised if the potencies agreed to share spoils.¹⁴⁵ There was a common view that new circumstance could help

¹⁴³ Georges Haupt. *Socialism and the Great War*, 147.

¹⁴⁴ Georges Haupt. *Socialism and the Great War*, 153-5.

¹⁴⁵ Georges Haupt. *Socialism and the Great War*, 149.

to moderate the contradictions of capitalism. The European socialists believed that war was not inevitable, but the Bolsheviks could not follow them on this.

Revolution and War

Lenin's intense period of study helped him to formulate his systematic philosophy of war, the main tenets of which were divulged in the aforementioned pamphlet *Socialism and War* (1915). This work aimed at providing a response to the very first concern of the socialists at that time: their position in face of the war, and the collapse of the Second International. He condemns war as 'barbarous and brutal' but insists that, unlike 'bourgeois pacifists', socialists do understand the connection of war and economic class division: '[...] we understand that war cannot be abolished unless classes are abolished and Socialism is created [...]'. That peace cannot be but the result of civil war is categorically stated: 'Whoever wants a lasting and democratic peace must stand for civil war against the governments and the bourgeoisie.'¹⁴⁶

Lenin defined two categories of war, which he designated alternatively by various epithets: (a) 'just', 'progressive' and 'defensive', (b) and 'unjust', 'reactionary', 'aggressive', the former was especially assigned to wars of national liberation against imperialist potencies, as previously mentioned, and the latter reserved the wars conducted by the imperialist for the sake of plunder, territorial expansion, and so on. This was a judgement of war by its purposes, but the purpose was essentially absorbed in the agent, and what mattered eventually was the agent: whether it was an imperialist country or a colony or intervened country. Lenin preserved the Marxist judgement of war by historical reason, acknowledging that some wars had progressive consequences, regardless of whether they waged for reactionary purposes. The object of the Franco-Prussian War was plunder, he said, but the liberation of Germans from feudalism that followed from it was a progressive consequence¹⁴⁷. He refused to apply the principle to the Great War, though.

The World War was defined by Lenin as an imperialist war in all respects, and thus, it was unthinkable for any socialist to take part on it in favour of any side. This

¹⁴⁶ V.I. Lenin, *Socialism and War*, 299, 316.

¹⁴⁷ V.I. Lenin, *Socialism and War*, 299, 300.

was the very object of his fiery polemic with Kautsky and the German Social-Democrats, who supported the workers' right to fight for their own countries. But the circumstances were crucial for the movement, he thought. The radical nature of the situation called for revolutionary action, and this action in the context of a great war cannot be but civil war. His belief that the aggressiveness of imperialist countries would increase along with the decay of socialism, and the Marxist dictum 'that every war contain the seeds of other wars' pressed him to the conviction that action must not be postponed: '[d]own with mawkishly sanctimonious and fatuous appeals for "peace at any price"! Let us raise high the banner of civil war! [...] this war will soon be followed by others, unless there are a series of successful revolutions [...].'¹⁴⁸

These calls to civil war show that Lenin had little regard for the costs of his proposed path of actions, the serious consequences of adding internal violence to what was already an enormously violent situation, and thus contributing to the maintenance of the deadly spiral. On the other hand, the calls were conceived as a response to imperialism, upon whose shoulders resided the responsibility of starting the spiral. As he had written two years before:

"You shoot first, Messieurs the Bourgeoisie!" Engels wrote in 1891, advocating, most correctly, the use of bourgeois legality by us, revolutionaries, in the period of so-called peaceful constitutional development. Engels's idea was crystal clear: we class-conscious workers, he said, will be the next to shoot; it is to our advantage to exchange ballots for bullets (to go over to civil war) at the moment the bourgeoisie itself has broken the legal foundation it has laid down.¹⁴⁹

Lenin showed an awareness that the most powerful nations were rushing in an arms race, and this fact led him to affirm that militarisation was imposed upon the workers as a necessity, despite the ideological opposition of socialism to militarism. Given that 'the bourgeoisie was armed to teeth', to follow a path other than civil war 'would have

¹⁴⁸ V.I. Lenin, 'The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International', 1914, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 40.

¹⁴⁹ V.I. Lenin, 'Dead Chauvinism and Living Socialism', in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 97-8.

meant, *in practice*, “proclaiming a Revolution” (with the wrong revolutionary programme!).¹⁵⁰ He reaffirmed the same in the pamphlet *The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution*:

The whole of social life is now being militarised. [...] The women of an oppressed and really revolutionary class [...] will say to their sons: “You will soon be grown up. You will be given a gun. Take it and learn the military art properly. The proletarians need this knowledge not to shoot your brothers, the workers of other countries [...]. They need it to fight the bourgeoisie of their own country, to put an end to exploitation, poverty and war, [...] by defeating and disarming the bourgeoisie.”¹⁵¹

The Crucial Revolutionary *Momentum*

The same process that could be observed in 1905 is noticeable in 1914, but with a greater intensity. The attitudes and positions of Lenin and the Bolsheviks are fully understandable only if their belief in the presence of a revolutionary *momentum* is taken into account. The Great European War posed an unprecedented threat for humanity and for the Revolution itself, but at the same time opened the door the greatest opportunity. In this point, Lenin and the Bolshevik seemed to closely follow Engels’s in his assertions about the incoming European War. The chaos could serve as cradle for the Revolution, and the War would mean not only destruction but also the start of the World Revolution. If the Revolution did not happen, the work of the socialists might have been reduced to dust and force a new start from scratch. The absolute threat and the absolute promise were present for the Bolsheviks in a stronger form in which they did in 1905.

There were various factors that led to this belief. The first of all is, course, the fact of the War itself, and its potential destructiveness. In addition, the intensifying

¹⁵⁰ V.I. Lenin, ‘The Junius Pamphlet’, 1916, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 22 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 317.

¹⁵¹ V.I. Lenin, ‘The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution’, 1917, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 23 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 82.

contradictions of capitalism meant that the aggressiveness of the European potencies would not decrease. General militarisation and the arms race was also increase. As every war carries the seeds of new wars, the general and long-term outcome of the Great War could even worse than it was in itself. The development of their doctrine on war can only be understood in this context: it is also a product of the violence of the time. The violence of the tsarist regime, the cruelties of the Great War, the outcomes of imperialism, the Western arms race, are all part of a spiral of violence to which Lenin was adding an additional layer. Lenin was committed to attain his objectives, regardless of the costs and consequences, but he was very pragmatic in the use of means. A profoundly violent ambience led him to believe that the objectives cannot be reached except in that way.

But the concrete reading of the events had a role also. Lenin was reading the circumstances through his own ideological lenses, and these lenses led him to see in the events the evidence that supported the path of 'militarisation'. Whilst other socialists such as Kautsky could envisage different perspectives and then oppose the Bolsheviks methods, Lenin's own ideology pointed to another direction: the contradictions of capitalism, then in its last stage, would aggravate, capitalist nations would become more aggressive and new wars would be unleashed, and imperialist coalitions against the new socialist state would form. The experience of the French revolutionaries and the Paris Commune showed, for him, that Kautsky's methods would precipitate the end of the revolution. The role of the context, therefore, cannot be understood separated from the ideological perception of it by a given agent, as Constructivism insists.

The answer to the question of why the Bolsheviks and the European socialists, or the European Marxists in particular diverged over the issue of war, having the same 'canon', more or less the same objectives, experiencing the same international circumstances, and so on, is simply that they had a different interpretative framework. The outlook of the European socialists was more emancipated and then could navigate better throughout the possibilities — even if it totally failed in producing unity in the international movement. The Bolshevik interpretation of this situation was more limited in choice, more narrow in vision. It led to the petrification of the circumstances into a *revolutionary kairos*, and this, in turn, led to an extreme position in which the all costs

were worth paying for them. Ultimately, their Revolution succeeded at a very high cost, but their World Revolution, the great promise, never came.

CHAPTER SIX

WORLD REVOLUTION AND WAR

The Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917. They initially formed a coalition with the Social Revolutionaries, the Party supported by the majority of the peasants, and that won the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November of that year. But the coalition was dissolved after Lenin agreed to negotiate the peace with Germany and started the collectivisation of agriculture. The Social Revolutionaries then formed an alternate government and a civil war between the two factions was unleashed. Later on, military units that were allied to the industrialists that had been deprived by the Revolution staged entered the war, with support of the Allied. The Bolsheviks would have to win this war to survive.¹⁵² Their hopes rested in the promise of the World Revolution that would come after the first flame had appeared in Russia. In this phase, revolutionary warfare reached its highest point, albeit it was unsuccessful in achieving the promise that motivated it, and then faded. This chapter addresses the main aspects of these developments.

War and the Socialist State

For Lenin, the February Revolution meant, finally, ‘the beginning of the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war’.¹⁵³ After the October Revolution and the substantive change of scenario and position of the Bolsheviks in the political sphere, from belligerent party of opposition to ruling party, the new regime had to face some general problems whose eventual solution had some influence in Lenin’s theory of war.

¹⁵² This account has been taken from Geoffrey Swain, *Russia’s Civil War*, 16-7.

¹⁵³ V.I. Lenin, ‘The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution’, 1917, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 67.

The *major* was the definition of the form of state that the new proletarian Russia should adopt. He discussed this aspect in *The Task of the Proletariat in Our Revolution* where he rejects the possibility of forming a parliamentary democratic republic and supports, instead, a regime of the ‘Paris Commune type’, where the army and police are ‘replaced by the direct arming of the people [...]’ The reason was simple: parliamentarism allows the ‘old machinery’ to survive and a reversion to pre-revolutionary phase is impossible, whereas the Commune would “*smash that machinery*”¹⁵⁴

The polemic against Kautsky became more heated, given the latter’s misgivings about the methods of the Bolsheviks in seizing power and organizing the new state. Against the violence and harshness of Bolshevik practice, Kautsky, who was now declared by Lenin to be a ‘renegade’ and an ‘apostate’ insisted, in the words of Lenin, in’[...] peaceful democracy, without civil war, without a dictatorship and with good statistics [...] a revolution without revolution, without fierce struggle, without violence’.¹⁵⁵ Lenin on the other hand, believed that the anti-Bolshevik revolt headed by Cadet Ataman Kaledin in 1917, ‘[...] destroyed every chance of setting in a formally democratic way the very acute problems with which history has confronted the peoples of Russia [...]’,¹⁵⁶

The connection between war and revolution became, then, solidified in Lenin’s thought, and through him in Bolshevism. In his analysis of Lenin’s 1917 work entitled *State and Revolution*, James Ryan argued that Lenin sketched already at that time the general lines of the violent ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ that would later be established in Russia.¹⁵⁷ France remained, as it were, the role model of the revolutionary praxis: ‘[...] the Paris Commune waged war against Versailles as the workers’ government of *France* against the bourgeois government. What have “pure democracy” and “universal suffrage” to do with it, when Paris was deciding the fate of France?’¹⁵⁸ And he claimed to have the force of experience on his side: ‘Bolshevism has indicated

¹⁵⁴ V.I. Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*, 68-69.

¹⁵⁵ V.I. Lenin, ‘The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky’, 1918, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 28, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 317.

¹⁵⁶ V.I. Lenin, ‘Theses on the Constituent Assembly’, 1917, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 26 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 381.

¹⁵⁷ James Ryan, *Lenin’s The State and Revolution*, 159.

¹⁵⁸ V.I. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, 240.

the right road of escape from the horrors of war and imperialism, [...] Bolshevism *can serve as a model of tactics for all.*'¹⁵⁹

Historians have for a long time identified the phase of political consolidation from 1918 to 1922 as 'war communism', but some recent scholars consider the concept inappropriate inasmuch as it fails to take into account Lenin's main purpose of reconstruction in conditions of agreed peace.¹⁶⁰ Without neglecting the value of these observations, though, it might be argued that the concept still expresses one essential feature of the shape adopted by the regime. The Chapter II, Article 1 of the Constitution of 1918 prescribed that the workers must be armed, and Getzler Considered this document as the clearest embodiment of Lenin's connection between war and revolution. In his view '[...] the Constitution amounts to little less than a declaration of war on the bourgeois capitalist world.'¹⁶¹

As Marx and Engels believed that the Revolution would spread fast throughout the world, once started, bringing with it the withering away of the state, there was little normative content to be found in them to determine the character of the relations between socialist states, much less was there any indication of the principles that should regulate the proletarian state in world of stable capitalist countries. The most immediate expectation was war. The bourgeois countries would seek sooner or later to crush the socialist country, and war would be then, unavoidable: '[o]ur press has always spoken of the need to prepare for a revolutionary war in the event of the victory of socialism in one country with capitalism still in existence in the neighbouring countries. That is indisputable.'¹⁶² The intervention of the entente and the blockade cannot but confirm Lenin is his belief.

Lenin could find strong reasons to explain away this eventuality. Since the capitalist development is uneven, not uniform, for the creation of inequalities belongs to its essence, it appeared reasonable to think that not all countries might arrive at the revolutionary stage at the same time: '[u]neven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism. Hence, the victory of socialism is possible first in several

¹⁵⁹ V.I. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, 293.

¹⁶⁰ Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia*, 222.

¹⁶¹ Israel Getzler, *Lenin's Conception of Revolution as Civil War*, 468-9.

¹⁶² V.I. Lenin, 'The Revolutionary Phrase', 1918, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 19.

or even in one capitalist country alone.’¹⁶³ Once the revolution has been accomplished in one country, the newly-formed proletarian government must have to pursue an international mission: to support the socialists in other countries, in their struggle against the bourgeoisie. In 1915 already, Lenin had even contemplated the possibility of the use of force against other capitalist states, in order to help the proletarians of these countries. In *On the Slogan for a United States of Europe*, he wrote:

Hence, the victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country alone. After expropriating the capitalists and organising their own socialist production, the victorious proletariat of that country will arise against the rest of the world—the capitalist world—attracting to its cause the oppressed classes of other countries, stirring uprisings in those countries against the capitalists, and in case of need using even armed force against the exploiting classes and their states.¹⁶⁴

The Unfortunate Peace

Once the power had been seized, the Bolsheviks could adopt the idea of the ‘defence of the fatherland’, for the Russian state no longer represented the interests of the bourgeoisie. But Lenin arrived at the conclusion that, given the weak condition of the nascent Bolshevik regime, a peace with Germany was the most convenient path, even if that peace involved strong concessions. Lenin’s call for negotiating the peace with Germany was a radical step, for it met with the opposition of the Social Revolutionaries and with many members of the Bolshevik party, including Trotsky and Bukharin, all of whom expected that a ‘revolutionary war’ would be waged against Germany. Against almost all of them, Lenin stood alone in arguing for a policy that seemed to contradict his previous statements and his own convictions. Lenin, however, could impose his will

¹⁶³ V.I. Lenin, ‘On the Slogan for a United States of Europe’, 1915, vol. 21, in *Lenin: Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 342.

¹⁶⁴ V.I. Lenin, *On the Slogan for a United States of Europe*, 342.

upon the party, and the Bolsheviks, then, agreed to sign the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ceding Ukraine and the Baltic states.

This appears to be an act of pure *realpolitik*, and seems to contradict the main argument of this dissertation. If the Bolsheviks were urged by an ‘eschatological’ judgement of the circumstances, if they believed they had no time to lose for achieving their objectives, why did they choose to retreat in this particular point? As John M. Thompson pointed out, however, the reason why Lenin chose peace with Germany was that he feared that end of the war would precipitate a coalition of the capitalist world against Russia. It was more convenient for him that the hostility between Germany and Britain be maintained, so that such a capitalist coalition against Russia would not happen.¹⁶⁵ He expected to gain time in order to allow local revolutions to emerge in Europe.

But in the same way that imperialist powers used period of peace to regain strength to participate in future conflicts, Lenin maintained that the peace was not, in any way, a compromise with imperialism, but a strategic step to allow the proletarian state to organize and regain strength. Lenin did not reject the revolutionary war against Germany, but simply wanted to postpone it. This ‘most harsh, oppressive, brutal, disgraceful peace’, he argued, was concluded ‘not to “capitulate” to imperialism but in order to learn and prepare to fight against imperialism in a serious effective manner’.¹⁶⁶ Understandably, he was reproached by some of the party members for insisting so many times in the waging of a revolutionary war, and changing the discourse to support a peace with Germany. He responded to this admonishment in *On the History of the Question of an Unfortunate Peace*, where he remarked that he would not support a revolutionary war unless there were conditions for it. Starting a revolutionary war depended entirely, he said, on ‘[...] whether material conditions permit it, and of the interests of the socialist revolution which has already begun.’¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ John Thompson, ‘Lenin’s analysis of Intervention’, *American Slavic and East European Review*, 17:2, 1958, 154-5.

¹⁶⁶ V.I. Lenin, ‘A Painful but Necessary Lesson’, 1918, in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 64.

¹⁶⁷ V.I. Lenin, ‘On the History of the Question of an Unfortunate Peace’, 1918 in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 26 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 447.

Exporting the Revolution

The escalation of the Russian civil war, the possibility of an intervention of the Entente in Russia, and the international support given to the Whites, made the position of the Bolsheviks extremely complicated, and to some extent intensified their belief of the inevitability of the war between capitalism and communism, and the necessity to prepare the new state for war. Despite the traditional socialist opposition to the arms race, Lenin was convinced that the conditions of the time made totally expedient for the new proletarian Russian state to form and employ its own army, and as the provisions Constitution of 1918 showed, the Bolsheviks were interested in arming and preparing Russian all workers for war. Writings of the time demonstrate that the belief in the incoming military help from the proletariat in the West was crucial in maintaining Lenin's motivation to pursue his political objectives, despite all the negative circumstances. Several times, as Thompson remarked, Lenin referred to the actions of the Bolshevik government as 'holding on' until the help from the West came.¹⁶⁸

The peace of Brest-Litovsk was short-lived, nevertheless, given the defeat of Germany in First World War, and its withdrawal from the Eastern territories was followed by an offensive of the Red Army with the purpose of establishing Communist regimes in the Baltic States, Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland.¹⁶⁹ The campaign failed in Estonia, and Poland, and although it succeeded in forming Soviet Republics in Latvia, Lithuania, and Belarus, these regimes were all of short duration. Having to deal with an intensive civil war and with a state organization and economic base still in weak conditions, the Red Army had to retreat from the Baltic region, and Belarus. The campaign was successful, though, in establishing a Soviet government in Ukraine. The offensive in Poland led to the Polish-Soviet War, in which the Soviet troops were strongly resisted and forced to retreat after two years.¹⁷⁰

The campaign in Poland was of particular importance for Lenin and the Bolsheviks, for the country was geopolitically crucial due to its proximity to Germany,¹⁷¹ which in turn was the place where, so it was expected, the decisive

¹⁶⁸ John Thompson, *Lenin's Analysis of Intervention*, 158.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Jones, *The Soviet Concept of 'Limited Sovereignty'*, 31.

¹⁷⁰ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 81-2.

¹⁷¹ Robert Jones, *The Soviet Concept of 'Limited Sovereignty'*, 33.

proletarian revolution would have to take place.¹⁷² The advance of the Red Army toward Warsaw and the Bolshevik purpose of ‘sovietising’ it was justified by Lenin under the grounds that Russian troops were simply offering help to the Warsaw workers in their struggle against their exploiters. The mission of the army was to meet the workers in Warsaw and to tell them: ‘we have come to your aid’, although he seems to have had little concern on whether the Polish workers wanted such an aid.¹⁷³ This understanding was shared by Lenin’s fellow revolutionaries. Karl Radek affirmed that ‘the Polish working class [...] knows very well that Russia does not threaten the independence of the Polish people, but that she wants to help the Polish workers to sunder the chains forged for them by Poland’s capitalists and the Entente.’¹⁷⁴

As the ‘fraternal aid’ from the West did not come, then, the new Bolshevik state considered itself in position of offering military help to the workers of other countries that were allegedly in need of it for the overthrow of their local bourgeoisie and the establishment of socialism. The statements of various Bolshevik leaders during the period of the westward advance of the Red Army show explicit support for ‘revolutionary wars’ in that form. Robert Jones pointed out that Zinoviev believed that ‘any effort by the Red Army to extend the Revolution beyond the borders of the Soviet Union —at bayonet point — was justified’, and quoted Bukharin affirming that ‘the proletariat as a state must fight against bourgeois states [...] for the victory of communism [...]’ In 1922, Bukharin had held that the workers should conquer the world only through bayonets, and therefore, the ‘right of red intervention’ should be included in the programme of the Communist International.¹⁷⁵

Despite the failures of the advances of the Red Army in the Eastern territories, ‘red intervention’ was successful in ‘sovietisation’ Georgia, which at the time of the Russian civil war possessed a Menshevik government. This intervention was not entirely planned by the Bolsheviks leaders in Moscow, but was instigated by Stalin and other officials who requested permission to advance into Georgia to support the workers of the country. The campaign led to a full scale intervention, and the substitution of Menshevik rule for a Bolshevik government. In the first edition of the *Bolshaya*

¹⁷² John Thompson, *Lenin’s Analysis of Intervention*, 158.

¹⁷³ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet View of War*, 57.

¹⁷⁴ Karl Radek, Intervention, in *Minutes of the 2nd Congress of the Comintern*, 1920.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Jones, *The Soviet Concept of ‘Limited Sovereignty’*, 32-34.

Sovietskaya Entsiklopediya, published under Stalinism, the intervention and subsequent “bolshevisation” of Georgia is described as a “revolutionary war”, in the sense of a war to defend the gains of socialism against counter-revolutionaries.¹⁷⁶

The formation of the Third International or Comintern embodied, at least in its first years, the Bolshevik intention to spread revolution worldwide through military intervention.¹⁷⁷ This ‘iron international proletarian organization’, Zinoviev affirmed, would be able ‘to beat the enemy everywhere’ and would give ‘any one of its troops the greatest possible help, at any moment’.¹⁷⁸ One of the main objectives of Zinoviev, as head of the Comintern, was to trigger the long-expected proletarian revolution in Germany. This policy did not live long, though, for the Soviet leadership was led to accept the failure of the socialist revolutions in the West and to admit the possibility of a ‘peaceful coexistence’ with capitalism. The Comintern focused, then, in pitting Western Communist parties against their Socialist Democratic counter-parts, and later in forming a united international front against Fascism.¹⁷⁹ The early militant interventionist impetus yielded its place to a more pragmatic international behaviour.

This phase of Bolshevik foreign and military policy ended approximately in 1922, at the same time that the Russian civil war finished, and when Lenin’s leadership began to wane as a consequence of his health problems. Assuring an internal and external peace, the Soviet state turned its attention to economic reform, industrialization, collectivisation, and regime consolidation. The previous factors that had solidified the Bolshevik beliefs on the imminence of a war between capitalism and socialism slowly lost their force and importance, conceding their space to doctrines such as ‘peaceful coexistence’ and ‘socialism in one country’.¹⁸⁰ The Soviet leadership, henceforth, will abandon public endorsement of ‘revolutionary war’ in the sense of intervention to spread socialism, and will concentrate its military doctrine in promoting preparation for war in defence of ‘the gains of socialism’ against imperialist aggression and internal counter-revolution, upholding at the same time a campaign to portray socialist countries as essentially peaceful and non-aggressive.

¹⁷⁶ Peter Vigor, *The Soviet view of War*, 57.

¹⁷⁷ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 82.

¹⁷⁸ Zinoviev, Intervention, in *Minutes of the 2nd Congress of the Comintern*, 1920.

¹⁷⁹ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 85-88.

¹⁸⁰ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 84.

CONCLUSION

By the end of the 19th century, before developing concerns with organised political agitation against the Russian monarchy, most of the activities of Lenin were focused in refuting ideological perspectives that competed against orthodox Marxism for the intellectual headship of Russian Social Democracy. The main claim advanced by him was that representatives of *Narodnichestvo* and the ‘economists’ did not understand the historical process through which the consciousness of the Russian workers developed, in interaction with the development of capitalism in the particular Russian conditions, and hence they failed to appreciate the correct course of action and the convenient political strategies that that specific juncture demanded. They identified as the proper objective of Russian Social Democracy what belonged just to the initial phases of the process of growth or revolutionary consciousness. At this point, Lenin found himself in general agreement with both Plekhanov and Kautsky, his future critics.

The same formal structure of this critique might be applied with the Bolsheviks views on war after the 1917 Revolution. The Leninist critique to the Socialist International focused in stating that European socialists had failed in understanding the specificities of the historical juncture, and hence were incapable to adduce what the Bolsheviks believed to be the most appropriate measures needed for the circumstance. The failure and collapse of the International seemed to give support to these claims. Lenin’s texts at the time evidence a belief that the juncture, the phase in the historical process in which they were immersed, was profoundly critical, and that a course of action devised by him was necessary and could only take place at that particular point. The critical phase would create an international setting that would make entirely impossible that course of action, as Engels had seemingly predicted.

In this context, the Bolshevik theory of war was not essentially a Clausewitzian theory of war as a tool of the state, but of war as the ‘last war’ that would pave the way for a revolution that should abolish war altogether. The doctrinal content of the early Bolshevik military doctrine was functional to a political strategy that was believed to be a concrete response to a crucial and decisive point in history that would eliminate the employed means themselves. The implications of this kind of mentality are, firstly, that all the activities associated with the war would require an extraordinary and universal input of energy; secondly, that more risks are allowed, and more sacrifices are accepted, for the sacrifice is measured against the future scenario in which no more sacrifices are required; and thirdly, there is a tendency to ‘total war’ in connection with the extraordinary character which is given to the juncture.

The key for understanding why, facing the same events, albeit from different positions, this ideological development was taken by the Bolsheviks, but not shared by the rest of socialist bodies, is to be found in the debate on imperialism, and in Lenin’s application of socialist principles to the concrete situation of the time, and the many ideological aspects assessed in the previous chapters. Whereas the European socialist could perceive better the complexity of the international order, and could give attention to both the factors of destabilisation and of stabilisation, Lenin’s historical rationality arranged the various pieces in a mental picture in which were all ordained to a critical point in which all efforts would turn meaningless if extreme actions were not taken. This mentality would be abandoned by Stalin, mainly through his theory of ‘socialism in one country’ and the Soviet view of war would then be approximated to the Clausewitzian view.

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