Russia's Doctrine of "Peaceful Coexistence". A Solution to Avoiding WWIII?

Genoa Revisited: Russia and Coexistence

By Evgeny Chossudovsky
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Theme: History

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Introductory Note

The doctrine of peaceful coexistence was first formulated by Moscow in the wake of the 1918-1920 war against Soviet Russia.

It was presented to the Genoa Conference in April 1922.

The "unspoken" 1918-20 war against Russia (barely acknowledged by historians) was launched two months after the November 7, 1917 Revolution on January 12 1918.

It was an outright "NATO style" invasion consisting of the deployment of more than 200,000 troops of which 11,000 were from the US, 59,000 from the UK. 15,000 from France. Japan which was an Ally of Britain and America during World War I dispatched 70,000 troops.

The article below entitled Genoa Revisted: Russia and Coexistence was written by my late father Evgeny Chossudovsky in April 1972 (in commemoration of the Genoa 1922 Conference). It was published by Foreign Affairs.

At the height of the Cold War, the article was the object of a "constructive debate" in the corridors of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). According to the NYT:

> Mr. [Evgeny] Chossudovsky wants a United Nations Decade of Peaceful Coexistence, a new Treaty Organization for European Security and Cooperation which would embrace all Europe, and comprehensive bilateral and multilateral cooperation in everything from production and trade to protection of health and environment and "strengthening of common cultural values." ...

> Skeptics, of course, can point out that Mr. Chossudovsky's argument; has lots of holes in it, not least in his strained efforts to prove that peaceful coexistence has always been Soviet policy. Nevertheless, he has made such a refreshing and needed contribution to the East-West dialogue that it would be neither gracious nor appropriate to answer him with traditional types of debating ploys.
>
> Unquestionably, East-West cooperation in all the fields he mentions is very desirable, and so is East-West cooperation in other fields he doesn't mention such as space. And he is pushing an open door when he laments the colossal burdens of the arms race. (Harry Schwarz, *The Chossudovsky Plan*, New York Times, March 20, 1972)

Flash Forward to 2024

 *The world is at a dangerous crossroads. In the post Cold War Era, East-West Dialogue has been scrapped.*

On June 15-16, 2024, delegates from 90 countries will be meeting at the Bürgenstock resort near Lucerne, in the context of a Peace Conference organized by the Swiss government to which Russia was not invited.

Is "Peaceful Coexistence" and Diplomacy between Russia and the U.S. an Option?

Constructive Debate and Dialogue is crucial.

Can East-West Dialogue be Restored as a Means to Avoiding a Third World War?

There is a sense of urgency. Military escalation could potentially lead humanity into nuclear war.

The first priority is to restore dialogue and diplomatic channels.

We call upon the U.S., the member states of the European Union and the Russian Federation to jointly endorse a policy of "Peaceful Coexistence", with a view to reaching meaningful peace negotiations in regards to the war in Ukraine.

My father's family left Russia in 1921 for Berlin. He was seven years old. In 1934, he departed for Scotland, where he started his studies in economics at the University of Edinburgh, the alma mater of Adam Smith.

In 1947 he joined the United Nations secretariat in Geneva. In 1972 at the time of writing of his article he was a senior official at the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Secretary of the Trade and Development Board.

The following article on "Peaceful Coexistence" is part of the legacy of my late father, Dr. Evgeny Chossudovsky

It is my sincere hope and commitment that the concept of "Peaceful Coexistence" between nations will ultimately prevail with a view to avoiding a Third World War.

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, June 14, 2024

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Foreign Affairs, April 1972

Half a century ago, on April 10, 1922, Luigi Facta, Prime Minister of Italy, solemnly opened the International Economic Conference at Genoa. Lloyd George, the prime mover of the Conference, was among the first speakers. He called it "the greatest gathering of European nations which has ever assembled," aimed at seeking in common "the best methods of restoring the shattered prosperity of this continent."

Though this rather remote event has by now been forgotten by many, the evocation of it is justified. For a study of Soviet attitudes at that Conference throws light on the origins and evolution of the notion of the peaceful coexistence between countries having different economic and social systems, a major concept of Soviet foreign policy which no serious student of international affairs can nowadays afford to ignore.

Therefore, to look at Genoa afresh from this particular angle may perhaps add to the understanding of Soviet foreign policy and economic diplomacy, including their more recent manifestations.[1]

The author was also anxious to assess the relevance of this first multilateral encounter between Soviet Russia and the Western world to current efforts, a half-century after Genoa, aimed at promoting cooperation across the dividing line. To undertake the task in these pages is not unfitting: the first issue of Foreign Affairs, published only a few months after the Conference, carried a then anonymous article by "K" entitled "Russian After Genoa and The Hague," written in masterly fashion by the review's first Editor, Professor Archibald Cary Coolidge. I am grateful for having the privilege, on the eve of the golden jubilee of Foreign Affairs, to revert to this early theme, even if from a different standpoint and at a more comfortable historic distance.[2]

The Genoa Conference was convened as a result of a set of resolutions passed by the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers meeting at Cannes in January 1922. The principal

among these was Mr. Lloyd George's Resolution.

In the form in which the draft was adopted on January 6, it provided for the summoning of an Economic and Financial Conference "as an urgent and essential step towards the economic reconstruction of Central and Eastern Europe." All European states, including the former Central Powers, were asked to attend.

Special decisions were adopted to invite Russia and the United States. Russia replied in the affirmative. Indeed, the young Soviet Republic accepted this call with eagerness and alacrity for reasons which will become apparent as we proceed. On the other hand, we are told that Secretary of State Charles E. Hughes informed the Italian Ambassador in Washington on March 8 that, since the Conference appeared to be mainly political rather than economic in character, the United States government would not be represented.[3] However, the U.S. Ambassador in Rome, R. W. Child, was appointed observer.

American oil and other business interests were represented by F. A. Vanderlip. In the opinion of Soviet historians, the U.S. refusal to take part was motivated mainly by hostility toward Soviet Russia and fear that Genoa might strengthen that country's international position. The United States at the time was adhering firmly to the policy of economic blockade and nonrecognition of the new Bolshevik regime. On May 7, 1922, Ambassador Child wrote to the State Department that he considered his main function as observer at Genoa would be to "keep in closest possible touch with delegations so as to prevent Soviet Russia from entering any agreements by which our rights would be impaired."

Participants at the 1922 Genoa Conference. (Licensed under the Public Domain)

Russia was to have been represented by Lenin himself in his capacity as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. Lenin had closely supervised all the preparations and undoubtedly intended to go to Genoa. He stated publicly that he expected to discuss personally with Lloyd George the need for equitable trade relations between Russia and the capitalist countries.

But in naming Lenin as its chief delegate, the Soviet government entered a proviso that "should circumstances exclude the possibility of Comrade Lenin himself attending the Conference," Georgy Vassilievich Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, the deputy head of the delegation, would be vested with all requisite powers.

In the end, public concern over Lenin's personal safety, pressing affairs of state requiring his attention, and the deterioration of his health, made it undesirable for him to leave Moscow. However, he retained the chairmanship of the Russian delegation and directed its activity through almost daily contact. (The New York Times entitled its leader on the opening of the Conference "Lenin in Genoa!") Chicherin serving as acting head of the delegation was aided by such outstanding Soviet diplomats and statesmen as Krassin, Litvinov, Yoffe, Vorovsky and Rudzutak, who together formed the "Bureau" of the delegation.

All eyes turned with curiosity on the People's Commissar when he took the floor, after star performers such as Lloyd George and Barthou had made their inaugural speeches. In keeping with the diplomatic etiquette of those days, he wore tails. Issue of the Russian nobility and for some years archivist in the Tsarist Foreign Ministry, Chicherin as a young man had broken with his past and espoused the cause of revolution, ultimately siding with Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Un homme genial and a diplomat of consummate professional skill, he combined wide knowledge of world affairs, sophisticated erudition and artistic sensitivity with burning faith in communism and a single-minded dedication to the defense of the interests of the Soviet state. Having spoken in excellent French for some twenty minutes, he proceeded, to the surprise and spontaneous applause of the meeting, to interpret his speech into English.

Though Chicherin had hardly looked at his notes during delivery, his statement had been most carefully prepared. Lenin himself had approved the text, had weighed each word, formulation and nuance. Chicherin's declaration was the first made by a Soviet representative at a major international conference on the agenda of which the "Russian question" loomed large and to which the Soviet Republic had been invited. It was truly a historic moment.

Chicherin told the Conference that "whilst themselves preserving the point of view of Communist principles, the Russian delegation recognizes that in the actual period of history which permits of the parallel existence of the ancient social order and of the new order now being born, economic collaboration between the States representing the two systems of property is imperatively necessary for the general economic reconstruction." He added that

> "the Russian delegation has come here … in order to engage in practical relations with Governments and commercial and industrial circles of all countries on the basis of reciprocity, equality of rights and full recognition. The problem of world-wide economic reconstruction is, under present conditions, so immense and colossal that it can only be solved if all countries, both European and non-European, have the sincere desire to coordinate their efforts… The economic reconstruction of Russia appears as an indispensable condition of world-wide economic reconstruction." (emphasis added)

A number of concrete offers (combined with proposals for a general limitation of armaments) accompanied this enunciation of policy, such as the readiness of the Russian government "to open its frontier consciously and voluntarily" for the creation of international traffic routes; to release for cultivation millions of acres of the most fertile land in the world; and to grant forest and mining concessions, particularly in Siberia.

Chicherin urged that collaboration should be established between the industry of the West on the one hand and the agriculture and industry of Siberia on the other, so as to enlarge the raw materials, grain and fuel base of European industry. He declared, moreover, his government's willingness to adopt as a point of departure the old agreements with the Powers which regulated international relations, subject to some necessary modifications. Chicherin also suggested that the world economic crises could be combated by the redistribution of the existing gold reserves among all the countries in the same proportions as before the war, by means of long-term loans. Such a redistribution "should be combined with a rational redistribution of the products of industry and commercial activity, and with a distribution of fuel (naphtha, coal, etc.) according to a settled plan."

Such was, in essence, the first considered presentation by Soviet Russia of what came to be termed the policy of peaceful coexistence between the capitalist and socialist systems, linked with a specific program of practical action, made in an intergovernmental forum. But the genesis of the concept goes back much further.

As long ago as 1915, Lenin, in the midst of the First World War, which to him was above all a clash of rival imperialist powers, in a celebrated article entitled "On the Slogan for a United States of Europe," had foreseen the possibility of the victory of socialism in one country. In so doing he proceeded from an "absolute law" of the uneven economic and political development of capitalism, especially during its imperialist phase.

Lenin came to the related conclusion that the "imperialist chain" might first snap at its weakest link, e.g. in a relatively backward country like Tsarist Russia with a small but concentrated and rapidly expanding capitalist sector, a desperately poor peasantry and a compact and politically conscious working class pitted against a decaying ruling elite. Though the break in the chain would set in motion a process of revolution, that might take time, possibly decades to unfold, depending on the specific conditions obtaining in each country. The socialist state, meanwhile, would have to exist in a capitalist environment, to "cohabit" with it for a more or less prolonged period, peacefully or nonpeacefully. In another article dealing with the "Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution," published in the autumn of 1916, Lenin developed this theme further by concluding that socialism could not achieve victory simultaneously in all countries. It would most probably first be established in one country, or in a few countries, "whilst the others will for some time remain bourgeois or pre-bourgeois."

The weakest link did break, as Lenin had foreseen, in Russia, though the tide of revolution was also mounting in other parts of Europe, impelled by the desperate desire of the peoples to end the war. Indeed, at one time it looked as if a socialist upheaval was about to triumph in Germany. It is hardly surprising that Lenin, the revolutionary leader, openly hailed this prospect, though he was resolutely opposed to the manipulating and artificial pushing or "driving forward" of any revolution from the outside, since for him this was essentially an inexorable social phenomenon ultimately shaped by internal forces. As E. H. Carr has observed, "it was the action of the western Powers toward the end of the year 1918 which contributed quite as much as of the Soviet government which had forced the international situation into a revolutionary setting."[4]

Yet, being a realist, Lenin did not omit to stress from November 1917 onwards that it would be wrong and irresponsible for the young Soviet Republic to count on revolutions in other countries. They might or might not occur at the time one wished them to happen. There was no question either, as he said again and again, of trying to "export" the Russian Revolution.

While maintaining its belief in the ultimate victory of socialism in other countries, the young Soviet Republic had, meantime, to be prepared to stand on its own feet and to defend its own interests as a state. Not only had the forces of the White Guards and the interventionists to be defeated, but steps had to be taken to conclude peace with the capitalist countries and to prepare, under certain conditions and safeguards, for cooperation with them. Exploratory moves for the resumption of trade and economic relations with the Allied and Central Powers, as well as with neutral countries, had begun immediately after the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. As early as May 1918, for instance, the Soviet government made, through the good offices of Colonel Raymond Robins (the representative of the American Red Cross in Petrograd) detailed and far-reaching offers to the United States of long-term economic relations, including the granting of concessions to private businessmen for the exploitation, subject to state control, of Russia's vast and untapped raw material resources. These offers were reiterated a year later through William Bullitt. There was no response.

Military intrusion and economic harassment from the outside (the latter going to such lengths as "the gold blockade," i.e. the refusal to accept gold for desperately needed imports) continued, forcing the Soviet government, as Lenin put it, to "go to greater lengths in our urgent Communist measures than would otherwise have been the case." But the option of "peaceful cohabitation" with the capitalist world, based on normal economic, trade and diplomatic relations, was kept open nonetheless throughout this entire phase.

This emerges clearly from the writings and utterances of Lenin and the documents on Soviet foreign policy during the pre-NEP period. Indeed, one of the most incisive and farsighted definitions of the concept of peaceful coexistence dates back to the early summer of 1920 when, in a report on the foreign political situation of the Soviet Republic, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs proclaimed that

> "Our slogan was and remains the same: peaceful coexistence (mirnoye sosushchestvovaniye) with other Governments whoever they might be. Reality itself has led … to the need for establishing durable relations between the Government of the peasants and workers and capitalist Governments. . . . Economic reality calls for an exchange of goods, the entering into continuing and regulated relations with the whole world, and the same economic reality demands the same of the other Governments also."[5]

Thus, the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence has deep roots in the early history of the Russian Revolution and was most assuredly not something concocted on the spur of the moment for tactical use at Genoa.

RECONSIDERATIONS

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Author's Note: The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the U.N. Secretariat, of which he is a member.

[1] An added inducement has been the recent appearance of hitherto inaccessible writings by Lenin on questions related to coexistence and the Genoa Conference in the fifth edition of his "Complete Works" (issued during the period 1967 to 1970), as well as of further relevant material, some of it originally confidential, contained in the first comprehensive collection of official papers on Soviet foreign policy, "Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR." This fresh evidence has made it possible to trace from the "inside" a particular process of policy-making.

[2] When working on this essay, I learned from the memoirs of Hamilton Fish Armstrong, "Peace and Counterpeace" (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), that Lenin carefully read and marked certain articles in the first number of *Foreign Affairs,* particularly Coolidge's essay.

[Our thanks to Foreign Affairs]

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Featured image: Interior view of the main hall of the Palazzo di San Giorgio, location of plenary meetings of the Genoa Conference of 1922. (Licensed under the Public Domain)
