

The Conquest of Ukraine and the History of Russian Imperialism

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In this pivotal war on a global scale, the Ukrainian nation is struggling to preserve its independence, obtained only 30 years ago, after centuries of domination and relentless Russification. It rejects the “Trinitarian” Russian nation (Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine) imagined in the tsarist era and claimed by Vladimir Putin. The Russian ruling class is struggling for the revival of a declining Russian imperialism that, without control over Ukraine, risks disappearing from the historical scene.

In 1937, at a reception on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, Joseph Stalin toasted “to the complete destruction of all enemies, themselves and their kin!” As eyewitness Georgi Dimitrov noted in his diary, in making this toast, Stalin explained that the tsars “did one thing that was good—they amassed an enormous state, all the way to Kamchatka. We have inherited that state. And for the first time, we, the Bolsheviks, have consolidated and strengthened that state as a united and indivisible state.” Therefore, “whoever attempts to destroy that unity of the socialist state, whoever seeks the separation of any of its parts or nationalities — that man is an enemy, a sworn enemy of the state and of the peoples of the USSR. And we will destroy each and every such enemy, even if he was an old Bolshevik; we will destroy all his kin, his family. We will mercilessly destroy anyone who, by his deeds or his thoughts — yes, his thoughts — threatens the unity of the socialist state.” [1]

Historically, Russian imperialism has been based on the ideas of “amassing Russian lands” and building a “unique and indivisible” Russian state. This imperialism has always been – and remains – as specific as the social formation of Russia itself has been and remained the same during the successive historical phases of its development, starting with the Tsardom of Russia (1547-1721). When Vladimir Lenin theorized “modern capitalist imperialism,” he stressed that in Russia “capitalist imperialism is weaker than military-feudal imperialism is.” [2] To describe the latter as feudal was an oversimplification. Probably from the middle of the sixteenth century, in the time of Ivan the Terrible, the Russian social formation was essentially a combination of two different pre-capitalist modes of exploitation. The first, feudal, was based on the fact that landowners extorted surplus labor from peasants in the form of rent. The other, tributary, was modeled on the Ottoman Empire, then the most powerful empire in the world, [3] and was based on the extraction by the state bureaucracy of the tax on the peasants.

In the Soviet Union, the Stalinist dogma of the unilinear development of humanity, with only five stages, was de rigueur. The tributary mode of exploitation had no place, especially since it could be associated (superficially, but not without reason) with the domination of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Some Soviet historians, without formally transgressing this scheme, cleverly circumvented the ban by calling it “state feudalism” or “eastern” feudalism, different from “private” and “Western” feudalism. From the middle of the seventeenth century and almost until the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the third form of exploitation – and more terrible for the peasantry – was slavery, including

human trafficking, into which Russian serfdom actually degenerated.

Minimal surplus product

None of these modes of exploitation represented (contrary to supposedly Marxist discursive habits) is a mode of production, because they failed to formally and really subsume the productive forces under them, and therefore did not guarantee their sustainable and systematic development. However, it was on the basis of these modes of exploitation that the Russian state was formed. As pointed out by Ruslan Skrynnikov, one of the leading specialists in the *oprichnina* of Ivan the Terrible who unleashed the very first Great Terror in Russia and drowned in it, "some of its practices contained, as if in the embryonic state, all the further development of the nobiliary and bureaucratic absolute monarchy." [4] In fact, not only of Tsardom, but of all Russian despotic regimes up to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Another contemporary historian, Leonid Milov, puts forward very important theses on the peculiarities of the historical development of Russian society. Starting from the study of the natural and climatic conditions of production, he developed a key conception of "the history of Russia as a society with minimal total surplus product." [5] The reasons for this are that compared to other agricultural societies, central Russia had a very short agricultural season, which because of the climate lasted only from the beginning of May to the beginning of October (in Western Europe, only in December and January did peasants not work in the fields); and in addition, the land was poor in humus.

The result was that "until the mechanization of this type of work," there was low fertility and, therefore, a low volume for society's total surplus product, which "created in this region, for centuries, a relatively primitive agricultural society." Therefore, "in order to achieve a minimum result, it was necessary to concentrate the work as much as possible in a relatively short period of time. Individual peasant exploitation could not achieve the indispensable degree of concentration of labor efforts during objectively existing agricultural labor seasons," so its fragility "has been compensated for through most of the millennial history of the Russian state by the very great role of the peasant community." [6]

Unity of opposites

Peasants' surplus labor could only be extorted - to a large extent or even entirely - at the expense of the labor necessary for its own reproduction, that is, by methods of absolute exploitation (rather than by relative exploitation based on the increase in labor productivity). This was not possible without imposing on them the harshest possible system of serfdom, especially since, given the general conditions of production, a strong communal organization of labor was necessary. The need "to optimize the size of the total surplus product" - to increase it in the interest of the state apparatuses and the ruling class - was pressing, but "in the way to this 'optimization,' that is, the objective need to intensify the exploitation of the peasants, was based on this same peasant community, bastion of local cohesion and means of peasant resistance." [7]

From this was born "a kind of unity of opposites: what counterbalanced the inevitable existence of the community was a counterweight in the form of the most brutal and severe variant of the personal dependence of each member of this organism." The impossibility of overcoming this contradiction without a considerable development of the productive forces, which was not allowed by pre-capitalist relations of exploitation, meant that the role of the state consisted in "creating a monolithic and powerful ruling class, capable of uprooting or neutralizing the defense mechanisms of the agrarian community in the process of daily exploitation of the peasantry." Summing up, according to Milov: "The inevitability of the existence of the community, conditioned by its

productive and social functions, ended up giving life to the most severe and brutal mechanisms to squeeze out as much surplus product as possible. Hence the emergence of the serfdom regime, which was able to neutralize the community as the basis of peasant resistance. In turn, this regime of serfdom became possible only because of the development of the most despotic forms of state power – the Russian autocratic regime.” [8] This is what has united the ruling class.

Where does the periphery begin?

At the same time, however, “the extremely extensive nature of agricultural production and the objective impossibility of intensifying it have meant that the main historical territory of the Russian state has not been able to withstand the growth in population density. Hence the constant need, for centuries, for the population to migrate to new territories in search of more fertile arable land, climatic conditions more favorable to agriculture, etc.” [9] Moreover, “migratory processes have gone hand in hand with the strengthening of the absolutist state, ready to control and defend large areas of the country,” and thus with the establishment of huge armed forces, although “the extremely small size of the total surplus product objectively created extremely unfavorable conditions for the formation of the so-called superstructure over the basic elements.” [10]

This centuries-old colonial, military, and secular state expansion to the south, southeast and east gradually encompassed vast areas, increasingly extensive “alien” peripheral territories and increasingly distant neighboring countries, victims of conquest. This expansion was accompanied by several hundred years of struggle on the part of the Tsardom of Russia and then the Russian Empire (1721-1917) for access to ice-free ports on the seas to the west and east. Hence the legitimate questions that are so difficult to answer correctly: “When did Russian colonization begin – with the occupation of Kazan, an ethnically foreign city, or Novgorod, ethnically close?” The Novgorod Republic fell under the onslaught of the Moscow army in 1478, and the Kazan Khanate in 1552. “Where are the borders of the Russian metropolis, where do the Russian colonies begin, and how can they be distinguished?” Because they have been so mobile, “Russia’s borders expanded both before the rise of Tsarism and during the Tsarist era with such rapidity that the very distinction between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ was fluid and indeterminate.” [11]

Military-colonial conquests

The historical formation of Russia was shaped in the process of military-colonial conquests of the Russian countryside and by peasant wars, in fact anti-colonial wars, that they provoked, accompanied by internal and external colonizations, conquests, looting, and colonial oppression of other peoples. As Alexander Etkind rightly puts it, “the Russian Empire was a great colonial system both at its distant frontiers and in its dark heartlands.” [12] Contrary to Russian mythology, the conquest of a country as huge as Siberia did not “extend the territory of Moscow to the border with China,” but turned Siberia into a typical colony. Yet it became common to perceive Siberia as an inseparable part of Russia, as well as later Poland, Lithuania, Finland, the Caucasus, Bukhara and Tuva – among others.

Some Russian historians, making their theoretical contribution to the construction of the dominant and, as is evident today, timeless “Russian idea,” have very cleverly called this phenomenon “Russia’s self-colonization”: the successive lands it seized did not become its colonies, but they “colonized themselves,” [13] because it was boundless (and, whether openly or secretly, remained boundless in the dominant ideology). After taking left-bank Ukraine in the seventeenth century, Russia’s participation in the partition of the Republic of the Two Nations (Poland-Lithuania) in the last decades of the eighteenth century allowed it to seize most of Ukraine on the right bank of the Dnieper – a total of 80% of Ukrainian land. This proved to be a fundamental strategic gain, reaching deeply into Europe and determining the scope and Eurasian character of the Russian Empire.

If the Russian nobility was a dominant order, the land never became entirely the private property of the nobles. This would have been contrary to the overriding interests of this imperial state, in the construction of which no social class played as important a role as itself – its apparatuses and bureaucratic personnel. It was not only the construction of a colossal army at the very cost of 25 years of peasant military service and immense military and civilian infrastructure financed by the forced labor of hundreds of thousands of other peasants, belonging both to the state and to the landowners, but also entire brigades of skilled craftspeople sent to truly forced labor in different parts of the country. Moreover, as Milov puts it, “the state machine was forced to advance the process of social division of labor, and especially the separation of industry and agriculture,” [14] against the resistance of dominant modes of exploitation that hindered this process.

Industrial serfdom

As a result, “the participation of the state in the creation of industry in the country contributed to a gigantic leap in the development of the productive forces, although the borrowing of ‘Western technologies’ by an archaic society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had a monstrous social effect: a mass of workers appeared forever attached to factories and workplaces (the so-called laborers “subjected in perpetuity”), and it stimulated the slide of society towards slavery.” [15] The enormous Russian military-industrial complex, the nucleus of which was the metallurgy of the Urals, was not established on the basis of the development of capitalist relations, but within the framework of feudal and tributary relations. [16]

It is true that capital flourished, but it was pre-capitalist and hindered the development of capitalism – “commercial capital developed not deeply, not by transforming production, but broadly, by increasing the radius of its operation,” and “advanced from the center toward the periphery, following the peasant settlers who, in search of fresh lands and freedom from imposts, were penetrating new territory.” [17]

Based on extra-economic coercion, pre-capitalist modes of exploitation dominated the capitalist mode of production in Russia until the revolution of 1917, not only in agriculture but also in industry, long after the reform of 1861.

When Russian social democracy was formed as a party, the work of about 30% of the industrial workers was still serf work, not wage labor, which this social democracy, including Lenin’s and Martov’s *Iskra*, associating industry (i.e., the productive forces, not the relations of production) with capitalism, did not see. “Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, more than half of the industrial enterprises of the main industrial core (the steel industry) were not capitalist in the strict sense of the term,” says Mikhail Voeikov. The pre-capitalist methods of extracting the surplus product of the labor of the direct producers that still prevailed “did not allow national capital to carry out the necessary accumulation,” which is why “foreign capital was so strong.” [18] Where capital already dominated in the Russian economy, it was almost immediately big capital and there were quickly processes of monopolization.

Multiplicity of revolutions

In Russia, therefore, “modern capitalist imperialism” was being born, but it was “enmeshed” – Lenin wrote just before the 1917 revolution – “in a particularly close network of pre-capitalist relations,” so close that “in general, military and feudal imperialism is predominant in Russia.” [19] The foundation of this imperialism was “the monopoly of military power, vast territories, or special facilities for robbing minority nationalities, China, etc.,” that is, of the non-Russian peoples within Russia itself and of the peoples of neighboring countries. At the same time, Lenin wrote, this extra-economic monopoly “partly supplements, partly takes the place of, the monopoly of modern, up-to-

date finance capital.” [20] Virtually all exegetes of Lenin’s writings on imperialism do not mention this theoretical proposition, which is crucial for the study of the Russian social formation. [21]

The collapse of this entanglement of Russian “military and feudal” imperialism with capitalist imperialism was not the work of a single revolution, but of various revolutions converging and diverging, forming alliances and clashing violently. The Russian Revolution of October 1917 was one of them. At the center of the empire, it was a worker and peasant revolution; in the colonial periphery, it was based on Russian and Russified urban minorities and settlements. It had a colonizing character, as did the Russian power of the councils it established, as demonstrated by the Bolshevik Georgi Safarov in his once-classic work on the “colonial revolution” in Turkestan. “Membership of the industrial proletariat of a Tsarist colony was a *national privilege of the Russians*. This is why, here too, the dictatorship of the proletariat has taken on a *typically colonizing* appearance from the very first moments” (emphasis in original). [22]

But among the oppressed peoples, the Russian Revolution also sparked national revolutions. The most territorially extensive, violent, dynamic, and unpredictable of these was the Ukrainian revolution. Its outburst, and even more the momentum it gained, was unexpected. A peasant nation, without “its” landowners and “its” capitalists, with a thin layer of petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia and a forbidden language, did not seem destined or capable of a successful revolution. Since the Russian army wiped out the Zaporozhian Sich, the stronghold of the Free Cossacks, in 1775, the Ukrainian people for the first time proclaimed their independence in 1918. Formally it was done, with great popular support, in January 1918 in Kiev by the Central Rada (Council) formed by petty-bourgeois Ukrainian parties. Frightened by the proletarian revolution that had brought the Bolsheviks to power in Petrograd and Moscow, the Central Rada decided in this manner to separate Ukraine from Soviet Russia, and immediately became involved in a war with the Bolsheviks.

Ukrainian National Revolution

Some Ukrainian Bolsheviks (although the percentage of Ukrainians among the members of the Bolshevik Party in Ukraine was negligible) nevertheless also wanted a revolutionary Ukraine, a Soviet one like Russia, but independent. But above all, in the radical left, the Ukrainian Communist Party (Borotbist)—separated from the Bolsheviks and formed by the left wing of the Ukrainian Socialist-Revolutionary Party and part of the left wing of Ukrainian Social Democracy—wanted national independence. Allied with the Bolsheviks, this party had a social base incomparably broader than theirs.

The alliance of the Borotbists with the Bolsheviks was very difficult. The head of the Bolshevik government set up after the second occupation of Kiev by the Red Army in 1919, Christian Rakovsky, coming from Bulgaria, proclaimed that “decreeing the Ukrainian language as the state language would be a reactionary measure that no one needs,” because in general “the Ukrainian question and Ukraine are not so much a real fact as an invention of the Ukrainian intelligentsia.” [23] He was not alone among Marxists: Rosa Luxemburg asserted that Ukrainian nationalism was a “ridiculous pose,” “a mere whim, a folly of a few dozen petty-bourgeois intellectuals.” [24] Believing that “Ukraine is to Russia what Ireland is to England,” that it was a colony and that its oppressed people should obtain independence, Lenin was an exception, but he said so publicly only once. [25]

In addition to the Rakovsky government’s policy on the national question, there was an ultra-left policy on the agrarian question, which, unlike the Bolshevik decree on land, was not aimed at the parceling out of land holdings for the benefit of the peasants, but at the transformation of these properties into collective farms. State requisitions of grain and “war communism” in general added fuel to the fire. All this led to a strong tide of anti-Bolshevik peasant uprisings in 1919 (there were 660, large and small), which cut Ukraine off from Hungary and prevented the Ukrainian Red Army

from coming to the aid of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, when this was the latter's only hope of survival. In Ukraine itself, these uprisings defeated totally the policy of "war communism." The Bolshevik authorities managed to collect only less than 9 percent of the grain that they planned to transport to Russia to feed the starving cities. Moreover, the insurgent wave paved the way for the offensive of General Anton Denikin's White Guard troops on Moscow. [26] It is true that Rakovsky himself quickly drew serious conclusions from his government's disastrous policies, but he did so only after its collapse.

Pro-independence Communists

In much of the Dnieper and south-east regions of Ukraine, the struggle against the occupation by the Russian White Guard rested on the shoulders of guerrilla and insurgent movements, led by the Communist-Borotbists, who were the strongest underground party, and by the anarcho-communists under the leadership of Nestor Makhno. After the defeat of Denikin, the Red Army, for the third time in a row, guaranteed power in Ukraine to the Bolsheviks. It was only then, in February 1920, that they decided to abandon their doctrinaire approach to the agrarian question and distribute the land to the peasants. The Borotbists were overwhelmingly in the majority among the Ukrainian Communists, and even more numerous than all the Bolsheviks then active in Ukraine, including those sent from Russia. But the Bolsheviks, much stronger with their regular army, accepted them only as very minority partners in the ruling coalition and also strongly tied their hands to limit their political independence as much as possible.

Lenin was very afraid that once the civil war and foreign intervention were over, there would be an armed uprising of the Borotbists against the Bolsheviks if the latter opposed the independence of Soviet Ukraine. He was well aware, too, that in his own party "scratch some Communist and you will find a Great-Russian chauvinist. (...) He is in many of us and we have to fight him." [27] He demanded of his comrades the "greatest caution regarding nationalist traditions, strictest observance of equality of the Ukrainian language and culture, all officials to be required to study the Ukrainian language, and so on." [28]

He publicly affirmed: "It is (...) self-evident and generally recognized that only the Ukrainian workers and peasants themselves can and will decide at their All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets whether Ukraine shall amalgamate with Russia" into a single Soviet republic, "or whether it shall remain a separate and independent republic" united by a union (federation) with Russia, and, "in the latter case, what federal ties shall be established between that republic and Russia." On this question, he declared, "there should be no parting of the ways among Communists." He did not accept a confederation. "One of the things distinguishing the Borotbists from the Bolsheviks is that they insist upon the unconditional independence of Ukraine. The Bolsheviks will not make this a subject of difference and disunity, they do not regard this as an obstacle to concerted proletarian effort" (emphasis in original). Because the Ukrainian nation was historically a nation oppressed by Russia, Lenin explained, "we Great-Russian Communists must make concessions when there are differences with the Ukrainian Bolshevik and Borotbist Communists and these differences concern the state independence of Ukraine, the forms of its alliance with Russia, and the national question in general." [29]

"A victory worth a pair of good battles"

However, exactly the opposite happened, with the Borotbists having to give way to the Bolsheviks in these areas - and this under the threat of "liquidation." Behind closed doors, Lenin postulated, "for the time being, an independent" Ukraine "in close federation" with Russia and a "temporary bloc with the Borotbists" together "with the concurrent launching of a propaganda campaign for the complete merger" of Ukraine with Russia into a unitary state. He quickly added that "the struggle

against the slogan of union as close as possible" with Russia, i.e. for the national independence, is "contrary to the interests of the proletariat," so that in Ukraine "all politics must systematically and relentlessly aim at the liquidation of the Borotbists in the near future." He "urge[d] that the Borotbists be accused not of nationalism, but of counter-revolutionary and petty-bourgeois tendencies." [30]

In exactly the same period the so-called "federalist," in fact pro-independence, faction of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks had been informing Lenin that in Ukraine his "party has no influence in the countryside, which is purely Ukrainian, and does nothing to attract its poorest elements, but on the other hand it admits into its ranks with open arms Russian petty-bourgeois elements and, still more, more or less Russified Jewish craftspeople. The influence of these petty-bourgeois elements in the party is very pernicious." This is due, they explained, to the fact that "through the entire policy of the [Bolshevik] Communist Party in Ukraine runs like a red thread an extremely suspicious attitude towards the Ukrainian Communist groups and an orientation towards groups, although not Communist, but not infected of 'separatism', although these groups have no real force and are a kind of 'imaginary values', like the [non-Ukrainian] Mensheviks and Left Socialist-Revolutionaries." [31]

The "liquidation" of Borotbists did not take place because, whether for the sake of the cause of the international socialist revolution or simply because they realized that a revolver had been put to their heads, they themselves dissolved their party. [32] As Lenin explained, "instead of an inevitable uprising, (...) all the best elements among the Borotbists have joined our Party under our control and with our consent, while the rest have disappeared from the political scene. This victory is worth a pair of good battles." [33] Out of 15,000 Borotbists, 4,000 joined in Ukraine the 12,000 Bolsheviks. Less than two years later, after various, especially "anti-separatist", internal purges, only 118 of them remained in the Bolshevik party. Some for several years occupied prominent state positions in the republic. But the pro-independence Communist currents or milieux of Borotbist origin disappeared very quickly inside the Bolshevik Party.

In the light of Lenin's well known ideological struggles for the right of peoples to self-determination to the point of separation, and of his real policy in this area, the way in which he actually conceived of this right inherent in his thought remains, if not a mystery, at least something totally unexplored. Nearly all Marxist literature or that presenting itself as such devoted to his interpretation of this right has the exegetical, apologetic, or epigonic character. Marxists have buried their heads in the sand in the face of the historical fact that everywhere in the colonial peripheries of Russia where the power of his party imposed itself, or more precisely where the Red Army asserted it, this right has not been enforced and there was no way to try to enforce it without being accused of being counter-revolutionary.

Contradiction at the heart of the revolution

The revolution in Russia did not destroy Russian imperialism. With capitalism, it overthrew "modern capitalist imperialism" and suppressed the pre-capitalist base (feudal and tributary) of military imperialism. But it did not uproot the conditions for the reproduction of the Russian extra-economic monopoly that constituted it, the extra-economic "monopoly of military power, vast territories, or special facilities for robbing" the other peoples of Russia's inner and outer peripheries. To the extent that the revolution embraced the periphery and spread there, among the oppressed peoples, in the form of national revolutions, it forced this monopoly to retreat. At the same time, it reproduced it to the extent that it spread from the center to the periphery by means of military conquest. This contradiction, which was at the heart of the Russian Revolution, was inherent in it and impossible to resolve within its own framework. Much now depended on which side of the contradiction would prevail.

Following the collapse of the Russian Empire, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland successively broke away from it, and following the disastrous defeat suffered in the 1920 war with Poland, Soviet Russia lost part of Ukraine (and Belarus). For the survival of Russian imperialism, it was decisive whether or not Soviet Ukraine would separate. When the Soviet Union took shape as a state body in 1922-1923, the Ukrainian Bolsheviks spoke openly of the fact that while a sharp struggle was waged against Ukrainian “nationalist survivals” among Bolsheviks, especially those of Borotbist origin, “great power prejudices, nourished by breast milk, had become an instinct among very many comrades,” because “in practice no struggle against great power chauvinism was waged in our party.” [34] At the head of those who still demanded the independence of Ukraine and the creation of a union of independent Soviet states, Rakovsky, now a very popular leader among the Ukrainian masses, fiercely opposed Stalin. [35] They lost, but their defeat was incomplete.

The Transformations of Russian Imperialism

The central leadership of the Bolshevik Party, led by Stalin, opposed the aspirations for independence in favor of a linguistic and cultural nationalization of the non-Russian republics. Unexpectedly for its Moscow promoters, Ukrainization turned into an extension of the Ukrainian national revolution, which it revived and remarkably revitalized. It lasted almost 10 years, until 1932. The extermination by hunger (Holodomor) and the crushing of Ukrainization by terror [36] were both constitutive acts of the Stalinist bureaucracy, now separated from the Thermidorian bureaucracy that had ruled until then (and would soon be exterminated by it), and an act of rebirth – this time of Russian military-bureaucratic – imperialism. [37]

The latter was consolidated by the unification of Ukrainian (and Belarusian) lands following the partition of Poland by Hitler and Stalin, and by the annexation of the Baltic states, accomplished in 1939 and confirmed in 1944, during the victorious war against German imperialism. The gigantic plundering of the industrial resources of the Soviet zone of occupied Germany, as well as the domination over the satellite states of Eastern Europe, kept in check by the permanent threat of Soviet military intervention, have sealed this revival of Russian imperialism. [38]

The sudden, totally unexpected fall of the USSR in 1991 revealed the nature of this state, created on the basis of Stalin’s Great Terror. What Ukraine failed to achieve during the collapse of the Russian Empire, it was able to do during the collapse of the Soviet Union. It then managed to break away, like 14 other of the largest non-Russian nations. By declaring its national independence, it dealt a decisive blow to Russian military-bureaucratic imperialism.

Restored on the ruins of the USSR, Russian capitalism remains dependent on the same extra-economic monopoly on which past modes of exploitation depended and, like them, it is distorted by this dependence. The Russian state protects capitalist private property, but at the same time restricts it because this property is subject to state coercion, just as the fusion of the state apparatus with big capitals restricts and distorts competition between them. Thus, under the weight of this monopoly, state oligarchic capitalism and military-oligarchic imperialism have taken shape in Russia.

The imperative of reconquest

However, this monopoly itself has suffered enormous, albeit extremely uneven, degradation. Russia retained its “monopoly of military power” to the extent that, after the collapse of the USSR, it remained the world’s largest nuclear power with a huge army. On the other hand, its “monopoly of the vast territories, or special facilities for robbing” of other peoples has declined profoundly. As Zbigniew Brzezinski observed after the collapse of the USSR, Russia’s borders receded dramatically, “rolled back to where they had been in the Caucasus in the early 1800s, in Central Asia in the mid-1800s, and – much more dramatically and painfully – in the West in approximately 1600, soon

after the reign of Ivan the Terrible.” Worst of all, “without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire” and while “can still strive for imperial status,” the center of gravity would then be shifted and Russia would be doomed to weakness. Brzezinski was right when he wrote that, “if Moscow regains control over Ukraine, with its 52 million people and major resources as well as its access to the Black Sea, Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia.” [39]

This is why Russian imperialism has embarked on the reconquest of Ukraine, where its very destiny is at stake.

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P.S.

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Footnotes

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[19] V.I. Lenin, "Socialism and War (The Attitude of the R.S.D.L.P. Towards the War)," and idem, "Imperialism, the Highest Stage Of Capitalism. A Popular Outline," *Collected Works* vol. 21, pp. 306, 259.

[20] V.I. Lenin, "Imperialism and the Split of Socialism," *Collected Works* vol. 23, p. 116.

[21] Cf. Z.M. Kowalewski, "Impérialisme russe," *Inprecor* no. 609/610, 2014, pp. 7-9.

[22] Г. Сафаров, *Колониальная революция (Опыт Туркестана)*, Госиздат, Moscow 1921, p. 72. This fundamental work for the development of anti-colonial thought, forbidden and condemned to eternal oblivion by Stalin, was only re-released in 1996 in Kazakhstan. Internationally, it remains almost completely unknown to this day.

[23] П. Христюк, *Замітки і матеріали до історії української революції 1917-1920*, pp. vol. IV, Український соціологічний інститут, s.l. 1922, p. 173.

[24] R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1961, p. 54.

[25] Quoted after П. Кравчук, "Під проводом благородних ідей (6)," *Життя і Слово* (Toronto) No. 26 (183), 1969, p. 18. The text of this speech was lost and is known only from the press

reports of the time. See R. Serbyn, "Lenin and the Ukrainian Question in 1914. Le discours 'séparatiste' de Zurich," *Pluriel-débat* no. 25, 1981, pp. 83-84.

[26] Cf. Z.M. Kowalewski, "For the Independence of Soviet Ukraine," in M. Vogt-Downey (ed.), *The USSR 1987-1991: Marxist Perspectives*, Humanities Press, New Jersey 1993, pp. 235-255.

[27] V.I. Lenin, "Eight Congress of the R.C.P.(b). Speech Closing the Debate on the Party Programme," *Collected Works* vol. 29, p. 194-195. Translation verified with the Russian original and corrected (see В.И. Ленин, *Полное собрание сочинений* vol. 38, Политиздат, Moscú 1969, p. 183-184).

[28] R. Pipes, David Brandenberger (eds.), *Unknown Lenin. From the Secret Archive*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 1996, p. 76.

[29] V.I. Lenin, "Letter to the Workers and Peasants of the Ukraine Apropos of the Victories over Denikin," *Collected Works* vol. 30, pp. 292, 294, 296.

[30] R. Pipes, David Brandenberger (eds.), op. cit., p. 76; В.И. Ленин, "Проект резолюции об украинской партии боротьбистов" and "Замечания к резолюции исполнительного комитета Коммунистического Интернационала по вопросу о боротьбистах," *Полное собрание сочинений* vol. 40, Политиздат, Moscow 1974, pp. 122, 152.

[31] "Лист представників української комуністичної організації при Московському комітеті РКП(б) до ЦК РКП(б) та особисто Леніна з аналізом та оцінкою політики Комуністичної партії в Україні у 1919 р.," in: Г. Єфіменко, *Взаємовідносини Кремля та радянської України: економічний аспект (1917-1919 рр.)*, Інституту історії України НАН України, Kiev 2008, pp. 191-192.

[32] The circumstances and course of the self-dissolution of the Ukrainian Communist Party (borotbists) were examined by Д. В. Стаценко, "Самоліквідація осередків Української комуністичної партії (боротьбистів) у 1920-му році (на прикладі Полтавщини)," *Історична пам'ять. Науковий збірник* vol. 29, 2013, pp. 58-70.

[33] V.I. Lenin, "Ninth Congress of the R.C.P.(b). Reply to the Discussion on the Report of the Central Committee," *Collected Works* vol. 30, p. 471. Translation verified with the Russian original and corrected (see В.И. Ленин, *Полное собрание сочинений* vol. 40, Политиздат, Moscú 1974, p. 266).

[34] These are the words of Mykola Skrypnyk, one of the main leaders of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks. *Двенадцатый съезд РКП(б). 17-25 апреля 1923 года. Стенографический отчёт*, Политиздат, Moscow 1968, pp. 571-572.

[35] Г. Чернявский, М. Станчев, М. Тортика (Лобанова), *Жизненный путь Христиана Раковского. 1873-1941. Европеизм и большевизм: неоконченная дуэль*, Центрполиграф, Moscow 2014, pp. 165-191.

[36] The most accurate analysis of this event was provided by A. Graziosi, "The Soviet 1931-1933 Famines and the Ukrainian Holodomor: Is a New Interpretation Possible, and What Would Its Consequences Be?," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* vol. 27 no. 1/4, 2004/2005, pp. 97-115.

[37] Cf. Z.M. Kowalewski, "Ouvriers et bureaucrates. Comment les rapports d'exploitation se sont

formés et ont fonctionné dans le bloc soviétique," *Inprecor* no. 685/686, 2021, p. 35-61.

[38] Cf. D. Logan [J. van Heijenoort], "The Eruption of Bureaucratic Imperialism," *The New International* vol. XII no. 3 (105), 1946, pp. 74-77.

[39] Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York 1997, pp. 88, 46.