

# Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914-1921

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*Carl von Clausewitz. Lithograph by F. Michelis after the painting by W. Wach, 1830. (Original in the possession of Professor Peter Paret, Stanford; used with permission.)*



**E**VEN the most superficial reading of Soviet military writings would lead to the conclusion that a close tie exists between Marxism-Leninism and Clausewitz' studies on war and statecraft. Although labeled an "idealist," Clausewitz enjoys a place in the Soviet pantheon of military theorists strikingly similar to that assigned to pagan philosophers in Dante's Hell. Colonel General I. E. Shavrov, former commander of the Soviet General Staff Academy, has written that Clausewitz' method marked a radical departure in the study of war:

He, in reality, for the first time in military theory, denied the "eternal" and "unchanging" in military art, strove to examine the phenomenon of war in its interdependence and interconditionality, in its movement and development in order to postulate their laws and principles.<sup>1</sup>

Soviet authors point to the fact that Lenin valued Clausewitz' work but refuse to see Lenin's reading of *Vom Kriege* as having any fundamental consequences for Lenin's own views on war or military affairs.<sup>2</sup> Soviet authors take no note of when or in what context Lenin read Clausewitz, nor do they consider the specific manner in which Lenin applied Clausewitz' concepts on war and statecraft to the formation of the military policy of his party. It is the purpose of this article to examine the intellectual bond between the Prussian officer and the Russian revolutionary in order to understand better the relationship between Soviet military science and Marxism-Leninism.

The ideological baggage which Russian Social Democrats carried with them in 1914 would seem to suggest an undying distrust of any ideas coming from professional soldiers of the

old regime. On the one hand, reformers and revolutionaries shared the strong anti-militarist thrust of European Social Democracy, which viewed the military elite as the sources of a vile and poisonous militarism. The professional soldiers' desire for glory, like the capitalists' search for profits, only brought suffering to the working class. All socialists shared a commitment to a citizens' militia as the preferred means of national defense. In 1917 the Bolsheviks rode this anti-militarist sentiment to power by supporting the process of military disintegration, upholding the chaos of the *komitetchchina*, and promising a government that would bring immediate peace.<sup>3</sup>

These Social Democrats were also the heirs of the voluminous writings on military affairs of the two founders of scientific socialism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. As Peter Vigor has pointed out, these two life-long collaborators employed a division of labor in their military writings. Engels, who considered himself an amateur soldier, dealt with tactics, strategy, and the impact of technology on military affairs. Marx dealt with international relations, the impact of war on domestic politics, and the revolutionary potential of a given conflict.<sup>4</sup> After Marx's death Engels continued writing about military affairs, and in 1887 penned a chilling prediction of what a general war would be like in capitalist Europe:

This would be a universal war of unprecedented scope, unprecedented force. From eight to ten million soldiers will destroy one another and in the course of doing so will strip Europe clean in a way that a swarm of locusts could never have done. The devastation caused by the Thirty Year's War telescoped into 3-4 years and spread over the

entire continent, hunger, epidemics, the universal enslavement of both troops and the masses, brought about by acute need, the hopeless jumbling of our artificial trade, industrial, and credit mechanisms; all this ending in general bankruptcy; the collapse of old states and their vaunted wisdom . . . the utter impossibility of foreseeing how all this will end and who will emerge victorious from this struggle; only one result is absolutely beyond doubt: universal exhaustion and the creation of conditions for the final victory of the working class.<sup>5</sup>

Engels had little to say about what would follow this crisis. Its very magnitude pointed towards a general revolutionary crisis across Europe and a rapid social transformation from capitalism to socialism. Once the exploiting and exploited social classes had disappeared, the proletarian state would have no need for the military as the instrument of the state's monopoly on violence since the state would have neither external nor internal threats with which to contend.

**T**WENTY-SEVEN years passed between Engels' prediction and the onset of that great European war. In the meantime the heirs of Marx and Engels had become powerful political forces in many states of Europe. Some parties, most notably the German Social Democratic Party, had abandoned revolutionary action, although they continued to mouth the rhetoric of class confrontation. European socialists had in 1890 created the Second International, and they expected it to provide the organizational expression for a workers' solidarity, which was to prevent the outbreak of such a war. But in the Summer and Fall of 1914 the socialist parties of Europe, with the exception of the Serbian, actively or passively supported their governments' entry into the war. To the disgust of Lenin, the majority of Russian Social Democrats were willing to defend Russia, no matter how much they despised the tsarist regime. But Engels' vision came back to haunt them all. Total war gradually tore assunder both socialist ideology and European society in the same manner that the massed guns tore apart land and men.

In reading Lenin's early writings on military affairs, one must be conscious of the extent to which these views have been accepted without deep reflection or consideration. Lenin's observations on the colonial wars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially the Russo-Japanese War, reflect the preeminent concerns found in the works of Marx and Engels: the politics of war and the impact of new technology upon war in capitalist society.

With the outbreak of World War I, Lenin's speculations and writings about war underwent a radical transformation. Ideologies, like the paradigms of a scientific discipline, begin to disintegrate when the exceptions or anomalies start to threaten the very core of the model. Normal ideological discourse, like what Thomas Kuhn has called "normal science," becomes increasingly difficult. Lenin's concerns were shared by socialists across Europe. In Marxist terms practice, i.e., objective circumstances, had called into question a central point of theory. In 1914 Lenin, along with other social democrats, confronted an anomaly of such scope and power that their ideological assumptions could not but undergo change.<sup>6</sup>

Marxism, with its historical materialist analysis of the world, and its emphasis upon class conflict, had held out the promise of liberating the essential potentialities of man amid the deprivations of reality. Hegel had placed this philosophical concern in the historical context of his time and so had made manifest the fact that man's knowledge, activity, and hope were directed towards the establishment of a rational society. Marx set out to demonstrate the concrete forces and tendencies that stood in the path of this goal and those that promised it. This material connection of his theory with a definite historical form of praxis negated not only philosophy, but sociology as well. As Herbert Marcuse has pointed out, the social facts that Marx analyzed,

i.e., the alienation of labor, the fetishism of the commodity world, surplus value, exploitation, are not akin to sociological facts, such as divorces, crimes, shifts in population, or business cycles. The fundamental aspects of Marxian categories defy any empirical science, i.e., one preoccupied with describing and organizing the objective phenomena of society. They appear as facts only to a theory that takes them in preview of their negation. Correct theory is nothing less than a consciousness of a praxis that aims at changing the world.<sup>7</sup> Marx put the proposition succinctly in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."<sup>8</sup>

What Marxists across Europe faced in the Summer and Fall of 1914 was an anomaly so glaring that reality seemed to negate existing theory. In the face of its proclaimed internationalism and pacifism, the Social Democrats of Europe had to confront a general European war, which their theory had held to be an impossibility. The Second International and worker solidarity were supposed to prevent a general war among the powers. True, as in the case of analogous circumstance associated with scientific revolutions, observers in the decades prior to the outbreak of World War I had noted anomalies in mature capitalism, which did not fit the essential paradigm outlined by Marx and Engels. But the shock of modern war, i.e., praxis, set off a deep crisis in theory.<sup>9</sup>

In Lenin's case, this crisis had a profound, but largely unacknowledged consequence, for Soviet military science. For Lenin, the committed revolutionary, the ramifications of a general European war were no abstract concern. On the contrary, because he was committed to changing the world, Lenin required of theory that it grant him "scientific foresight" — the ability to foresee the war's course and outcome. On the one hand, this led Lenin to review the substantial body of socialist literature on finance capitalism and imperialist rivalries, culminating in 1916 with his synthetic work, *Imperialism the Highest State of Capitalism*.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Lenin was concerned with the problem of theory reconstruction, a task made essential by the apparent failure of accepted Marxism to predict or prevent the war. It is most typical of Lenin that in the face of such earth-shaking historical events, he should return to philosophy in order to find a theoretical framework upon which to analyze these events and to guide his actions.

Unlike the dry and largely ahistorical exposition of Lenin's views to be found in most Soviet works, this process is intellectually intriguing and highly relevant to our concern, the development of Soviet military science.<sup>11</sup> This process involved a fundamental restructuring of Lenin's general theory.<sup>12</sup> Down to 1914, for all his declarations about dialectical materialism, Lenin never transcended the historical pre-Marxian, mechanistic materialism of the Enlightenment. In one of his earliest writings (1894), "What the Friends of the People Are," Lenin had asserted that "insistence on dialectics . . . is nothing but a relic of Hegelianism out of which scientific socialism has grown, a relic of its manner of expression."<sup>13</sup> While recognizing a need for some philosophical underpinning to Marxism, Lenin did not himself enter into debate until practical issues of policy, i.e., whether the Bolsheviks would take part in the elections for the Third Duma, brought him into conflict with the Bogdanovites and their Machian Empiriomonism. When it appeared that Bolshevism was being identified with Machism and suffering politically from this identification, Lenin did address the issue in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*.<sup>14</sup> Lenin's approach, and one to be found in Soviet works to this day, was to postulate a struggle between philosophical idealism and materialism:

The question here is not of this or that formulation of materialism but of the antithesis between materialism and idealism, of the difference between the two fundamental lines of philosophy. Are we to proceed from things to sensations and thought? Or are we to proceed from thought and sensation to things?<sup>15</sup>

Two doctrines formed the central themes of Lenin's materialism: the external reality of the world and the "copy" theory of knowledge. This can still be found as the epistemological foundation of all Soviet writings on philosophy, including those relating to military affairs.

WITH the unexpected disintegration of internationalism and the outbreak of a general European War, Lenin turned to philosophy in order to reformulate theory in the face of these anomalies. Lenin devoured Hegel and engaged in his first systematic treatment of the dialectic. His notes, which extended to about 300 pages, reflect his changing interpretation of Hegel. Initially, it seems Lenin intended to use his study of Hegel to give a correct account of Marx's materialism. But in the process of his study of Hegel's *Logic*, Lenin's critical comments gave way to enthusiastic acceptance. At the end of his notes, he wrote, "In this most idealistic of Hegel's works there is the least idealism and the most materialism."<sup>16</sup> In what was an explicit acknowledgement that prewar Marxists' general theory had been utterly wrong-headed, Lenin wrote:

It is impossible to understand completely Marx's *Capital*, especially its first chapter [dealing with Marx's treatment of use-value and the fetishism of commodities], without having thoroughly studied the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!

This most revealing act of criticism and self-criticism marked a fundamental shift in Lenin's and subsequently Communist ideology. This shift, denied in Soviet works for the purpose of maintaining an uninterrupted ideological continuity between Marxism and Leninism, had radical implications for Lenin's developing paradigm of modern war. Maintaining his revolutionary, internationalist position on the war, Lenin turned from Hegel and philosophy to polemical writings on the war and the political struggle to transform the war into an international civil war, pitting class against class. In the process, Lenin turned to the study of the conduct of war. He received a copy of Karl von Clausewitz' *Vom Kriege* from G. I. Gusev, a fellow Bolshevik and former editor of the *Military Encyclopedia*. As an editor of the encyclopedia Gusev had contact with many reform-minded general staff officers who after the Russo-Japanese War had embarked upon the process of modernizing Russian military thought and doctrine under the banner of creating a "unified military school."<sup>18</sup> Lenin devoured Clausewitz' book, filling a large notebook with his observations in early 1915 and applying these to the politics of the socialist movement. During this period we can observe the transformation of Lenin's dialectical materialism from an emphasis on the latter to the former aspect.<sup>19</sup>

His first citation of Clausewitz' work is most instructive in what it reveals about his method and technique. The citation came in a work devoted to the collapse of the Second International, which was written in the first half of June 1915.<sup>20</sup> Here Lenin presents his paradigm shift in the form of intellectual synthesis of Clausewitz, Hegel, Marx, and Engels, transforming the dialectic from an external process of "copying" observed empirical phenomena into an internalized tool for the unification of theory and practice:

Applied to wars, the basic thesis of the dialectic, so shamelessly distorted by Plekhanov [then defending Russia's prosecution of the war as part of a democratic struggle against German militarism] to the purposes of the bourgeoisie, is this, that "war is simply the continuation of politics by other (namely violent) means." Such is the formulation of Clausewitz, one of the greatest writers on questions of military history, whose ideas were engendered by Hegel. And such ideas were always the point of view of Marx and Engels, each war, they viewed as a continuation of the politics of a given interested power

and of the different classes within them — at a given time.<sup>21</sup>

The first observation to be made concerns the revision of Clausewitz done by Lenin. In *Vom Kriege*, war is the continuation of politics but these are conducted by the supra-class, rational state in the name of the general interests of the entire population, which the state seeks to mediate. In Lenin, the state is still Marx's executive committee of the ruling class, and so its policies are, at best, the realistic interests of the ruling class, or worse, the irrational and self-destructive instincts of a class caught in irresolvable contradictions.<sup>22</sup> Although well aware of the influence of Kantian philosophy on the young Clausewitz, Lenin chose to attribute a philosophical and historical relationship to Hegel. Now, in fact, as modern scholarship on Clausewitz has acknowledged, there is an implicit relationship between Hegel and the Prussian general in the latter's mode of exposition. As Peter Paret has observed, German philosophy did provide Clausewitz "with a fundamental attitude and with the intellectual tools to express it." More specifically, Clausewitz employed the dialectic as his method in developing his conceptions, i.e., the posing of opposites to be defined and compared not only so that each part could be more completely understood, but also so that all the dynamic linkages connecting all of the elements of war could be examined in a state of permanent interaction.<sup>23</sup>

The reality of war and the bitter intersocialist politics of 1915-1916 brought Lenin to a radical revision of Marxist thought on war. If the European working class could not deter war through solidarity and proletarian internationalism, then the question became one of how to benefit from anomaly. The answer was to transform the imperialist war into a civil war. Lenin embraced Clausewitz in a fashion never done by Marx or Engels. Indeed, Engels' references to Clausewitz are either banal or of a purely peripheral nature to the subject and topic under discussion, i.e., the level of education of the Prussian officer corps.<sup>24</sup> Lenin's reading of Clausewitz assumed central significance with the increasing militarization of Lenin's thought from the questions of organizing an armed insurrection to the command of the forces of the new Bolshevik state. The Prussian provided a model of the application of the dialectic to issues of military science, allowing Lenin to break down the "immutability of the firm principles of military science" and to reformulate his own conceptions of war and the armed forces.

An examination of Lenin's references to Clausewitz in the period after his reading of *Vom Kriege* is most instructive. Marxism has always retained a predictive element, thanks to utopian tracts and the Enlightenment's faith in human progress, but in the face of a world war, which challenged the most pious hopes of socialists, doctrine required another type of foresight, a tool for immediate use in assessing and analyzing the conflicting trends. In the Summer of 1915, Lenin articulated his own synthesis of Marx and Clausewitz in the form of an historical typology of wars covering the period 1789 to 1914. In this essay, "The Principles of Socialism and the War, 1914-1915," Lenin drew the conclusion that war had been transformed from bourgeois-national struggles, which he identified as just struggles by the bourgeoisie against the surviving feudal order, into imperialist wars among capitalist powers. The first era had lasted until 1871, and since then as a consequence of the uneven development of capitalism the number, extent and intensity of local wars had been growing over colonial questions, culminating in the general imperialist war. In this typology, war had become a central feature of the capitalist international system and was presented as a consequence of internal, i.e., class, politics. "War is a continuation of politics by other, i.e., violent, means" becomes in Lenin's hands, a tool for a class analysis of the imperialist war and the emergence of anti-colonial struggles outside Europe. It is also a weapon to be turned upon his opponents, those Social Democrats who had

agreed to support their governments during the war, and, therefore, opposed Lenin's defeatism.<sup>25</sup>

**I**N 1917, Lenin found himself confronted by a revolutionary upheaval in Russia, which no party could have claimed to have authored — save possibly the tsarist government in its own incompetence. Yet, Lenin more quickly than other radicals reached the conclusion that this revolution could only be understood in the context of the war. He believed that his faction and the working class could thus direct the war to their end. In May 1917, in the midst of the first crisis of Russia's Provisional Government over the politics of war aims, i.e., whether that government would reject the promised Russian territorial gains contained in various secret treaties among the Allies and accept a peace without victors, Lenin applied Clausewitz to the existing political-military situation. Lenin began "War and Revolution" with what was for him the central question: the class nature of the war. After an historical analysis of the roots of the conflict, Lenin turned to Clausewitz:

The dictum of one of the most famous writers on the philosophy of wars and on the history of wars, Clausewitz, is well known. It states, "War is a continuation of politics by other means." This dictum belongs to a writer who reviewed the history of wars and deduced the philosophical lessons from that history — shortly after the epoch of the Napoleonic Wars. This writer, whose basic ideas have become at present time the undoubted acquisition of any sort of thinking person, already about eighty years ago struggled against the narrow and ignorant prejudice, that war could be isolated from the policy of the corresponding governments, the corresponding classes, as if war could be looked upon as simple aggression, which disturbs the peace, and then follows the restoration of that disturbed peace. They fought and then they made up! This coarse and ignorant view decades ago was refuted and disproved by any sort of attentive analysis of any historical epoch of war.<sup>26</sup>

The juncture of class analysis and the political nature of war is, of course, Lenin's own insight. In embracing the dialectical approach to questions of war and peace, Lenin sought to put revised theory into practice. In May, 1917, the objective was the transformation of the imperialist war into an international civil war:

Without a workers' revolution in several countries no one can win in this war. War is not a toy; war is an unprecedented thing; war costs millions of lives, and it is not so easy to end it.<sup>27</sup>

Lenin intended his analysis to provide foresight, and foresight in turn was to prepare his party and the working class of Russia for action. While the events of the Summer and Fall of 1917 confirm that Lenin could not control the social forces acting upon the Russian polity, in July he went along with demonstrations that he could not control and faced their failure and the suppression of his party. Then, in October he could not convince his own party elite of the timeliness of preparations for an armed insurrection against a bankrupt Provisional Government.<sup>28</sup> His own synthesis of class analysis, the centrality of politics to war, and an interpretation of the immediate past that seemed to hold out the prospect of immediate, sweeping, revolutionary changes allowed Lenin to speak of "scientific prediction" and foresight. This, in turn, gave Lenin the confidence to act decisively.

Upon coming to power Lenin had to confront the stark realities of the social, political, and economic disintegration which had transpired in Russia in 1917, and to which the Bolsheviks had contributed themselves. Lenin and the Bolsheviks found themselves the nominal rulers of a vast country in the process of disintegration as national minorities, which had been held in check by the autocratic police power, sought national

autonomy. Powerful social groups grudgingly accepted Soviet power, but were already in the process of becoming political movements dedicated to the overthrow of the regime. Lenin was acutely aware of the two central threats to the regime's survival: the trauma of the continuing war and the processes of social disintegration. These twin threats explain much of Bolshevik policy during the Winter-Spring of 1918.

Negotiations with Imperial Germany and its allies produced neither a compromise peace nor a social revolution in Berlin. German terms for peace became harsher as Soviet Russia grew weaker. The Soviet government decreed the abolition of the old army and navy and on 28 January 1918 (N.S.), proclaimed the formation of the RKKA, the Red Army of Workers and Peasants. This new force, which was originally drawn out of available Red Guard units from among the proletariat and remnants of military formations which had demonstrated their loyalty to Soviet power, began as little more than a stop-gap measure to provide the regime with at least some credible military power in the face of that increasing German pressure at the peace talks in Brest-Litovsk.<sup>29</sup>

Lenin identified the Red Army as a new type of military force in keeping with the state formation which the Soviet Republic represented. The Red Army in many ways negated the imperial military tradition. But it also negated much of the prewar socialist ideas about a citizen army, which would dispense with the services of a professional officer corps. Lenin and L. D. Trotsky, the newly-appointed commander of the RKKA, rejected the cult of the militia which had been seen as the military embodiment of radical democratic and socialist ideology in the nineteenth century. This break became apparent during the inter-party debates over the acceptance of the final German terms at Brest-Litovsk. Once the Germans had demonstrated their will to continue military operations in the East until their political objectives were obtained, concessions became vital to the regime's survival. Lenin argued for a policy of realism; he labeled the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk a "Tilsit Peace," an agreement which would, however humiliating and damaging the terms, buy time for the regime to consolidate its power.<sup>30</sup>

Again Lenin drew upon Clausewitz to justify his government's acceptance of the unfavorable terms as a necessary means of self-defense. October had transformed Lenin and the Bolsheviks from "defeatists" to "defensists" in the cause of the young Soviet republic:

Since we became the representatives of a ruling class, which has begun to organize socialism, we demand from everyone a serious relationship to the defense of the country. To relate seriously to the defense of the country means to be thoroughly prepared and to calculate accurately the correlation of forces. If those forces are plainly inadequate then the most important means of defense is to withdraw into the depths of the country. Those [advocates of continuing the struggle with Germany as a partisan war] who would see this as an attractive formula in the present situation can read about the results of the lessons of history in this account in old man Clausewitz, one of the greatest military writers.<sup>31</sup>

"Old Man Clausewitz" appeared here without ideological trappings, and Lenin's remarks do suggest a careful reading. Lenin called to his reader's attention the three specific conditions which Clausewitz had cited as being necessary to make such a strategic withdrawal into the interior of the country a proper course of military action:

- a. When our physical and psychological situation *vis a vis* the enemy rules out the possibility of successful resistance at or near the frontier
- b. When our main objective is to gain time
- c. When the condition of the country is favorable to it . . . .<sup>32</sup>

For Lenin the third factor was decisive in dictating a peace with

Germany. The Soviet Republic had just overseen the abolition of the old army and was only then in the process of creating a new one. Internal unrest and an emerging threat of civil war made it imperative for the Soviet government to concentrate upon the internal, i.e., class war, which Lenin viewed as decisive for the survival of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Lenin rejected out-of-hand left-wing romanticism, which called for a partisan war against the German invaders. For Lenin the "breathing space" was to provide an opportunity for the regime to arm itself with a powerful standing army. Nikolai Bukharin, one of those who advocated a guerrilla war, or *partizanstvo*, recognized Lenin's priorities:

Comrade Lenin has chosen to define revolutionary war only and exclusively as a war of large armies in accordance to all the rules of military science. We propose that war from our side — at least in the beginning — will inevitably take the character of a partisan war of flying detachments.<sup>33</sup>

**L**ENIN not only got the Party to accept Brest-Litovsk, but in the months following the ratification of the treaty as civil war erupted across Russia, Lenin and Trotsky directed the creation of a powerful standing army. In this process, the two men played an instrumental role in shaping a series of decisions that would affect the institutional relationship between the Party and the military and the ideological relationship between Marxism-Leninism and military science. One of the most important initial decisions was the acceptance of the mobilization of former tsarist officers as military specialists, *voenspetsy*. Colonel I. A. Korotkov has credited these "spetsy" with "the first steps of Soviet military science."<sup>34</sup>

Two elements seemed to have shaped Lenin's attitude on this question. The first was his general respect for professional competence. At the core of Lenin's theory of the party was the concept of leadership by *professional* revolutionaries as outlined in *What Is To Be Done?* so many years before. Lenin had little use for amateurs in politics, culture, or the military. Second, Lenin's realism made him acutely aware of the need for professionally competent strategic leadership, if the regime was to survive.<sup>35</sup> Although Soviet authors still vilify Trotsky for a policy of "capitulation" before the so-called professional credentials of the *voenspetsy*, his views in 1918 were close to Lenin's. After the decision had been made to recruit bourgeois specialists for the Red Army on 31 March 1918, Trotsky wrote the following comments, explaining his support for the measure, which he considered essential to the survival of the regime:

We need a real armed force, constructed on the basis of military science. The active and systematic participation in all our work of the military specialists is therefore a matter of vital importance. The military specialists must have guaranteed to them the possibility of exerting their powers honestly and honorably in the matter of the creation of the army.<sup>36</sup>

Neither he nor Lenin had any blind faith in the political reliability of former tsarist officers drawn from the privileged classes of the old regime. On 18 April 1918, within the *Narkom po voennym delam* (People's Commissariat for Military Affairs), the Soviet state created the Commissar Bureau to oversee the recruitment and assignment of the political commissars as watchdogs over the *voenspetsy*.<sup>37</sup> The question of the loyalty and value of the *voenspetsy* became one of the most volatile issues of military policy for the Party during the Civil War. Some Bolsheviks/Communists objected to the specialists on ideological grounds; others questioned their utility on the grounds of their technical competency.

Initially, the opposition to the *voenspetsy* had come from Left Communists who favored a guerrilla warfare fought along class lines. This "Military Opposition" demanded that the Party

justify its decision to utilize *voenspetsy* on the basis of the writings of Marx and Engels. To this, Lenin responded that neither man could offer any guidance on this question because, "for them the question did not exist for the simple reason that it arose only when we (the Bolsheviks) undertook the construction of the Red Army."<sup>38</sup>

M. N. Tukhachevsky, a former tsarist officer himself, wrote to Lenin that the new regime was unlikely to get either the brightest or the best from the former tsarist officer corps. Much of it was badly educated and therefore professionally incompetent. Many of the very best had already given their lives on the battlefields of the Eastern Front, and of the rest, many had already chosen to side with the Whites.<sup>39</sup> Others, most notably the Tsaritsyn *Shaika* (gang) which grew up around J. V. Stalin, K. Voroshilov and S. M. Budennyi, raised political objections and called into question the loyalties of *voenspetsy* sent to their theater.<sup>40</sup>

Lenin and Trotsky answered these critics by asserting that they grossly underestimated the positive role that *voenspetsy* could play, failed to appreciate the value of bourgeois military science, and overestimated the value of partisan warfare.<sup>41</sup> Under conditions of dire emergency and with appropriate political controls to guarantee their loyalty, they saw the *voenspetsy* and bourgeois specialists in general as critical to the survival of Soviet power. The regime needed professional expertise from any source that could provide it:

But although our party is thoroughly and inseparably linked with the working class, it never was and never can become the simple booster of the working class, which is content with all that the workers do . . . The proletariat and even more the peasant masses have only just emerged from many centuries of slavery and carry in themselves all the consequences of oppression, ignorance, and darkness. The seizure of power in and of itself has not at all transformed the working class and has not attired it with all the necessary merits and qualities: the seizure of power has only opened before it the possibility to really learn, develop and purge itself of its own historical deficiencies.<sup>42</sup>

The *spetsy* became the instruments through which a future generation of Communist cadre would be created. The *voenspetsy* played a crucial role in the formation of the Soviet staff and officer-education systems during the Civil War and in the postwar decade.<sup>43</sup> On 8 May 1918, the Soviet government created the All-Russian Main Staff, and subordinated it to the Revolutionary Military Soviet of the Republic (RVSR). In June the first number of *Voennoe delo* (*Military Affairs*), the Red Army's first military-theoretical journal appeared. The prestigious *Voennaia mysl'* of the modern Soviet Armed Forces can trace its origins through a series of succeeding journals to that publication.<sup>44</sup> In August 1918, the RVSR authorized the creation of the Military-Historical Commission for the Writing of the History of World War I.<sup>45</sup> Those developments, when combined with the efforts to restore discipline, end the *komitetshchina*, and begin conscription, confirm the accuracy of Bukharin's assessment of Lenin's military policy directed towards the creation of a professional military establishment. If further evidence of this direction was needed, Lenin provided it by arguing for the creation of the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Red Army and calling for the use of the most qualified members of the teaching staff of the tsarist general staff academy to man the new academy in October 1918 with its first classes being held in December.<sup>46</sup>

To those socialists who accused him of revisionism and militarism, Lenin replied that the Soviet government's decision flowed from the events, i.e. from the demands of praxis. In "Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky," written in 1918, Lenin stated that a new social class upon coming to power could do nothing else but disband the old army. But in order to stay in power with the threat of civil war mounting, the



regime had to establish a new army, a new discipline, and a new military organization, based upon the correlation of forces confronting the victorious class.<sup>47</sup>

With the outbreak of the Civil War and the beginning of foreign intervention the Soviet Republic imposed War Communism, carried out the total nationalization of all means of production, embarked upon a policy of extreme administrative centralization, draconian social legislation, and the forced expropriation of grain from Russia's villages. Thus practicing total war within the context of a civil war, Lenin and the Communist Party were able to field their new army, which numbered 5.5 million men by 1921, and defeat the Whites.<sup>48</sup> Lenin considered this state socialism to be a Marxist variation of the state capitalist regimes which had prosecuted World War I. Some Party leaders agreed with this characterization, but came to see beneath it the threat of a twentieth-century Leviathan state, Bukharin described this warfare state as:

. . . a militaristic state capitalism. Centralization becomes the centralization of the barracks; among the elites the vilest militarism inevitably intensifies as does the brutal regimentation and bloody repression of the masses.

Lenin did not share Bukharin's fears regarding such an order. But, by 1921 he had concluded that War Communism had to be abandoned. In his defense of the New Economic Policy with its tolerance for the restoration of the market in agriculture, small-scale industry, and internal trade, the militarization of Lenin's thought persisted. In the Summer of 1921 Lenin explained the shift in party line to foreign communists by describing the new policy as another tactic imposed upon the regime by the domestic situation. He justified the NEP as a means of providing for the survival of the regime in the face of a restabilized, capitalist Europe:

So, we have begun our new tactic [the NEP]. There is no need to be nervous, we cannot be too late, and if you ask, how long can Russia hold out, we answer, that we are now conducting a war with the petite bourgeoisie, with the peasantry, an economic war which is more dangerous to us than the late civil war. But as Clausewitz said, the elements of war are dangerous, and we have not for one instance stood outside that danger.<sup>49</sup>

**L**ENIN has come full circle. War and politics have been transposed as subject and object. Here politics have become a continuation of war by other means. The NEP was a tactical device to restore the national economy and regain peasant support in the face of armed uprisings at Kronstadt and in the Tambov region. The NEP's success as an economic and political measure was in no small degree dependent upon the demobilization of the Red Army, and Lenin in his last months of activity before his final illness supported the creation of a mixed cadre and territorial military force.<sup>51</sup> The military policy of the Party and its general line were thus fused. Indeed, during Lenin's final illness V. Sorin wrote in *Pravda* that in a discussion with him, Lenin had recommended that Party workers read Clausewitz since political tactics and military tactics were "adjoining fields" (*Grenzgebiet*).<sup>52</sup>

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. He emphasized the inevitability of wars among capitalist states in the age of imperialism and presented the armed struggle of the working class as the only path towards the eventual elimination of war. With war at the center of his analysis of capitalism, Lenin and his followers, when confronted by civil war and foreign intervention, extended war and the systematic preparation for war as indispensable elements for the survival of the Soviet state, surrounded as it was by capitalist powers. Lenin hoped to use a policy of peaceful coexistence to aid in the recovery of the Soviet economy and to

prevent the formation of a grand, anti-Soviet coalition. In this process he counted upon uneven capitalist development and geopolitical circumstances to aid his regime while it sought another breathing space.

Mikhail Frunze, one of the most notable Red commanders of the Civil War and the father of the concept of a Soviet "unified military doctrine," put this Leninist formula of a long and intense struggle with the world capitalist system in military terms:

Between our proletarian state and the rest of the bourgeois world there can only be one condition — that of long, persistent, desperate war to the death: a war which demands colossal tenacity, steadfastness, inflexibility, and a unity of will. . . . The state of open warfare may give way to some sort of contractual relationship which permits, up to a definite level, the peaceful coexistence of the warring sides. These contractual forms do not change the fundamental character of these relations. . . . The common, parallel existence of our proletarian Soviet state with the states of the bourgeois world for a protracted period is impossible."<sup>53</sup>

Frunze summed up the essence of militarized Marxism. Here Clausewitz' dictum on war as a continuation of politics was applied to the struggle between the Communist and capitalist systems which must end in the victory of one and the annihilation of the other. Limitation, defined as the articulation of specific ends and means in keeping with a given correlation of forces, became nothing more than a tactical decision. Accepting the terrible logic of this position led to the recognition of the need to prepare for total war. It placed great stress upon economic preparations for war, state-directed industrialization, the peacetime mobilization of the citizenry, and the central command and control of the state machine.

After Frunze's death in 1925 M. N. Tukhachevskii, one of Lenin's favored young commanders and Frunze's close collaborator, began to call for a militarization [*voenizatsiia*] of the entire country including state-directed industrialization.<sup>54</sup> Tukhachevskii justified such a course by referring to the existing capitalist encirclement and the mechanization of warfare, which he and others in the RKKA Staff were already anticipating in their discussions of "future war." He did not, however, find much support for such views within the upper reaches of the Party. Ironically, as the Soviet state embarked upon the process of dismantling the NEP, total mobilization of the society, super industrialization, and forced collectivization, which he had advocated, Stalin removed him from the central leadership of the RKKA. In May 1928 Tukhachevskii was reassigned from his post as Chief of Staff of the RKKA and "exiled" to the command of the Leningrad Military District.

To their dismay Bukharin and the Party's ring-wing now saw their ally, Stalin, embrace the very policies which threatened to create a leviathan, the warfare state, which they so feared. Even after the Party had embarked upon his program of super industrialization and collectivization in the First Five Year Plan Stalin did not immediately embrace militarization as an objective or use it to justify the tremendous sacrifices imposed upon town and village. In the Summer of 1930 Stalin identified his new revolution from above with Peter I's transformation of Russia and related the building of factories to economic mobilization for war. Tukhachevskii returned to favor and took over as Deputy Commissar of Defense and Director of Armaments. In 1931, when the warfare state was already under construction, Stalin defended the choice in his own Social-Darwinist rendering of militarized Marxism:

Those who fall behind, get beaten. . . . Such is the jungle law of capitalism. You are backward, you are weak — therefore, you are wrong. Hence, you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty; therefore, you are right. Hence, we must be wary of you.<sup>55</sup>

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13. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1958-1966), I, 164.
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and propagandists, explaining the Party's new program, which had been adopted by the 8th Party Congress in March 1919. In that work the authors talked about the negation of the Red Army in its final victory over capital, about its foundations in a workers' militia, and about the hostility to the barracks system of training, and about the temporary utility of the military specialists. In the end both men saw the army disappearing after the victory in the civil war and were hostile to the creation of a permanent military caste. See Nikolai Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism: A Popular Explanation of the Program of the Communist Party of Russia* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperback, 1967), 205-219. For a full discussion of the relationship between Bukharin's perceptions about development of state capitalism and the concept of equilibrium theory in his historical materialism, see Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 117-122.

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# CLAUSEWITZ at CARLISLE

by David Kahn

**C**ARLISLE Barracks, Pa. — Intellectual fisticuffs broke out on 25 and 26 April at the first conference ever held in the United States on Carl von Clausewitz, widely regarded as the world's greatest philosopher of war.

Military historians and majors and colonels who are students at the U.S. Army War College here disputed whether Clausewitz' classic work, *On War*, which is required reading at many military academies, has been outdated by modern technology.

Clausewitz, a Prussian general staff officer who fought in the Napoleonic wars, died in 1831. While early military writers had concentrated on such matters as lines of approach to a battle or encircling strategies, Clausewitz emphasized the psychological aspects of war, such as the need for a general to be firm of purpose, and the political aspects. His most famous dictum describes war as the continuation of politics by other means.

Michael Handel, a professor at the War College and organizer of the conference, pointed out areas in which new weapons have affected Clausewitz' theories. "Strategic surprise, which he thought not possible, is now feasible," said Handel. "This also makes intelligence much more important than he saw it as." Unity of command has also become much more complex, Handel said.

Martin van Creveld, a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, declared of Handel's presentation, "I don't agree with a single word he said. If Michael is correct, you'd have to add a new dimension to what Clausewitz wrote every 10 or 20 or 25 years, and this would mean he'd have a hundred dimensions and would be entirely out-of-date, and we wouldn't be sitting here today."

In his own remarks, Creveld said, "Just as cookbooks tell you how to cook a chicken, most books on war tell you how to fight,

so they can't withstand any changes on technology. *On War* doesn't tell you how to cook. It says what cooking is and what does it serve. Clausewitz is useful because he is not useful. Everybody else has tried to be useful — and that's why they're outdated by the next weapons system that has come around the corner. Clausewitz deals with ideas, not reality, and this is why he is eternal."

Retorted Handel: "What happens in theory isn't as important in war as what happens in reality."

Voices were occasionally raised in the wood-paneled conference room, and there were plenty of interruptions and tough-sounding remarks. "I want to drop a bomb on Martin," said Williamson Murray, professor of history at Ohio State. But the participants said the remarks were just part of academic give-and-take.

During a free-wheeling discussion on politics in war, John Gooch, a professor at the University of Lancaster in England, said he had been told the Soviets were picking their targets for a conventional war in Europe not on military but on political grounds. When someone contradicted that, Gooch responded, "If you really think that, that's why you're going to lose the next war against the Russians — if there is one."

Creveld contended that the Prussian regarded intelligence as essential, but other participants observed that the problem of uncertainty in intelligence, which Clausewitz stressed, remains serious, despite modern-day satellite photography and electronic interception. They pointed to such intelligence failures as Pearl Harbor, the Tet offensive in Vietnam, the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, and the Arab surprise attack on Israel that started the Yom Kippur war in 1973 as demonstrating that in intelligence as in other matters, Clausewitz still has much to teach.