



Research Paper

# Definition and Principles of Lenin's Thought of Peaceful Coexistence: Interpretation in Soviet and Russian Scholarship

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**ABSTRACT:** Peaceful coexistence was one of the fundamental policies of Soviet foreign policy. This paper examines the interpretations of Soviet and Russian scholars regarding the definition and core principles of peaceful coexistence based on Lenin's concept. Using a diachronic analysis of historical and academic sources, the study demonstrates that peaceful coexistence has been interpreted in several ways: as a form of class struggle and "peaceful competition" between socialist and capitalist countries, as a framework for interstate cooperation, and as a means of peaceful settlement of international disputes. The paper further researches the principal elements of peaceful coexistence include equality, non-interference, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the peaceful resolution of international conflicts, and the development of international cooperation.

**KEYWORDS:** Lenin, Peaceful Coexistence, Definition, Principles, Socialist and Capitalist Countries

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Peaceful coexistence was a policy first proposed by the head of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin (1870 – 1924). In Collected Works of V.I. Lenin, he emphasized the conditions Russia faced in early 1918, after the revolution: the country was ravaged by hunger and war, only just beginning to heal its wounds, confronting a higher level of labor productivity in technology and organization (Lenin, 1972). To recover Russia and prevent interventions from capitalist countries, Lenin proposed the policy of peaceful coexistence.

Some Soviet historians argue that the policy was proposed before the October Revolution of 1917, noting that Lenin mentioned the possibility of peaceful cohabitation between socialist and capitalist countries (Деборин, 1958). Other scholars contend that Lenin emphasized the necessity of peaceful coexistence only after the October Revolution, as a way to bring an immediate end to the war without annexations or indemnities, following the publication of the Decree on Peace in 1917 (Ленинская внешняя политика и развитие международных отношений, 1983; Арбатов, Бабак, Барановский, 1989).

In the first years following the establishment of the USSR and introduction of the policy of peaceful coexistence, the main focus was on the elements of the principle related to maintaining peace and a just environment. Later, greater importance was given to the elements related to cooperation. This distinction is significant, as opponents of the policy claimed that it merely implied the absence of war.

The research mainly focuses on scholarly discussions surrounding three main approaches to defining peaceful coexistence: as a form of class struggle, as a form of a cooperation, and as a means of peaceful resolution of interstate conflicts. In addition, it examines the three core principles of peaceful coexistence identified by Soviet and Russian scholars based on Lenin's conception of the policy: 1) equality, non-interference, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; 2) the resolution of international disputes by peaceful means; 3) the development of cooperative relations. It also examines how these principles were interpreted and debated.

## **II. DEFINITION OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE**

### **2.1 Peaceful Coexistence as a Form of Class Struggle and "Peaceful Competition"**

When defining peaceful coexistence, most Soviet and Russian scholars regard it as a form of class struggle between capitalism and socialism. On the international stage, this struggle is considered as the basis of "peaceful competition". Y.A. Korovin (1961) and G.V. Tunkin (2006) approached the concept of peaceful coexistence from the perspective of international law. Both scholars maintained that peaceful coexistence represented a specific form of struggle between socialist and capitalist countries in which the new system (socialism) would ultimately prevail over the old system (capitalism).

G.V. Tunkin further observed that, despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the principle of peaceful coexistence lost only limited practical significance because socialist states continue to exist within the international system, most notably the People's Republic of China. According to G.V. Tunkin, these states remain capable of applying the principle in their relations with other countries and, in doing so, continue the Soviet theoretical doctrine of peaceful coexistence.

V.G. Trukhanovsky (1974) noted that Lenin's discussion of peaceful coexistence did not extend to national liberation movements, class struggle, or ideological struggle, as these belonged to the sphere of "acute struggle", within which the principles of peaceful coexistence could not be applied. The author further elaborated the contemporary understanding of peaceful coexistence, pointing out that, in the context of states with different social systems, it entails the rejection of war as a means of resolving interstate conflicts and instead prioritizes peaceful settlement and negotiation. Moreover, a general policy of peaceful coexistence promotes cooperation in politics, economics, science and technology, culture, and other fields. Similar interpretations can be found in the works of I. Kuz'minkov (1964) and S. Kovalev (1964). According to authors, peaceful coexistence represents the most rational, humane, and advanced form of relations between states and constitutes one of the prerequisites for addressing global problems and advancing social progress.

G.N. Pirogov (1976) defined peaceful coexistence from a global-historical perspective. He described it as a new stage in the development of international relations, a "forward movement" of society, and essentially a form of struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie within the sphere of interstate relations (Пирогов, 1976).

V.I. Surin (1978) sees peaceful coexistence as a form of class struggle: under conditions of peaceful coexistence, the struggle between capitalism and socialism remains a struggle, but it is expressed primarily as peaceful competition than as war.

A.D. Bogaturov and V.V. Averkov (2010) described peaceful coexistence as a concept of Soviet foreign policy referring to the possibility of stable and peaceful competition, as well as economic development between states with different social systems, while simultaneously preserving substantial ideological differences.

Some authors, while examining the easing of Soviet-American tensions in the late 1950s, offered a concise definition of peaceful coexistence. Their perspectives largely coincide with those of Soviet scholars, according to whom peaceful coexistence referred to the opposition between the capitalist and socialist systems within the framework of peaceful economic relations (Краснощеков, Соловьев, 2021).

The above discussion demonstrates that Soviet and Russian scholarship generally interprets policy of peaceful coexistence as a specific form of class struggle under conditions that exclude direct military conflict. Within the mentioned framework, the confrontation between two social systems was expected to continue through peaceful competition in such areas such as political, economic, scientific, technological, and ideological. On one hand, many authors pointed out that peaceful coexistence is only possible on condition of rejection of war as a means of resolving interstate disputes and encouraged both parties to negotiate, cooperate and develop international relations. On the other hand, although the concept emerged within the context of Soviet foreign policy and Cold War bipolarity, several scientists noted its continued relevance even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union due to the persistence of socialist states, particularly the People's Republic of China. Overall, the examined interpretations present peaceful coexistence as both a way for managing ideological rivalry and a principle focused on preserving international stability and promoting social progress.

### **2.2 Peaceful Coexistence as a Form of Cooperation**

A.O. Chubaryan (1976) interpreted Lenin's concept of peaceful coexistence as a framework enabling socialist states to interact with the capitalist world system. In this reading, such engagement unfolds within the broader historical context of capitalism's perceived transition toward communism. This interpretation also provides solid basis for understanding peaceful coexistence as a form of cooperation with elements of systematic rivalry.

Soviet and Russian lawyers G.V. Ignatenko, V.A. Kartashkin, et. al. (1989) conceptualized peaceful coexistence as a scientific-political concept grounded in Leninist thought, according to which peaceful relations and cooperation between countries with different social systems are not only possible but also desirable. Such

relations should be based on the principles of justice and democracy. Within this framework, peace and cooperation are presented as mutually reinforcing elements that together form a foundation for a stable international order.

Some scholars while examining the role of the Great October Socialist Revolution in the development of international law, present peaceful coexistence as a multidimensional framework comprising four interrelated levels. From a philosophical perspective, it reflects the actual conditions of sovereign state existence in modern history. From a political perspective, it functions as a guiding principle of foreign policy and as the legal articulation of certain countries' political orientations; for instance, the Soviet Constitution enshrined peaceful coexistence as a foundational norm governing its international activities. From an empirical perspective, peaceful coexistence describes the real dynamics of interaction between states with different socio-economic systems and operates as a practical mode of international cooperation. From the standpoint of international law, it serves both as a normative basis regulating interstate relations and as a diplomatic tool through which countries pursue their interests within the international discourse (Ашавский, 2017).

V.A. Suvorov (2018) examined the meaning of peaceful coexistence from a legal perspective. Drawing on related criminal-law theory, the author interprets peaceful coexistence as a theoretical principle of modern international law. Externally, it denotes cooperation among countries in cultural, scientific, economic, sporting, and crime-control areas, as well as the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Thus, the examined literature presents peaceful coexistence as a complex and multifaceted concept that integrates ideological, political, and legal dimensions. While it originates in Leninist theory as a framework for interaction between socialist and capitalist systems, it is consistently interpreted as encompassing both cooperation and controlled rivalry in interstate relations. Across different scientific approaches, policy of peaceful coexistence is associated with the promotion of stable international engagement based on peaceful settlement of disputes, mutual cooperation, and such normative principles as justice and democracy. Moreover, its significance extends beyond political doctrine, functioning as a practical mode of international relations and a legal principle embedded within international law. To sum up, these interpretations demonstrate that peaceful coexistence is not a static, but a dynamic concept that structures both theoretical understandings and practical mechanisms of global interaction.

### **2.3 Peaceful Coexistence as a Means of Peaceful Resolution of International Disputes**

R.S. Mukhametov (2012) interprets Lenin's concept of peaceful coexistence as a policy designed to enable the Soviet Union to establish and maintain normal relations and comprehensive cooperation with capitalist states, with such cooperation concentrated primarily in the economic and trade fields. Although peaceful coexistence provided a solid foundation for Soviet foreign policy, Mukhametov stressed that its principles were, to some extent, in tension with the tenets of proletarian internationalism: the policy of peaceful coexistence advocated for cooperation with the capitalist world, whereas proletarian internationalism championed world revolution. The author believes that this contradiction constituted the most significant controversy in Soviet foreign policy.

V.S. Bystrikova and T.K. Demidova (2023) highlighted the connection between "peaceful settlement of disputes" and "peaceful coexistence", defining the latter as the resolution of disagreements and disputes through peaceful means without undermining peace and security. From this perspective, the peaceful settlement of conflicts depends on the requirements of international security and peaceful coexistence. This view aligns with the analyses of V.G. Trukhanovsky (1974) and V.A. Suvorov (2018).

Some scholars integrate all three definitions into a single, comprehensive framework. For instance, A.A. Anastasyev and V.V. Gorovoy (2024) contend that the concept of peaceful coexistence possesses a relatively rich and multifaceted meaning, expressed primarily in the following aspects: (1) it served as an important instrument for the Soviet Union to normalize cooperative international economic relations with capitalist states; (2) it contributed to restoring commercial ties with other countries through peaceful diplomacy, thereby averting direct armed conflict, and securing advantageous positions in international peaceful competition; (3) it facilitated the resolution of all disputed international issues by means of negotiation.

The scholarly discourse on the Soviet concept of peaceful coexistence reveals a multidimensional and evolving interpretation. It is presented as a mechanism for sustaining cooperation between socialist and capitalist countries, particularly in the economic and trade areas, while also revealing an inherent tension between cooperative engagement and revolutionary internationalist objectives. At the same time, the concept is closely associated with the peaceful settlement of disputes as a key requirement of international security, emphasizing the resolution of conflicts through negotiation without undermining stability. More integrative interpretations further present peaceful coexistence as a foreign policy instrument, a way of restoring and maintaining international economic relations, and a diplomatic framework for preventing armed confrontation and managing interstate conflicts through a dialogue.

### III. MAIN PRINCIPLES OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

#### 3.1 Principle of Equality, Non-interference, Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity

The principles of peaceful coexistence, widely examined in scholarly literature, emphasize equality among all nations, along with non-interference in internal affairs of other states and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. Soviet and Russian historians, when analyzing the essence and methods of implementing the policy of peaceful coexistence have summarized its guiding principles: first, treating people of all nations as equals; second, respecting the independence and sovereignty of all countries (both socialist and capitalist); third, adhering to mutual non-interference while rejecting the export of both revolution and counter-revolution (Соколов, Михлин, 1962; Ашавский, 2018). According to N.M. Pegov (1971), these principles further require all states to refrain from using force against one another and to respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

However, in contrast to N.M. Sokolov and E.Z. Mikhlin, the Academy of Sciences of the USSR argued that non-interference in other countries' affairs not only affirmed people's right to independently manage their own affairs, but also recognized the right to revolution (Международные отношения после второй мировой войны, 1965). From this perspective, people worldwide could replace the "old" / existing social system (capitalism) and establish a more advanced revolutionary form (socialism).

Further developing this idea, Soviet scholar V.G. Trukhanovsky (1974) demonstrated that proletarian internationalism is closely related to peaceful coexistence, as both follow several common principles: (1) continuously conducting a peaceful struggle between countries with different social systems; (2) recognizing the right of all nations to self-determination and independent statehood; (3) respecting state sovereignty and refraining from interference in domestic matters; (4) acknowledging the equal rights of all nations and countries; (5) promoting the development of diverse forms of international cooperation.

Consequently, the doctrine of peaceful coexistence comprises principles of equality, sovereignty, and non-interference, while accommodating differing interpretations regarding the right to revolution. Soviet scholars demonstrate that these principles both guide peaceful relations between states in the international scope and also intertwine with proletarian internationalism, focusing on self-determination, mutual respect and international cooperation. As a whole, they all reflect a framework for balancing state sovereignty with global socio-political change.

#### 3.2 Principle of Peaceful Settlement of International Conflicts

The resolution of international conflicts is closely linked to the absolute rejection of war as means of settling disputes between countries. The Academy of Sciences of the USSR points out that capitalist and socialist states can reach agreement only on the basis of fully recognizing the inevitably destructive consequences of global thermonuclear war or any war in general (Международные отношения после второй мировой войны, 1965). At the same time, this principle embodies the spirit of equality, as it considers the interests and security of both great powers and smaller states, ensuring that all nations are treated on an equal footing.

I.P. Soroka (1984) concurs with the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. He claimed that conflicts between the two state systems should be resolved through mutually beneficial negotiations and agreements. Similarly, the Russian scholar R.S. Mukhametov (2012) emphasizes that the fundamental principle of peaceful coexistence prioritizes non-aggression and negotiation over military action. According to this perspective, states are to adhere to peaceful diplomacy, as proposed by Lenin, as the primary means of resolving disputes.

On the other hand, some scientists classify the principle of maintaining international peace and security into the following points (Ашавский, 2018):

1. Prohibiting threats or the use of force;
2. Addressing international conflicts through peaceful methods;
3. Paying attention to the principle of collective security;
4. Following the principle of disarmament;
5. Prohibiting the declaration of war.

In conclusion, the resolution of international conflicts rests on the fundamental rejection of war and the importance of peaceful diplomacy. As emphasized by the Academy of the USSR, Soroka, and Mukhametov, states should rely on negotiation, non-aggression, and mutually beneficial agreements, taking into consideration the security and interests of both great and smaller powers. These principles are further reflected in key international norms and acts, including the prohibition of force, adherence to disarmament, collective security, and the peaceful settlement of disputes, which provide a comprehensive framework for maintaining global peace and equality among nations.

### **3.3 Principle of International Cooperation**

One of the most essential components of the policy of peaceful coexistence is the principle of developing economic and cultural cooperation on the basis of complete equality and mutual benefit. Such cooperation not only benefits the development of each participating country but also plays a crucial role in strengthening mutual understanding and trust among nations. V.G. Trukhanovsky (1974) emphasizes that development of diverse ties between countries constitutes one of the core elements of peaceful coexistence, stressing the importance of multifaceted engagement in promoting stable and harmonious international relations.

I.P. Soroka (1984) and A.E. Bovin (1988) both conclude that such mutually beneficial cooperation in the economic and cultural areas serves as an important means of creating favourable external environment for achieving the goals of building socialism and communism. Expanding on this perspective, R.S. Mukhametov (2012) believes that the core principle of peaceful coexistence also involves maintaining and regulating relations and cooperations between states, while strategically leveraging the inherent contradictions between capitalist countries to gain benefits and acquire insights into economic regulation for socialism.

Complementing mentioned views, B.M. Ashavsky (2018) highlights that cooperation between states, respect for and observance of fundamental human rights and freedoms, and the sincere fulfilment of international obligations constitute main principles of peaceful coexistence. Together, these elements extend the concept of development cooperation beyond economic and cultural spheres, reinforcing mutual respect, legal commitments, and the normative framework governing international relations under the doctrine of peaceful coexistence.

A number of modern Russian scholars approach the concept from a legal-normative angle. In analyzing the phenomenon of "rogue states" and the process of their marginalization, they draw on the 1945 UN Charter, the 1978 Declaration on Preparing Societies for Life in Peace, and the 2016 Declaration on the Right to Peace, concluding that, alongside with the principle of development cooperation, peaceful coexistence also entails: (1) the right to peace; (2) the prohibition of discrimination; (3) the prohibition of propaganda inciting hatred and intolerance (Кшевицкая, Шумиленко, Пастухова, 2023).

From one hand, across different scholarly interpretations, the development of cooperation is presented as a means of strengthening relations between countries, fostering mutual understanding, and establishing stable frameworks of interaction with the basis on equality, legal commitments, and shared principles. From another hand, contemporary approaches extend its significance beyond traditional areas, linking it to norms such as human rights, peaceful development, and the rejection of discrimination and intolerance in international relations.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

Across the three analytical dimensions considered – class struggle and peaceful competition, cooperation between countries, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts – peaceful coexistence emerges as a framework for managing relations between states with different socio-political systems without resorting to armed conflict. In its classical Soviet formulation, peaceful coexistence was related to the ideological narrative of class struggle, in which socialist countries and capitalist countries were viewed as rivals expressed through non-military means. In the post-Soviet and contemporary Russian scholarly context, the concept is increasingly detached from strict ideological bipolarity and reinterpreted in more functional and normative terms: scholars place emphasis on stable cooperation between states, legal regulation of interstate relations, and the peaceful settlement of conflicts. At the same time, many contemporary interpretations still reference Leninist origins and preserve the idea that peaceful coexistence combines elements of cooperation and regulated rivalry.

From a comprehensive perspective, the examined approaches to the principles of peaceful coexistence demonstrate that the policy is a complex doctrine incorporating the economic, cultural, legal, and normative aspects of international relations. It is grounded in the principles of equality, mutual benefit, and the development of various interstate ties, while also extending to respect for human rights, the fulfilment of international obligations, and adherence to universally recognized legal norms. From this point of view, peaceful coexistence is not only a framework for enhancing cooperation between countries, but also a comprehensive mechanism for regulating international relations, promoting stability, and advancing shared global principles of peace, justice, and mutual respect.

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