



Russia's Revolutions

A century has passed since the Tsars were usurped and later replaced by the Soviets, yet Russia today still seems no further into progress than it did 100 years ago. In fact, every leader in the past century has had to face a harsh reality; the nation is inherently unstable. The challenges it is facing now are of the same ilk that succeeded the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire before it.

Consider Russia today; a large nation that is both diverse and socially unstable with more than 185 ethnic groups, 21 national republics and 85 regional subjects that span nine time zones. Russian leaders, be they Czarist, Soviet or post-Soviet, have struggled to consolidate such geopolitical disparity. Despite its vast geography, 75% of Russia is virtually uninhabitable, primarily as it is frozen most of the year before turning to marshland in the summer. Maritime trade is also difficult for Russia, particularly as its only warm-water port is now blocked by rivals. Furthermore, Russia's heartland runs from St. Petersburg through to Moscow and into the Volga region, which lies on a series of plains, making it vulnerable from all angles. This has forced Russia to attempt to expand its borders and influence beyond its borders, so as to create a buffer zone between it and its rivals. As Catherine, the Great, famously put it: *"I have no way to defend my borders except to extend them."*

The abrupt end to Tsarist rule in 1917, which ushered in the Communist era, has been a problematic phenomenon to reconcile for Vladimir Putin. He has venerated victory but deliberately undermined revolution due to the political failure that the Kremlin wishes to distract its people from. In fact, on the date generally recognised as the beginning of the Revolution (March 12th), Russia held no national holiday and the Kremlin issued no real interpretation. The official reasoning for apathy towards such a historic moment for the country was due to an internal division over the consequences of that year; however, the more plausible explanation is Putin's shame over Russia's climate and a strong aversion to any sentiment for change, lest the people protest the failures that pervade them.

Many attempts have been made to unify Russia. The Tsars used absolute monarchism as a means to bring together its people, albeit to no avail, leading to their capitulation in 1917. The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin and born from the October Revolution, also tried to unify the Russian people under Communism, albeit to no avail, leading to the Soviet Union's demise in 1991. Putin, like his autocratic predecessors, has also failed in this regard. In fact, despite the collapse of Tsarist rule and Communism, Russians continue to live in the shadow of their past; amidst social fragmentation and political volatility - phenomena that Vladimir Putin has done little to resolve.

To make matters worse, any attempt to distract the people from their revolutionary history has been undermined by contemporary economic and political problems within the country. In regards to the former, Russia continues to suffer from the effects of recession. Although now recovering from an oil crisis in which Brent dropped from a lucrative \$125 in February 2012 to a damaging \$27 in 2016, Russia's currency has fallen almost 50% relative to the dollar which has forced real wages and consumption to fall. The real sector has been severely damaged with Russia suffering from a decline in growth comparable to the United States post financial crisis. In addition to this, poverty is at its extreme, inequality is on the rise, sanctions on trade prevail and Russia's involvement abroad has had an impact on its budgetary position. Those familiar with Russian history will recall how similar macroeconomic conditions ignited the deposition of both Tsar Nicholas II; an outcome Putin wishes to take no chances with. Hence, it would seem that little has changed in this regard (in light of recurring economic crises) despite Russia's political transition over time.

With no real strength in Putin's political leadership, it is certainly unsurprising that he has sidelined the centenary of the Revolution. However, it is clear that the failure is not with the ruler in charge per se but with the ideas that bind people together. In fact, it is the lack of ideology that has caused Russia's division and it is there where failure lies. The only real solution for Russia is to adopt an ideology that is able to convince its people of its truth, so that they may unify and rally in support of the ideas it proposes; one not born from the meagre mind of man, but from his originator.

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