

PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE?

AN ANALYSIS OF SOVIET-LED FOREIGN-IMPOSED REGIME CHANGE

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Abstract

Shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution brought his Communist Party to power in 1917, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin warned party members that “a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states will be inevitable.” Lenin undertook a foreign policy, which future Soviet premiers would continue, designed to accelerate the Proletariat revolution abroad. As part of this policy, the Red Army would invade foreign states and replace existing governments with Communist Party leaders that would entirely re-align the domestic and foreign policy of those states, principally in favor of the Soviet Union. In this regard, 1917 marks a watershed in military intervention politics, demarcating a time period after which states—the Soviet Union as well as its adversaries in the West—used foreign-imposed regime change (FIRC), defined as foreign military intervention with the explicit purpose of removing an existing regime and replacing it with another, as a critical tool of policy-making. I argue that Foreign-Imposed Regime Change (FIRC) operations led by the Soviet Union were qualitatively different than those carried out by other states. In particular, compared to other interventions, Soviet FIRCs were less likely to lead to democracy, more likely to increase bilateral trade with the intervener (the Soviet Union), more likely to increase ideological alignment with the intervener, less likely to lead to intrastate conflict, and less likely to lead to interstate conflict, both with the Soviet Union as well as with neighboring states. In order to test my argument, I adopt a three-pronged approach. First, I present a quantitative analysis of the impact of Soviet FIRCs compared to other FIRCs. I control for relevant demographic and temporal variables. Second, I present historical case study evidence from the Soviet imposition of Communist rule in Bulgaria beginning in 1944. Third, I present evidence from the Soviet FIRC in Afghanistan in 1979. I show that the Soviet failures to produce a stable Communist regime in Afghanistan can best be understood as a transformation in the motives of Soviet leaders, who were, by 1979, less focused on continuing the revolution of 1917 and more on directly confronting the United States.

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