

construct an image of “the Leninist blueprint for world conquest” which may be useful for partisan political purposes, but stands in the way of a sound understanding of how Lenin actually approached East-West relations and the ways in which the early practice of Soviet diplomacy has influenced the subsequent course of Soviet foreign policy.

Lenin cannot be correctly understood as long as he is viewed as a theoretician who had a well-developed theory of international politics. In fact, Lenin not only lacked a coherent theory of international relations, but was not even a theorist in the strict sense of the term. The search by scholars — Soviet or Western — for such non-existent entities as Lenin’s “theory of peaceful coexistence” or his “theory of socialism in one country” is both misplaced and misleading. It imparts a false consistency and coherence to his views, and it ignores the contradictory nature and complexity of his thinking as it evolved over the years.

First and foremost, Lenin was a pragmatic man of action. The central question in his mind was always *chto delat’?* — what is to be done? His primary concern was the proper course of action in the here and now. Once this was decided, he would mobilize his formidable polemical skills to exhort his followers. The appropriate citations from Marx and Engels would be adduced to support his actions, and the advocates of differing tactics would be attacked as traitors to true Marxism. But Lenin’s use of theory was clearly tactical and polemical. He would twist the works of Marx and Engels to justify unorthodox, un-Marxist policies, and he was adept at providing theoretical arguments one day for the very policies that he had rejected with equal vigor the day before.³

Lenin was not just pragmatic and untheoretical in his approach to politics; he was anti-theoretical as well. He not only neglected theory,

³ The interaction of theory and practice in Lenin’s approach to politics is discussed in: Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism*, New York: Praeger, 1962; Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks*, New York: Collier Books, 1968.