

# LENIN'S CONCEPTION OF PEACE AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

## QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA LÊNIN VỀ HÒA BÌNH VÀ GIÁ TRỊ HIỆN THỜI CỦA NÓ

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**Abstract** - In a world marked by intensifying geopolitical conflicts and the restructuring of the international order, the study of Lenin's thought on peace bears not only historical relevance but also profound theoretical and practical significance. This article systematically analyzes the theoretical foundation and historical context of Lenin's conception of peace, elucidating its inheritance and development from Marxism. It highlights Lenin's core propositions, including his critique of bourgeois peace, affirmation of socialist peace, articulation of the principle of peaceful coexistence, and the essential conditions for safeguarding genuine peace. The paper further identifies five contemporary values of Lenin's peace doctrine: deepening Marxist theory, unveiling the nature of bourgeois peace, upholding sovereignty and revolutionary struggle, promoting mutually beneficial international cooperation, and fostering a proactive peace consciousness grounded in social justice.

**Key words** - Lenin; peace; socialist peace; peaceful coexistence

### 1. Rationale

In the current global context, the hopes for a stable post-Cold War world order are in crisis due to the outbreak of conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Gaza and Middle East crises, and US-China tensions in the Asia-Pacific... These not only threaten regional peace and security but also pose new challenges to the global perception of war and peace. In this context, studying Lenin's perspective on peace becomes a contemporary necessity.

Lenin's thought on peace is not merely a continuation of the doctrines of Marx and Engels, but also an independent and creative development under specific historical conditions, namely the period when capitalism transitioned into the stage of imperialism and imperialist war became the defining characteristic of the era. Using a dialectical methodology to analyze the relationship between war and politics, and between revolutionary violence and sustainable peace, Lenin proposed the concept of "revolutionary peace" and always emphasized that genuine peace could only be achieved through the elimination of the root cause of war: imperialism.

More than just a theory, Lenin's view on peace was quickly realized in the foreign policy of the nascent Soviet State. The culmination of this was the promulgation of the "Decree on Peace" in 1917 - a revolutionary and humanitarian political program that established a model for international relations based on equality, non-aggression, and peaceful coexistence. Later, along with the changes in

**Tóm tắt** - Trong bối cảnh thế giới hiện nay đang chứng kiến sự gia tăng xung đột địa chính trị và tái cấu trúc trật tự quốc tế, việc nghiên cứu quan điểm của Lênin về hòa bình không chỉ mang giá trị lịch sử mà còn có ý nghĩa lý luận và thực tiễn sâu sắc. Bài viết phân tích có hệ thống nền tảng lý luận và bối cảnh hình thành quan điểm hòa bình của Lênin, chỉ rõ sự kế thừa và phát triển từ chủ nghĩa Mác, đồng thời làm sáng tỏ các nội dung cốt lõi như phê phán hòa bình tư sản, khẳng định hòa bình xã hội chủ nghĩa, thiết lập nguyên tắc sống chung hòa bình và các điều kiện để bảo vệ hòa bình thực chất; xác lập năm giá trị thời đại nổi bật của tư tưởng hòa bình Lênin trong bối cảnh thế giới hiện nay như làm sâu sắc lý luận Mác, nhận diện bản chất hòa bình tư sản, đề cao chủ quyền và đấu tranh cách mạng, định hướng hợp tác quốc tế cùng có lợi, và xây dựng tư duy hòa bình tích cực trên nền công lý xã hội.

**Từ khóa** - Lênin; hòa bình; hòa bình xã hội chủ nghĩa; chung sống hòa bình

the international situation and the diversification of class struggle forms, Lenin officially introduced the concept of "peaceful coexistence" as a form of class struggle. This perspective was inherited and applied by Stalin and Khrushchev in Soviet diplomacy, demonstrating the flexibility in Lenin's thought on peace, which was both principled and closely tied to the practicalities of revolution and socialist construction under conditions of an asymmetrical balance of power.

In the historical development of research, Lenin's view on peace has been approached and discussed quite extensively, but most studies have focused on the classical theoretical aspect. There is a lack of integrated research between theory and political-diplomatic practice, and insufficient attention has been paid to analyzing the contemporary value of this ideology in the context of current globalization and the restructuring of the world order. Therefore, this study aims to systematically analyze Lenin's view on peace from the perspectives of its theoretical basis and context of formation; its ideological content and practical manifestations; and its contemporary ideological guiding value.

### 2. The theoretical and practical basis for the formation of Lenin's views on peace

Lenin's viewpoint on peace was not an ideology formed in a vacuum; rather, it was the result of a dialectical process of development based on the theoretical foundation of Marxism and Lenin's practical experience during the era of imperialism and imperialist wars.

In a theoretical sense, Lenin adopted and continued the ideas of Marx and Engels regarding the class nature of war and peace, the relationship between war and politics, and the role of the workers' movement and the right to national self-determination. Marx believed that bourgeois peace was merely a temporary state determined by the balance of forces. Genuine peace, he argued, must be connected to the elimination of the conditions that give rise to war within the capitalist mode of production. In *The Civil War in France*, Marx emphasized: "The class union of the workers of all countries will ultimately kill war" [1]. Observing the Franco-Prussian War, Marx issued warnings about the transformation of a "defensive war" into a war of conquest. Consequently, the institutional condition for peace, according to Marx, must be based on the sovereignty of the armed people, not on the instruments of violence of the old state [1]. Lenin directly inherited but also creatively developed an independent doctrine of peace within the specific context of his era. Accordingly, Lenin emphasized that war and peace are two parallel political forms that directly reflect the class structure of society; and that true peace cannot exist without eliminating the objective conditions that give rise to war - namely, imperialism. In "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism," Lenin scientifically analyzed: "Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development in which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, and in which the division of all territory of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed" [2]; and in the age of imperialism, peace is merely a ceasefire phase used to re-establish the division of markets and colonies. Therefore, capitalist peace is a false peace, a temporary political form serving the goals of plunder and oppression [3]. In articulating the relationship between war and peace, Lenin stood firmly on the methodological foundation of dialectical materialism to affirm: "War is the continuation of politics by other means, and peace is the same - the difference being that it is politics without bloodshed" [4]. This idea not only highlights the continuity between peace and war but also clearly indicates the class nature of both phenomena, allowing Lenin to distinguish the essential nature of different wars. This view later became the foundation for the stance supporting "revolutionary war" as a means of establishing genuine peace - a peace tied to the abolition of oppression and exploitation.

In practical terms, Lenin's views on peace were formed in the context of a backward Soviet Russia, during a time when World War I was devastating Europe and the international proletarian revolutionary movement was facing a historic test. Lenin strongly opposed moderate socialist views such as bourgeois pacifism and the conciliatory attitude of the Second International, arguing that these were merely forms of disguise for the imperialist powers' policies of aggression.

The Soviet government came to power after the victory of the October Revolution amid numerous economic, political, and ideological difficulties. (1) Economically, the war had left severe consequences: farmlands were

abandoned, grain output dropped sharply, many factories ceased production or closed down, and the living conditions of workers and peasants were extremely difficult. (2) Politically, there emerged views advocating for the establishment of a society that coexisted equally with capitalism, favoring compromise and social reformism. (3) Ideologically and culturally, Soviet culture was facing the backwardness of lingering pre-revolutionary ideas, raising an important question - how to learn from the past while building a new, more progressive culture. Meanwhile, the world was witnessing fierce contradictions among imperialist powers over markets and colonies, which became the fundamental cause of World War I (1914-1918). Lenin described this as the most reactionary, unjust, and inhumane war waged by imperialist robbers driven by the ambition to redivide the world [5]. It was precisely in this context that Lenin identified a new trend of the post-October Revolution era: the world was entering a transitional period from capitalism to socialism on a global scale, characterized by the parallel existence of two opposing social systems. Therefore, his views on peace were closely tied to the new historical task of defending the achievements of the revolution and establishing a more just international order.

### 3. The Fundamental Aspects of Lenin's View on Peace

Lenin's view on peace was formed on the basis of a consistent class standpoint and a dialectical materialist methodology. For him, peace was not an apolitical state but rather a continuation of politics by other means, always tied to the interests of specific social classes within a given economic and political formation. From his analysis of the contradictions of the imperialist era, Lenin established a theoretical system on peace consisting of four core aspects:

(i) The critique of the reactionary and pseudo-peaceful nature of imperialism.

In "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism," Lenin asserted that the peace of imperialism is a type of "false peace" (hòa bình giả tạo). According to him, while early capitalism relied on free competition, by the imperialist stage, financial monopolies depended on the plunder of colonies, the export of capital, and the use of force to re-divide the world market. In this context, peace, if it existed at all, was only temporary and served to prepare for the next war. Lenin sharply criticized the view that imperialist powers could maintain a long-term "peaceful alliance." He wrote: "Under capitalism, peaceful alliances between imperialist powers... are nothing more than a 'truce' between wars. These alliances simultaneously prepare for wars and spring from wars; the one conditions the existence of the other" [3]. Lenin concluded that imperialist wars cannot create a lasting peace. Unless the imperialist system and the monopoly bourgeoisie are abolished, peace is merely a temporary expression of the balance of power, always carrying the latent danger of a new war. Imperialist peace is essentially a cover for the structural violence of the global capitalist system. Therefore, in Lenin's ideological system, imperialist peace is not an achievable goal within the framework of capitalism, but is merely a strategic tool serving the interests of the ruling class, always associated with the risk of new war outbreaks.

(ii) Affirming the Just Nature and Revolutionary Goal of Socialist Peace.

Lenin emphasized that the peace of socialism could only be achieved through the proletarian revolution, and that it was a peace founded on the independence of all nations. In the Decree on Peace, he exposed the true nature of imperialism and put forward the principles of equality among nations and the policy of open negotiations. Lenin asserted that “the bourgeoisie seeks to establish a peaceful order based on exploitation, whereas socialist peace rests upon the proletarian revolution and the overthrow of bourgeois domination. For the masses in many countries, genuine peace cannot be attained without revolutionary struggle against their own governments and the overthrow of bourgeois rule” [6]. Lenin vehemently denounced and criticized the reformist arguments about peace within the Second International, arguing that pacifists (represented by Kautsky) failed to grasp the relationship between war and revolution, and did not recognize that true peace could only be achieved through proletarian revolution. Therefore, the peace advocated by Kautsky completely ignored the exploitative nature of imperialism, concealed the internal contradictions within imperialist systems, and weakened the revolutionary will of the proletariat. Lenin called Kautsky a worshipper of the doctrine of peace, but a betrayer of revolution [7].

(iii) Establishing the Principle of Peaceful Coexistence during the Transitional Period.

Immediately following the October Revolution, Lenin proposed a foreign policy based on the principle of peace with all nations, regardless of their political system. In the context of the country being encircled and intervened against by 14 imperialist nations, the Soviet government clearly understood that the survival of the revolutionary state required postponing direct armed conflict for as long as possible to focus on domestic reconstruction. At the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (1921), Lenin emphasized: “We need to prove in practice that socialism can peacefully compete with capitalism, and ultimately triumph through economic superiority, and not by war” [8].

Such an understanding enabled Lenin to promote the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) as a means of building peace through economic development. In the context of encirclement, Lenin regarded economic stabilization as the material foundation for genuine peace. The NEP allowed for state-controlled economic concessions, expanding trade with capitalist countries to absorb scientific and technological advances and attract capital.

Under the guidance of the idea of peaceful coexistence, Soviet Russia under Lenin’s leadership actively engaged in diplomatic activities with capitalist countries, creating new opportunities for its development. Economically, the Soviet state began implementing the New Economic Policy (NEP), shifting the nation’s focus toward economic development. Lenin firmly believed that capitalist countries were willing to cooperate with Russia on the basis of mutual interests. Through economic exchanges with capitalist nations, Soviet Russia could receive greater technical and financial support, thereby expanding its developmental space. As long as

capitalism continued to exist, cooperation with capitalist countries was considered inevitable. Ideologically, the Soviet Union’s peace policy and Lenin’s doctrine of proletarian internationalism served as the theoretical foundation for maintaining peaceful coexistence.

Lenin’s economic understanding and policy were firmly grounded in dialectical principles - namely, cooperation to develop productive forces and thereby strengthen peace, without compromising on principles that could undermine the economic and political structure of the Soviet state. The core and most significant feature of this viewpoint was the clear distinction between a “false peace” and a “constructive peace,” the latter being achieved through the strengthening of internal capacities and the preservation of national sovereignty. Lenin actively pursued his own policy of peace, declaring the abolition of unequal treaties signed during the Tsarist era. In doing so, he established the image of a peace-loving Russia and contributed to the promotion of world peace and development. Politically, as Soviet Russia broke through the imperialist blockade and achieved a balance of power with the imperialist countries in terms of economic, political, and military strength, it solidified its position as a defender of peace and independence.

(iv) Basic Principles Guiding the Struggle for Peace of the International Proletariat.

Lenin’s thought on peace did not stop at criticizing the reactionary nature of imperialist peace or proposing a strategy of peaceful coexistence; it was consistently expressed through a clear system of actionable principles, serving as a strategic guide for the foreign policy of the Soviet state. These principles reflected Lenin’s dialectical integration of class interests, national interests, and the concrete conditions of the transitional period. Lenin asserted that socialist peace could not be separated from the task of defending the Soviet regime and the foundation of public ownership. He warned that any concession threatening the control of the socialist state could lead to the restoration of capitalism. He stated: “It would be absurd for the Soviet regime to lease out most of its factories; that is not a concession but the restoration of capitalism” [8]. This thought embodies a key principle: peace is sustainable only when accompanied by political and economic independence. Therefore, Lenin placed great importance on maintaining state control in foreign trade and opposed all forms of large-scale privatization that could undermine the structure of socialism.

A distinctive feature of Lenin’s strategic thinking was his realistic understanding of the driving force of capitalism-profit. In the context of Soviet Russia’s economic encirclement after the war, Lenin did not deny the necessity of cooperating with capitalist countries to restore production and industry. However, he emphasized that such cooperation was only feasible if it was mutually beneficial, particularly through controlled forms of concessions. Regarding the trade deficit between Soviet Russia and capitalist countries, Lenin pointed out: “As long as we can obtain the aid of strong advanced capital, we shall not hesitate to expend all our unlimited wealth... We can recoup it later with considerable profit” [8]. This

principle reflects a dialectical approach, highlighting Lenin's highly practical and realistic perspective on peace.

#### 4. Contemporary Significance of Lenin's View on Peace

In the context of the world currently witnessing profound geopolitical shifts, the restructuring of the international order, and the escalation of strategic competition among major powers, Lenin's thought on peace continues to demonstrate remarkable theoretical and practical value. Lenin's perspective on peace is not merely a product of a revolutionary era but established principles with enduring significance for building a just, lasting, and humane peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Firstly*, Lenin's view on peace contributed to the enrichment and comprehensive development of Marx's thought on peace. As a developer of Marxism, Lenin helped expand and enrich the concept of peace on both the theoretical and practical political levels. Lenin not only placed peace in correlation with war as two opposing states but also analyzed it as a special form of political-class struggle in the specific historical conditions of the transitional period from capitalism to socialism. Accordingly, Lenin argued that peace is not merely a moral goal or a purely ideological concept; it is also a strategic tool for protecting the achievements of the revolution, consolidating the worker-peasant state, and gradually expanding the influence of socialism within the international order.

Lenin's thinking on peace was clearly demonstrated in the "Decree on Peace" when he called for a just peace without annexations, without indemnities, and respecting the right to self-determination of nations - principles unprecedented in contemporary bourgeois international agreements. At the same time, in the context of Soviet Russia facing encirclement and intervention from imperialist powers, Lenin still advocated signing temporary treaties and making strategic concessions to preserve the revolutionary forces. Therefore, Lenin's concept of peace provided the theoretical foundation for redefining the relationship between national sovereignty, development security, and international cooperation, enriching the content of the concept of peace and opening up the possibility of building a systematic doctrine of peace.

*Secondly*, clarifying the true and false nature of peace in modern international relations. Not only did Lenin criticize war as the inevitable consequence of class conflict under capitalism, but he also showed that even calls for peace from bourgeois powers were reactionary if they merely aimed to maintain the unjust status quo and protect the power and interests of a dominant minority within the international system. According to Lenin, in the imperialist era, the peace proposed by imperialist nations was often not genuine peace based on justice and self-determination; it was merely a temporary cessation of war to restructure the order of power, concealing the essence of economic, political, and military exploitation. Lenin called this the "bourgeois peace," characterized by technicality and strategic calculation, serving to prolong hegemony rather than stemming from the long-term interests of the people of all nations. This idea helps explain modern forms of intervention in the name of peace, such as: "Peace by proxy" through funding

opposition forces in weaker nations, "Conditional peace" through humanitarian aid coupled with compulsory institutional reform, or "Peace linked to sanctions," where peace is only granted if the target nation accepts sovereign concessions or adjusts its domestic policies according to the demands of power centers. These tools, though not overtly military, are still a continuation of conflict in a softened and technicized manner. In this context, Lenin's thought retains its profound critical value by helping developing nations identify genuine peace based on equality and mutual respect, and distinguish it from disguised peace which is merely an extension of imposed relations in the age of globalization.

*Thirdly*, prioritizing national sovereignty and the role of the people in peacebuilding. For Lenin, peace could not exist if it was merely the result of an agreement between major powers or the product of an international order imposed by a minority. On the contrary, peace is truly meaningful only when it reflects the will of the masses, guaranteed by the political, economic, and ideological independence of each nation. In the "Decree on Peace," issued by Lenin immediately after the October Revolution (1917), he called on the warring nations in World War I to sit down and negotiate peace on the basis of no annexations, no indemnities, and respect for the right to national self-determination [9]. Lenin's view serves as a profound critique of models of "imposed peace" by reaffirming that national sovereignty and the genuine participation of the people in establishing the political system are indispensable conditions for a real peace.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as international conflicts increasingly become non-traditional and occur in various soft forms (cyber intrusion, public opinion manipulation, political financialization), Lenin's thought on peace continues to serve as a compass for building a more just, multipolar, and humane world order, providing a foundation for many developing countries to assert their subjective role in international relations and to avoid falling into a passive position or dependence on global power centers.

*Fourthly*, providing principles for equal and mutually beneficial strategic multilateral cooperation. In an increasingly complex international context, where power competition, interwoven interests, and pressures for dependence are deepening, applying Lenin's view on peace allows developing countries to reposition their subjective role in the world order by building international relations based not only on hard realism but also on justice and genuine reciprocity. Lenin did not deny the existence and temporary necessity of cooperation with capitalist countries in the early stages of the Soviet regime, but he emphasized that such cooperation must occur on the basis of proactive control and a clear view of long-term strategic interests and permissible limits [10]. This view is clearly reflected in Vietnam's foreign and economic policies during the Renewal period. Joining the WTO and participating in new-generation free trade agreements like the CPTPP and RCEP are carried out on a two-way basis, avoiding the "trap of unilateral opening." Furthermore, Vietnam has skillfully maintained a strategic balance of relations among major partners while upholding independent, self-reliant foreign

policy principles and protecting core interests concerning sovereignty and development security.

*Fifthly*, enhancing political and ideological fortitude in the context of global struggle. One of the strategically enduring contents of Lenin's thought on peace is the requirement to maintain the "internal ideological order" of the revolutionary regime, in a context where class contradictions occur not only at the material level but also penetrate the spheres of consciousness, information, and public opinion orientation. Lenin soon realized that, given the revolution's need to survive while encircled by imperialism, social peace could not be protected without resolutely combating internal signs of degradation, especially the infiltration of bourgeois ideology in the forms of "pseudo-science," "formal democracy," or "opportunism." In "Party Organization and Party Literature" (1905), Lenin warned that freedom of thought, if not linked to a revolutionary orientation, would become a tool for the ruling classes to consolidate their position, weakening the worker-peasant-intellectual alliance [11]. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this idea holds particular value as traditional class struggle gradually shifts toward new forms such as information manipulation, psychological warfare, guiding public opinion on social media, and ideological intervention through educational-media programs. In this context, defending peace is not just preserving geographical borders but also protecting "ideological borders."

Particularly, in the context of global instability: the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Middle East crisis, the US-China trade competition, and increasing conflicts in various regions, Lenin's thought on peace suggests four aspects of application: (1) Identifying false peace by checking all "peace" initiatives against the criteria of sovereign equality, no annexation, no indemnity, and respect for self-determination; being wary of "conditional peace" packages linked to institutional imposition or geo-economic constraints leading to dependence. (2) Building peace through development capacity, setting economic-technological internal strength as the foundation, and applying conditional cooperation to create material durability for stability. (3) Peaceful coexistence as a form of struggle, prioritizing legal instruments, international norms, and multilateral diplomacy to minimize power conflicts while maintaining the line between core interests. (4) Ideological and informational fortitude in an environment of cognitive warfare, protecting social consensus and the domestic legitimacy of the peace strategy. This value aligns with Vietnam's foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, multilateralization, diversification; for peace, friendship, cooperation, development, along with the "four no's" principles and respect for international law and the UN Charter. Especially its practical applicability in participating in the CPTPP, RCEP, promoting safe and sustainable supply chains, and cooperating on green-digital transformation on the basis of mutual benefit, fair competition, non-interference in internal affairs, maintaining Lenin's spirit of distinguishing constructive peace from dependent peace.

## 5. Conclusion

Lenin's thought on peace is not only a logical development of Marxist theory but also a theoretical contribution that shaped the political practice of the 20th century and continues to hold value in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By analyzing the class nature of peace, highlighting the contrast between bourgeois peace and socialist peace, and establishing the principle of peaceful coexistence with an active spirit of struggle, Lenin created a system of thought on peace that is both strategically long-term and flexibly applicable. Based on theoretical research and practical implementation in the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, this study has affirmed five prominent contemporary values of Lenin's peace thought, particularly in relation to the Vietnamese revolution today. It serves as a foundation for Vietnam to build an independent, proactive, multilateral, and resilient foreign policy. In the context of a world undergoing structural reorganization and increasing strategic competition, applying Lenin's thought on peace in a manner that is flexible yet resolute, practical yet principled, represents an important theoretical basis for shaping strategies to safeguard ideological foundations and ensure sustainable national development.

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