

THE POLITICS OF REVENGE AND RESURGENCE – THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 100 YEARS LATER

(1917-2017)

Solomon Gebreselassie

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The Russian Revolution that started in October 1917 after passing through peaks and valleys, and a 100 years later is confronting us led by the second Vladimir with the odd scene of looking for Western partners in gullible or conservative Western politicians like Donald Trump of the USA and Marine Le Pen of France. The original revolution was of course led by Vladimir Lenin in 1917. Proclaiming to synthesize the teachings and thinking of both Marx and Lenin, the Revolution was a trail blazer for a communist revolution that continued to inspire other Revolutions throughout the 20th Century. Notable among those inspired by it, and lucky enough to see the Revolution's glorious consummation are China and Cuba. Others, mostly Third World Revolutions, including that of Ethiopia, were not as fortunate, and some like Cambodia ended up with disastrous results that might take another century to heal, and North Korea is still living through hell.

The Revolution's worthy contributions were, despite the tremendous costs to human lives, the accelerated industrialization of the USSR that brought a semi-feudal country into a par with the developed Western nations. The fact that in 1961 the USSR put the first man, Yuri Gagarin, in outer space orbiting the earth, was a slight that the US used to cajole and prod its scientists to catch up with the USSR, and the current movie *Hidden Figures*, betrays the edginess and societal contradictions to that effect. When faced with the Nazi racist expansion into Europe, the USSR's advance in military technology and the patriotism of its citizens that socialism engendered were the two main factors that enabled the USSR to stand shoulder to shoulder with the US and defeat Hitler, and then to have a say in re-ordering the then World Order as a victor after the second World War. However, rooted in the guiding ideology of Marxism Leninism, none of the Revolutions would tolerate any differing views and opposition. Therefore, it was no surprise that the first Revolution started its downward spiral with the 1938 Show Trials in the Soviet Union under Stalin that purged, executed, exiled, and tortured millions of its own

citizens- upright comrades -in many cases. Grippled by the contradictions of stale socialism, and a new found Super Power status, the USSR continued to masquerade as a democratic socialist alternative, while stifling the opposition and muzzling its citizens until the 20th Communist Party Congress in 1956 during Khrushchev's reign. At the Congress, Khrushchev attacked the cult of personality of Stalin, who had died 3 years earlier, and pushed to open up the society a bit. While no significant progress was made after the Congress, 6 years later a near fatal missile crisis took place with the USA regarding the deployment of ballistic missiles in Cuba during Kennedy's time. Thankfully, that was narrowly averted. From 1962 until Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985, the USSR was sleepwalking with septu and octogenarians ruling it and passing away in quick succession.

Gorbachev introduced the notions of *perestroika*, and *glasnost* and made real changes that Khrushchev planned but did not succeed to achieve. Unfortunately, Gorbachev and his USSR were victims of their own radical changes and the USSR disintegrated in 1990, with Russia left as the successor state.

Boris Yeltsin, a reported drunkard, took power of the Russian Federation, and quickly settled to play second fiddle to the USA. Russia was humiliated, its economy in shambles, prostitution widely practiced, state assets looted and crony capitalism in full swing. The West disdainfully relegated Russia to the kids' table. Taking advantage of Russia's difficulties, the West, particularly the US, under Bill Clinton, expanded NATO into Poland and Hungary; the previously USSR republics of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were now independent and flirting to join NATO and the West. Russian nationalists, including the current leader Vladimir Putin were immensely insulted. The nationalists were itching to take power and right all the wrongs and slights Russia suffered at the hands of the lone Super Power, the USA.

Since 2000, the former KGB official Vladimir Putin has been in charge, and the game has dramatically changed. Although a notorious dictator and hater of anything democratic, including the free press, Putin is a Russian nationalist that has turned the tables on the West in quick order. The nation that was left for dead came back roaring. Putin attacked Georgia in 2008, a former republic that was counting on the West to come to its defense, and later instigated a Russian led secession movement in Ukraine that still rages on. In 2014, he took by force Crimea that was Ukraine's province and the West could not do anything about it. The West put sanctions on Russia and put out many statements against it. However, Putin did not budge. Instead, he devised a policy of dividing the West (EU and the USA) and also successfully threw into a chaotic mess the Western electoral system particularly in the US, Germany and France. The now famous

2016 Wikileaks release of the Democratic Party of the US secret emails to sabotage Hillary Clinton and support the candidacy and election of Donald Trump is still reverberating and dividing the US elites.

Unlike the leaders of the TPLF/EPRDF that patently weakened Ethiopian nationalism, Putin recharged Russian nationalism rallying Russians around the flag, and despite his autocratic rule, and ruthless elimination of his opponents, he favorably polls consistently above 80%.

To wit, the Obama who stood side by side with Hailemariam Desalegne in his Ethiopian visit in 2015 and who shamelessly said the TPLF/EPRDF's regime was a democratically elected government, was coming with guns ablaze at Russia blaming Putin's dictatorship and his muzzling of the free press. This is the double standard and hypocrisy that makes it hard for millions of people around the globe to take America's sermon on human rights seriously.

The Russian Revolution has shown to the world that justice and freedom are worthy goals to fight for; it has generously helped the liberation movements of African countries against colonialism. However, the same freedom that it purported to stand for was subverted, and a democratic aspiration for peaceful and a system of rule of law was diabolically turned to a one man, or an elitist party rule, that ultimately unraveled the system.

Whether or not Mr. Putin would have the last laugh has to await the judgment of history. However, looking at the alternatives today that supplanted the Revolution's lofty goals, one cannot help but be dismayed at the global dark pictures: identity and tribalist politics gone viral, Islamic radicalism murdering innocents en masse, and a world where the rich are getting obscenely richer, and the poor falling on the way side.

There surely is a better system, a democratic, non-racial/ non-tribalist, and more equal, a system that treats man qua man with dignity and rights, and hopefully Ethiopia can join this group of nations and states one day and proudly reclaim her place there.

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