

Left Wing, Right Wing: Thoughts from the Politics Editor

By [Geoff Glover](#)

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IT HAS BECOME increasingly difficult to ignore Putin's role on the world stage. Many in the west are both cowed or in awe of the Russian strongman. Thus, history must inform us. February 2017 marks the 100th year of the Russian Revolution, arguably the single most significant event to happen in the early 20th century. Having overthrown the Tsar in favour of a form of liberal parliamentarianism, this left a power vacuum in Russian society, allowing Lenin and the Bolsheviks to seize power in a coup in October and set about exporting Leninism abroad in an effort to start a worldwide workers' revolution. This arguably prompted Hitler's Germany to both crackdown on dissent, and possibly scapegoat communists, notably with the Reichstag fire incident. It may have even prompted the Axis to invade the USSR. It goes without saying that we all know how invading Russia in winter always goes.

Thus we find ourselves in the present, the USSR having collapsed 25 years ago. The comparisons are stark. 40 years before 1917 were years of liberal triumphalism, with a system of worldwide free trade underpinned by a sole superpower. 40 years before 2017 were years of liberal triumphalism, with a system of worldwide free trade underpinned by a sole superpower. We have, as in 1917, seen the return of economic populists, and America is once again poised to retreat in on itself, as signalled by Trump's admittedly mixed messaging on international institutions such as NATO. However, in Russia itself, the story is different. Putin is firmly anti-revolution. Promoting as much may risk undermining the centralised control he holds over the Russian Federation. Thus, he finds himself cornered, unable to promote his nation's founding myth and at risk that he may himself find parallels with Tsar Nicholas' experience in 1917. Even in February, huge protests were recorded outside the Kremlin, demonstrating against the assassination of Boris Nemtsov two years ago, one of Russia's last truly liberal voices. Thus, how he reacts to domestic events will have effects for all.



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