

MATTHEW EVANGELISTA

Wilson's ideas, Carr's critique and the role of Russia in the post-Soviet space

1. *Introduction*

For many students in the field, myself included, the celebration of the 100th anniversary of International Relations is taking place twenty years too early¹. International Relations as a field was not founded with the establishment of the Woodrow Wilson chair and the Department of International Politics at Aberyswyth University. As Erasmus said, “one swallow does not make a spring”. The first holder of the chair, Alfred Zimmern is not a familiar name in the field and his views on international politics are not well known, although – to mix aviary metaphors – we infer that on matters of war and peace he was a dove. What most of us know of Zimmern's views comes from the critique of them offered by the fourth holder of the Woodrow Wilson chair – Edward Hallett Carr. Carr can truly lay claim to have founded the field of International Relations in 1939 with the publication of his classic work, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. In this essay I rely on the ideas in his book for my discussion of Russia and the post-Soviet space.

What qualifies a book as a classic? I tell my students that if it has remained in print and in multiple editions continuously from the time of its original publication, that is certainly one indicator. We still read Carr today because he set the terms of the debate by which we continue to study international politics with his description and critique of Utopianism and Realism, the former term now typically replaced by Idealism or Liberalism. And as Michael Cox mentions in his thoughtful introduction to the 2001 edition of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, some scholars find that Carr anticipated many of the later theoretical developments in the field. The treatment in the second half of his book of such topics as international ethics and law and the power of public opinion is consistent with variants of Constructivism, for example.

¹ In addition to the conference for which I wrote this paper, consider, for example K. BOOTH - W. BAIN (eds), *Reflections on International Relations 1919-2019*, “International Relations” [special issue], 33 (2019), 2.

As we discuss challenges to the liberal world order today, the toolkit of ideas and forms of analysis Carr offers us in his synthetic treatment of utopian and realist approaches is more useful than either approach in isolation. There are two more reasons to invoke Carr in a discussion of Russia. First, he himself was, in addition to his careers as a diplomat and journalist, a historian of Soviet Russia. Second, since the period about which he wrote in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* bears some similarities to the present, I draw specifically on the history of the interwar period in my remarks.

2. *Some apparent similarities*

When I first began work on this essay I did an internet search with the words “Russia” and *Anschluss*, Nazi Germany’s absorption of Austria into the German empire in 1938. We know that there is a “presentist” quality to the internet, with most hits coming from recent developments. So I did not expect all of the hits to be focused on the 1930s – say, on sites devoted to Soviet responses to Nazi Germany’s actions. Still hardly any hits dealt with that issue. They were all about Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the potential absorption of Belarus into the Russian Federation in the near future. In other words, on the internet the historical *analogy* of *Anschluss* was more prominent than the actual *history*.

What is it about the recent history that draws us to analogies with the 1930s? The superficial similarities are striking, and what we need to ask is: are they only on the surface, or is there something deeper?

Many historians and contemporary observers attributed the rise of Hitler to Germany’s defeat in the Great War, the Versailles settlement with its punishing reparations payments, and the economic depression which doomed the liberal Weimar Republic and created the conditions for a nationalist authoritarian backlash². For today’s Russia the defeat was the end of the Cold War and demise of the Soviet Union, followed by the collapse of the Russian economy – the equivalent of a Great Depression, as economic output fell by half between 1989 and the mid-1990s³. The World Bank was claiming as late as 1996 that “consistent policies, combining liberalisation of markets, trade, and new business

² For a recent account, see J. KIRSHNER, *The man who predicted Nazi Germany*, New York Times, 7 December 2019.

³ V. POPOV and J.K. SUNDARAM, *What explains the post-Soviet Russian economic collapse?*, The Wire, 10 June 2017, [online] available at: <https://thewire.in/economy/post-soviet-russian-economic-collapse>.

entry with reasonable price stability, can achieve a great deal even in countries lacking clear property rights and strong market institutions”⁴. US advisors such as Jeffrey Sachs and Andrei Schleifer were prescribing “shock therapy” for the sick post-Soviet economies. But the collapse of state institutions meant inability to collect taxes, enforce contracts, and control the black market – all of which undermined the prospects for investment and growth⁵.

Russia’s fragile post-Soviet political situation gave rise to fears about “Weimar Russia” from media commentators and scholars alike as early as the late 1990s⁶. The concerns centered on the risk that Boris Yeltsin, the president of newly independent Russia, would be overthrown by vengeful communists or xenophobic nationalists. Skeptics argued that communism had been discredited by the Soviet experience and that nationalism would be hard to promote in a country like Russia, which was still home to some hundred different ethnic groups, and whose national identity – to the extent that there was one – was founded more on a civic nationalism than an ethnic one. Moreover, with the breakup of the USSR, many Russians who had never lived in the Russian Federation itself, found themselves citizens of the newly independent countries where they had been living: Ukraine, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, for examples. They faced challenges in expectations to learn the local languages and experienced some discrimination, but nothing like what happened during the violent breakup of Yugoslavia⁷.

In 2005 Vladimir Putin, Yeltsin’s successor, raised some eyebrows by deliberately invoking nationalist themes. He asserted that, “the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside

⁴ WORLD BANK, *From plan to market*, World Development Report, 1996, quoted in *ibidem*.

⁵ J.R. WEDEL, *Collision and collusion: The strange case of Western aid to Eastern Europe*, St. Martin’s, New York 2001.

⁶ S.E. HANSON and J.S. KOPSTEIN, *The Weimar/Russia Comparison*, “Post-Soviet Affairs”, 13 (1997), [online] available at: <https://slate.com/human-interest/1999/12/weimar-russia.html>; W. J. PERRY, *Weimar Russia*, www.hover.org., 30 January 1998, available at: <https://www.hover.org/research/weimar-russia>; J. RAIMONDO, *Weimar Russia and the Chechen War*, www.antiwar.com, 03 January 2000, available at: <https://original.antiwar.com/justin/2000/01/03/weimar-russia-and-the-chechen-war/>; J. RAIMONDO, *Better Putin than Weimar Russia*, “The American Conservative”, 6 (January 2015).

⁷ V. VUJAČIĆ, *Nationalism, myth, and the state in Russia and Serbia*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2015; V. BUNCE, *Subversive institutions: The design and destruction of socialism and the state*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012.

Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself⁸.

In our comparison to Germany in the 1930s we identified political-military defeat, economic collapse, and political fragility. Now Putin was raising the issue of Russians and Russian-speakers outside the territory of post-Soviet Russia. Hitler had justified the annexation of Czechoslovakia's *Sudetenland* and the union with Austria on the basis of the principle that speakers of the German language should all live in the same country and that the Czechoslovak government discriminated against German speakers and therefore forfeited its right to govern them. Putin justified Russian interference in eastern and southern Ukraine as a defense of the language rights of Russian speakers against a Ukrainian government he accused of genocide; and the annexation of Crimea he explained as a natural return of Russian territory that had been under the control of the Russian Empire since Catherine the Great⁹.

3. *Key differences*

Here then we have several superficial similarities with the 1930s. But I want to highlight a key difference, one that many observers fail even to recognize. In the 1930s, Nazi Germany was a rising challenger to the international order. In the current decade, Russia is a *declining* challenger. To give the punch line right at the outset, it should be easier to defend a liberal international order against a declining challenger than against a rising challenger. The situation is complicated by the presence of China as a rival that is still growing, but the 1930s was also complicated by the challenge of a rising Japan. The question that I want to raise, and I will discuss it at the end, is whether there is adequate political will to defend the liberal order.

A second key difference with the 1930s – at least we hope so – is that Hitler had a long-term plan for domination of Europe and an insatiable appetite for military conquest. There is much to dislike in the authoritarian practices of Putin and the aggressive nature of some of his foreign policies, but we doubt that he is a Hitler.

⁸ K. SANDERS, *Did Vladimir Putin call the breakup of the USSR 'the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century?'*, Polityfact.com, 6 March 2014, available at: <https://www.polityfact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/mar/06/john-bolton/did-vladimir-putin-call-breakup-ussr-greatest-geop/>

⁹ M. EVANGELISTA, *Crisi Ucraina, tra cause e possibili soluzioni*, "Vita e Pensiero", 1, (January-February 2015), pp. 32-43 (trans. A. Campati).

One of Carr's main themes is a critique of the notion of a "harmony of interests" that should naturally foster peaceful relations among states if only they recognized their common interest in peace. Instead, he writes of a "fundamental divergence of interest between nations desirous of maintaining the status quo and nations desirous of changing it"¹⁰. In the 1930s the status quo in Europe meant keeping defeated Germany in the weakened position from which it emerged from the war. As Germany's power grew, especially under Hitler, the country sought to change the status quo, particularly by acquiring additional territory. And for some time, the satisfied powers allowed Germany to do so with their policy known as appeasement. Carr supported appeasement until 1936 as a British diplomat and thereafter as a professor and writer until almost the outbreak of the European war in September 1939.

He and many others considered at least some of Germany's claims legitimate. He agreed with the analysis that John Maynard Keynes had made already in his 1919 essay *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, that heavy reparations payments would prevent the revival of the Germany economy. Moreover, as Keynes wrote, the Versailles

Treaty includes no provisions for the economic rehabilitation of Europe, – nothing to make the defeated Central Empires into good neighbors, nothing to stabilize the new States of Europe, nothing to reclaim Russia; nor does it promote in any way a compact of solidarity among the Allies themselves; no arrangement was reached at Paris for restoring the disordered finances of France and Italy, or to adjust the systems of the Old World and the New¹¹.

As Christopher Browning has written, Keynes' argument "had produced a broad consensus that the deficiencies and injustices of the Versailles Treaty required revision, not enforcement"¹². The French were a bit late in joining that consensus, having sought to force Germany to keep making its reparations payments by militarily occupying the coal-mining region of the Ruhr Valley in the early 1920s. But with the 1929 stock market crash and onset of the Great Depression, it became obvious that Germany could not meet its obligations. The irony of appeasement is that it might have worked had it been directed toward the Weimar Republic, but once Hitler came to power in 1933 it was too late.

¹⁰ E.H. CARR, *The twenty years' crisis, 1919–1939*, reissued with a new preface from M. Cox, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2001, Apple Books version, 2016, p. 505.

¹¹ J.M. KEYNES, *The economic consequences of the peace*, with a new introduction by M. Cox, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2019.

¹² C.R. BROWNING, *Giving in to Hitler*, New York Review of Books, 26 September 2019.

The period following the end of the Cold War looks very different from Keynes' description of the interwar period. Everything missing from the Versailles Treaty seems to have been present in the vision of a post-Cold War world. In contrast to the Versailles Treaty, we have the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, signed in November 1990 by all members of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the culmination of the so-called Helsinki Process¹³. It promised a “new era of democracy, peace, and unity” – a “steadfast commitment to democracy based on human rights and fundamental freedoms; prosperity through economic liberty and social justice; and equal security for all our countries”¹⁴. To paraphrase Keynes, the Paris Treaty offered provisions for the economic rehabilitation of Europe, something to make the defeated members of the Warsaw Pact into good neighbors, something to stabilize the new States of Europe, something to reclaim Russia, and promotion of a compact of solidarity among the Allies themselves. The vehicles to convey this vision were the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization, both of which would be expanded to include most of the Baltic, central, and eastern European countries of the former Soviet sphere of influence – but not Russia itself.

4. *A dissatisfied Russia*

Why did this vision fail to satisfy Russia? Even though Russia was not invited to join the EU or NATO, one might argue that the expansion of those institutions nevertheless served its interests. This is precisely what US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried argued in 2008: “NATO membership for Western European countries during the cold war brought peace to nations that had known centuries of war. NATO membership for Central and Eastern Europe after the cold war extended this peace. Indeed, NATO enlargement, and EU enlargement that followed it, were leading factors in making the region to Russia’s west the most stable and nonthreatening it has been in Russia’s history”. He added that he didn’t “expect Russia will thank us for this act, but it should”¹⁵.

¹³ M. EVANGELISTA, *Revisiting the Helsinki principles: Are they still relevant to European security?* in S. BERETTA and R. ZOBOLI (eds.), *Crisis and change: The geopolitics of global governance*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2012.

¹⁴ For the text in many languages: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39516>.

¹⁵ D. FRIED, *Georgia, the US, and the balance of power: An exchange*, New York Review of Books, 23 October 2008, in response to G. FRIEDMAN, *Georgia and the balance of power*, New York Review of Books, 25 September 2008.

A quotation from Carr provides a good insight into Russia's reaction, if you substitute for his term "internationalism" something like "the liberal world order" or "globalization". As he wrote in 1939,

the concept of internationalism was so freely used between the two wars for the purpose of justifying the ascendancy of the satisfied Powers that it fell into some disrepute with the dissatisfied Powers. But this natural reaction was not a denial of the existence of an international community so much as a protest against exclusion from the privileges of membership¹⁶.

In other words, however much the existence of the EU and NATO, without Russian membership, served that country's interests, Russia would still resent being left out.

Regarding NATO, there is a lively debate about whether any Western officials promised the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev not to expand the alliance in return for his agreement on unification of Germany. Certainly, Gorbachev did not ask for such a commitment in writing. Nevertheless, it is clear that no Russian leaders expected NATO to continue expanding in the absence of any plausible security threat from the East. On the contrary, the Russian expectation, based on the 1990 Treaty of Paris, was that both military alliances, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, would be superseded by an alternative security arrangement based on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the successor to the CSCE¹⁷. As early as December 1991, as the USSR was on the brink of dissolution, and its former allies were clamoring to join the Western alliance, it became clear that NATO would not be ending anytime soon. NATO officials claimed that the alliance would fulfill mainly political rather than military goals, ensuring the stability of its democratic members. At that point, Russian President Yeltsin claimed that his country would also like to join NATO "as a long-term political aim"¹⁸. In 1993, the United States proposed to Yeltsin that Russia join with NATO members in a Partnership for Peace instead of joining the alliance. Yeltsin misunderstood this program as an alternative to NATO, which he expected would then fade away, but US officials clearly had in mind to use the Partnership to expand NATO, to the exclusion of Russia¹⁹.

¹⁶ E.H. CARR, *Twenty years' crisis*, cit., p. 787.

¹⁷ M. EVANGELISTA, *Unarmed forces: The transnational movement to end the cold war*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (NY) 1999, chap. 14.

¹⁸ T.L. FRIEDMAN, *Soviet disarray; Yeltsin says Russia seeks to join NATO*, New York Times, 21 December 1991.

¹⁹ S. SAVRANSKAYA - T. BLANTON, *NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard*, Briefing Book

What about the European Union? In 2002, Silvio Berlusconi, then Italian prime minister, proposed that Russia join the EU. Romano Prodi, then head of the European Commission, and a former and future Italian prime minister, criticized Berlusconi's proposal. He argued that Russia's market and territory were too large to incorporate into the EU at this stage without undermining the very structure of the organization²⁰. So Russia remained outside of that institution as well.

The arguments for maintaining NATO and excluding Russia from membership in it and in the European Union are plausible, but there is no reason to assume, as Ambassador Fried did, that Russia should have been grateful. Fried was a student of history at my university, Cornell, in the 1970s. He apparently did not take any courses in International Relations where he would have learned about the "security dilemma" – that even countries that support the status quo might nevertheless appear threatening to others. Sandy Berger, President Bill Clinton's national security adviser at the time of the first NATO expansion, was a Government (political science) major at Cornell, but he also does not seem to have anticipated Russia's reactions. I read *The Twenty Years' Crisis* as a graduate student at Cornell, but neither Fried nor Berger seems to have read it as undergraduates. Or if they did, they did not heed Carr's warning about assuming a harmony of interests. Carr called the harmony of interests "the ideology of a dominant group concerned to maintain its predominance by asserting the identity of its interests with those of the community as a whole"²¹. Clinton administration officials claimed that the interests of NATO and the EU were, if not identical, then at least compatible with and certainly not threatening to the interests of Russia.

But Russia, under both Yeltsin and Putin, did not see its interests as identical to those of the United States and its NATO allies. An early source of conflict was NATO's intervention in the wars in former Yugoslavia, first in Bosnia in 1995, and then, most consequentially, in Kosovo. The crisis in Kosovo led NATO to launch its first war ever against Serbia in March 1999, ignoring the opposition of two members of the UN Security Council. The 78-day bombing campaign against Serbia put an end to the pretense that the alliance was being transformed from a military to a primarily political organization. In April 1999, a NATO summit meeting in Washington welcomed new members, the Czech Republic, Poland,

#621, Mar 16 March 2018, available at: <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-03-16/nato-expansion-what-yeltsin-heard>

²⁰ M. MAROZZI, *Prodi: la Russia non può entrare nella nuova Ue*, La Repubblica, 14 April 2002.

²¹ E.H. CARR, *Twenty years' crisis*, cit., p. 484.

and Hungary. Russia, which had withdrawn from its brutal war against the secessionist republic of Chechnya in 1996, now watched as NATO effectively supported the secessionist efforts of the Kosovar Albanians and expanded to include three former members of the Warsaw Pact. A few months later, Putin reignited the war in Chechnya, with even more brutal indiscriminate bombing, kidnappings, torture, and extrajudicial killing. The United States voiced muted opposition to Russian atrocities, hoping that Russia, in turn, would accept the enlargement of NATO without much complaint²².

The terrorist attacks of September 2001 offered a chance for improvement in Russia's relations with the United States and NATO in confronting a common enemy – and Putin was particularly eager to associate the Chechen rebels with Islamist terrorism. But in March 2003, the United States invaded Iraq, which had not been involved in the 9/11 attacks. It did so in the face of opposition of three permanent members of the UN Security Council, including Russia, China, and France, one of several of its own allies to oppose the war. A year later in March 2004, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia joined NATO, along with, for the first time, three former Soviet republics – Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. With the subsequent “action plan” to bring the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Ukraine into the alliance, NATO seems to have crossed a line for Russia. In 2005 and 2006, NATO initiated a so-called Intensive Dialogue with Ukraine and Georgia to pursue their interests in joining.

At that point, Russia's willingness to ignore the encroachment of the alliance to its borders reached an end. The US ambassador to Moscow got the message that NATO expansion was alarming the Russian leadership and he tried to warn the political and military leadership in Washington already in early 2008:

Ukraine and Georgia's NATO aspirations not only touch a raw nerve in Russia, they engender serious concerns about the consequences for stability in the region. Not only does Russia perceive encirclement, and efforts to undermine Russia's influence in the region, but it also fears unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences which would seriously affect Russian security interests. Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war. In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face.

²² M. EVANGELISTA, *The Chechen wars: Will Russia go the way of the Soviet Union*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 2002.

That Ambassador William Burns took Russia's concerns seriously is without doubt. He made sure that his point not be missed by giving this title to his memo: "Nyet Means Nyet: Russia's NATO Enlargement Redlines"²³. Perhaps Burns' experience as a student of Hedley Bull at Oxford had given him better insight into international politics than some of his colleagues²⁴. In any case, Washington was clearly not listening.

One of the criteria for acceptance of new NATO members is "willingness to settle international, ethnic or external territorial disputes by peaceful means, commitment to the rule of law and human rights, and democratic control of armed forces"²⁵. In August 2008, when Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili sought to use force to bring the secessionist region of South Ossetia back under control, Russia intervened militarily there and in Georgia's other breakaway republic of Abkhazia. One goal was clearly to hinder Georgia's entry into NATO. Tensions had been building in the region ever since Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence in February 2008, with the support of the United States. Nearly half of the countries in the world refused to recognize Kosovo's independence, including India, China, Russia, and several members of NATO and the European Union. In the wake of Georgia's defeat in the 2008 war, however, Moscow recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia now seemed determined to defend what it considered its sphere of influence in response to US encroachment²⁶.

5. *The crisis in Ukraine and liberal internationalism*

If the war with Georgia began to raise suspicions about Russian intentions, the crisis in Ukraine seemed to confirm them. Then US Secretary

²³ W.F. BURNS, *Nyet Means Nyet: Russia's NATO Enlargement Redlines*, Memorandum, 1 February 2008, originally classified "confidential", and sent, among others, to the US secretaries of defense and state, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US National Security Council, NATO, and the European Union, available at: <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/02/08MOSCOW265.html>. For Burns' reflections on the Wikileaks release of secret government documents, see W.F. BURNS, *Powell's Q&A: William J. Burns, Author of "The Back Channel"*, 12 March 2019, [online] available at: <https://www.powells.com/post/qa/powells-qa-william-j-burns-author-of-the-back-channel>.

²⁴ W.F. BURNS, *The back channel: A memoir of American diplomacy and the case for its renewal*, Random House, New York 2019.

²⁵ Membership Action Plan (MAP), approved 24 April 1999, [online] available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27444.htm

²⁶ M. EVANGELISTA, *La Russia può essere di nuovo un nemico?*, "Vita e Pensiero" [special issue], 6 (November-December 2008).

of State John Kerry accused Russia of “an incredible act of aggression”. “You just don’t in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped up pre-text”, claimed Kerry. As a member of the US Senate Kerry had voted in favor of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, and the hypocrisy of his statement was not lost on the Russians²⁷. As Michael Ignatieff explains, the Russians (and Chinese) had long ago stopped believing in the US vision of a peaceful new world order: Whereas the annexation of Crimea in 2014 “marked the moment for the West when the post-1989 international order came apart, for the Russians and the Chinese, the fracture occurred fifteen years earlier when NATO warplanes bombed Belgrade and struck the Chinese embassy...The Kosovo precedent – unilateral secession orchestrated, without UN approval, by a great power – provided Putin with justification for Crimea”²⁸. It is worth noting that Ignatieff, a liberal Canadian politician and scholar at Harvard University, supported the NATO invasion of Kosovo (as well as the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the use of military force in Libya and Syria). So his comment is more an observation about Russia’s perceptions than a criticism of US behavior – precisely the sort of observation that I argue US officials such as Fried and Berger were incapable of making, owing perhaps to defects in their education at my university.

Again, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* helps us understand many elements of Russia’s behavior in the wake of the annexation of Crimea, especially the appeal to nationalism. As Carr wrote, “countries which are struggling to force their way into the dominant group naturally tend to invoke nationalism against the internationalism of the controlling Powers”²⁹. Russia’s interference in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea violated several bilateral and international treaties and its subsequent behavior reinforced Carr’s generalization that “states which violate treaties either deny that they have done so, or else defend the violation by argument designed to show that it was legally or morally justified”³⁰. Putin, trained as a lawyer before he became a secret-service agent, offered a number of creative, if dubious legal justifications for the annexation, which was popular at home.

The international response to Russia’s interference into Ukraine and

²⁷ W. DUNHAM, *Kerry condemns Russia’s “incredible act of aggression” in Ukraine*, Reuters, 2 May 2014.

²⁸ M. IGNATIEFF, *The new world disorder*, The New York Review of Books, 24 September 2014.

²⁹ E. H. CARR, *Twenty years’ crisis*, cit., p. 592.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 789.

annexation of Crimea was largely negative, but it reflected similar collective-action problems as we saw in the democracies' response to Hitler in the 1930s. It is hard to coordinate a regime of punitive sanctions, especially when countries like Italy are dependent on Russian energy resources.

Another factor that contributed to the democracies' unwillingness to stand up to Hitler, as many historians have noted, was a certain admiration for fascism and an appreciation of Hitler and Mussolini as strong leaders. While refraining from calling Putin another Hitler, we still can note the evident admiration of Putin among Western leaders such as Donald Trump, Silvio Berlusconi, and Matteo Salvini. One of the hindrances to pursuing a coherent US policy toward Russia during the Obama administration was the fact that many politicians in the Republican Party clearly preferred Vladimir Putin to Barack Obama³¹. Putin plays this to his advantage. In an interview with the *Financial Times* in June 2019, he deliberately echoed Trump when he criticized what he called "This liberal idea...that migrants can kill, plunder and rape with impunity because their rights as migrants have to be protected." He said "the liberal idea has become obsolete. It has come into conflict with the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population"³². He attributed Trump's electoral success of 2016 to the fact that "the middle class in the United States has not benefited from globalization" and "the Trump team sensed this very keenly and clearly"³³.

This brings me to my final point. Russia is a power in decline, not a rising challenger. Putin offers no coherent ideology to compete with liberal internationalism. His mix of macho nationalism and anti-gay "family values" has some admirers, and also echoes some themes from the 1930s that Klaus Theweleit explored in his 1977 book, *Male Fantasies*, about the relationship between misogyny and fascism³⁴. But those themes cannot compensate for a declining population growth rate, increasing frustration with rigged elections, rampant corruption among the political élite, and an economy heavily dependent on exports of

³¹ M. BOOT, *The Republicans have become the party of Russia. This makes me sick*, Washington Post, 4 December 2019.

³² AA.VV., *Vladimir Putin says liberalism has "become obsolete"*, www.ft.com, 28 June 2019, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36>

³³ THE MOSCOW TIMES, *The Highlights of Putin's "Liberalism is Obsolete" Interview With FT*, www.themoscowtimes.com, 28 June 2019, available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/06/28/the-highlights-of-putins-liberalism-is-obsolete-interview-with-ft-a66207>

³⁴ K. THEWELEIT, *Mannerphantasien*, Frankfurt am Main, Roter Stern/Stroemfeld, Frankfurt am Main 1977-1978, 2 vols. Published in English as *Male fantasies*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987 and in Italian as *Fantasia virile*, il Saggiatore, Milan 1997.

raw materials. Compared to the situation the democracies faced in confronting a rising Nazi Germany in the 1930s, it should be much easier for today's liberal states in Europe, supported by preeminent economic and military power of the United States, to deal with the challenge of a declining, authoritarian Russia. But that requires political will and a commitment to policies that strengthen liberal values rather than undermine them.

