

WEST'S BETRAYAL OF UKRAINE LIKE ARMENIA'S

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Robert Fisk, [The Independent](#), 9 March 2014

The Russkies are not going to be shaking in their boots at sanctions

For some reason, our last century's two world wars started rather far from home. I bet that most people in January 1914 couldn't find Sarajevo on a map. But then again, how many of us – really, I mean – could have found Simferopol on a map a year ago? Or three weeks ago, for that matter? The Second World War started because Britons simply wouldn't take another crooked deal like  Czechoslovakia – “a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing”, in which our Neville at least put distance in front of ignorance. So Poland it was, which, by awful mischance, shares a border with modern-day Ukraine.

And this really is, I fear, the sort of grim, only slightly understood consciousness that we can't let Poland/Ukraine down again, that we can't let Putin threaten little Ukraine as we let Hitler threaten and invade Poland. Poland is on Ukraine's doorstep – it's funny how we get upset about countries that are “on our doorstep” – that's what we said about Bosnia in the 1990s, as if those horrible Bosnians and Croats and Serbs did not deserve to have our door opened for them. They were in the backyard, I suspect, no privies, you know the sort of thing.

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But, of course, Putin is not Hitler and it would be well to try to get the Second World War out of our bloodstream – not least because we have the First World War coursing through our corpuscles this year, and besides the Russians were on our side in the last war and in the war before that (for a time). So were the Serbs. But what struck me, watching all the EU spivs looking serious in Brussels last

week, is that these people have no experience of war and somehow think that once they have made their threats, they can all go home and forget "the crisis". I admit I am much moved by a newspaper headline in Beirut last week that began: "War looms..." Well, let's hope not.

And the "crisis" or the war "looming" in the Ukraine is of great interest to someone who lives not a hundred miles from my home: President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, who will have been much relieved to see Putin leap to the rescue of Russian Ukraine as firmly as he did for Syria. Indeed, Assad, according to his government, has even sent a telegram to Putin – do people still send "telegrams", by the way? – in which he "expressed ... Syria's solidarity with Putin's efforts to restore security and stability to Ukraine in the face of attempted coups against legitimacy and democracy in favour of radical terrorists". Syria was committed, Assad said, to "President Putin's rational, peace-loving approach that seeks to establish a global system supporting stability and fighting".

And Assad praised Putin's "wise political leadership and commitment to international legitimacy based on the law that governs ties between nations and peoples". Phew. Well, we got the point. Assad liked what he saw in Simferopol, although I notice he didn't say anything about the ousted Viktor Yanukovich – and I'm not surprised. The Ukrainian leader did a bunk out of his own country. Assad did not run away. Putin, I suspect, will have liked that, just as Putin will have enjoyed the fact that Madame Clinton, Obama himself, David Cameron and Messieurs Hollande and Sarkozy – all of whom said years ago that Assad would go, was about to go or virtually gone – were totally wrong.

So what did I really think when I saw all these folk meeting in Brussels? I was reminded of a wonderful description of a British politician. It was written by Lawrence of Arabia and I take it from a fine new book on him by Scott Anderson. The man in question was "the imaginative advocate of unconvincing world movements ... a bundle of prejudices, intuitions, half-sciences. His ideas were of the outside, and he lacked patience to test his materials before choosing his style of building. He would take an aspect of the truth, detach it from its circumstances, inflate it, twist and model it." The politician was Mark Sykes of Sykes-Picot infamy, trying to be nice to everyone.

But lest you think Sykes was too removed from our time, try this from the mouth of another British politician: "However much we may sympathise with a small nation confronted by a big and powerful neighbour, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire (for which read "the EU") in war simply on her account." Our Neville again, of course, in 1938.

Makes you draw in your breath a bit, doesn't it? The Russkies are not going to be shaking in their boots at sanctions. Punishing Russians and Ukrainians involved in Russia's move into the Crimea will be a "useful tool", said Obama – though why the US President has to use the language of computer geeks to threaten Moscow is beyond me. But that's what it's all about, isn't it? We can't have war "looming". It would destroy all our internets and computers and live-time news and globalisation and "tools". It might even destroy us! Read that line again, the one from our Neville. They'll patch something up, a political gig to let Russia gobble part of Ukraine but still calling it a federated

As the Armenians will testify, we have been here before

On the subject of Ukraine, you might – if you happen to be passing through Beirut – pick up two hefty volumes by Katia Peltekian, an Armenian researcher who specialises in publishing news reports about the 1915 Armenian genocide at the hands of the Turks. The Times and The Manchester Guardian gave extensive coverage to the century's first Holocaust – some of the young German military witnesses turned up in the Wehrmacht in Russia less than 30 years later – and Peltekian has captured most of these reports in 976 pages.

What is most intriguing is the way in which the Great Powers lost interest in the one and a half million Armenian dead almost as soon as the 1914-18 war had ended. The Times was filled with heartbreaking letters from Armenians and the British society which supported them, pleading with the British and French and the Italians and the Americans – pretty much the same lot who were rambling on in Brussels last week – to let them have a nation that included part of eastern Turkey. Be patient, the Armenians were told. They had already been scattered across the Middle East, but were still being killed inside Turkey itself. Some found refuge in Russia. And some in the Ukraine ..

