

III. Appreciations

Silvio Berlusconi Kept Working for Peace

by Claudio Celani

June 23—On June 12 of this year, the four-time Prime Minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, passed away at age 86. Persons who were at his bedside during his last hours reported that Berlusconi was “more afraid of the threat of nuclear war than of his illness” (leukemia).

Indeed, Berlusconi, who inaugurated the era of tycoons in politics well before Donald Trump, and was universally scolded by the liberal establishment worldwide as a parvenu in politics, demonstrated more statecraft on strategic issues than most western leaders. One can argue with many aspects of his policy, and his habits both in public and private life, but he did more than anyone else in Europe to promote East-West peace and cooperation.

That is why on June 16, during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Russian President Vladimir Putin asked participants (from over 100 countries) to stand up and observe one minute of silence to honor Berlusconi, whom he characterized as “a global leader who did much to improve Russia-NATO relationships.”

The Russian President was not exaggerating. It was thanks to Berlusconi, indeed, that the NATO-Russia Council was formed in 2002, setting NATO and Russia on an equal partnership level and marking a promising leap in the direction of the common security arrangement so much invoked by Russia.

Berlusconi was then chairing his second Cabinet (2001-2005), and Italy was the rotating chairman of the G7. The Italian Prime Minister succeeded in persuading U.S. President George W. Bush to invite Putin to the



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Silvio Berlusconi, former prime minister of Italy, 1936-2023.

G7 meeting in Pratica di Mare Air Force Base, near Rome, on May 28, 2002, which then became the G8. At that summit, the “Rome Declaration” was signed, on “NATO-Russia Relations: a New Quality”—the agreements that gave birth to the NATO-Russia Council (NRC).

Berlusconi did not pull this as a rabbit from a hat, but built on the goals and principles of the May 27, 1997 [Founding Act](#) on Mutual Relations, Cooperation

and Security Between NATO and the Russian Federation. As the NATO [website](#) explains:

The NATO-Russia Council replaced the Permanent Joint Council (PJC), a forum for consultation and cooperation created by the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act. The individual Allies and Russia have met as equal partners in the NRC—instead of meeting in the bilateral “NATO+1” format under the PJC.

‘Equal Partners’

The text of the [Rome Declaration](#) says, among other things, that—

In the framework of the NATO-Russia Council, NATO member states and Russia will work as equal partners in areas of common interest. The NATO-Russia Council will provide a mechanism for consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision, and joint action for the member states of NATO and Russia on a wide spectrum of security issues in the Euro-Atlantic region.

Moreover, the Declaration states the aim of the Council:

[To] build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security and the principle that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible. We are convinced that a qualitatively new relationship between NATO and the Russian Federation will constitute an essential contribution in achieving this goal. In this context, we will observe in good faith our obligations under international law, including the UN Charter, provisions and principles contained in the Helsinki Final Act and the OSCE Charter for European Security.

This agreement overcame the imbalances which had resulted from the eastward expansion of NATO, which had included several countries formerly belonging to the Warsaw Pact, thus coming dangerously close to Russia’s border and violating assurances given to Moscow during the German reunification process.

The idea was therefore to turn NATO from a threat into an inclusive alliance. If Russia were to become a full member of NATO, the agreement contemplated a security arrangement in which interests of all participants were to be considered, and there was no need for Moscow to fear NATO anymore.

Unfortunately, this process was stopped in the following years, as the West resumed the Color Revolutions policy and issued sanctions against Russia over futile or false issues. Carried out by all U.S. administrations with the exception of that of Donald Trump, that policy aimed—and still aims—at dismembering Russia.

Berlusconi kept working for good relations with Russia, but he could not change EU policy. As he challenged the EU in 2011, he was put out of office by a plot involving the European Central Bank and the French and German governments.

He Should Have Left NATO

But still, now, in the Ukraine war, Silvio Berlusconi refused to back down to the western narrative of Russia as an “aggressor” and Ukraine as a victim. In a briefing to his parliamentary faction earlier this year, the former prime minister made it clear that he believed the war in the Ukraine was provoked by the West. Had Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stopped “attacking the two autonomous republics of Donbass, this would not have happened,” he said, adding: “I judge this gentleman’s behavior very, very negatively.” In an [interview](#) with *Il Messaggero* Feb. 12, he suggested:

I would think that Mr. American President, Joe Biden, should take Zelensky and tell him: after the end of the war, a Marshall Plan is at your disposal from \$9 trillion to rebuild Ukraine. One condition, however: that you order a ceasefire tomorrow, because from tomorrow we will no longer give you dollars and we will no longer give you weapons. Only such a thing could convince this gentleman to reach a ceasefire.

Silvio Berlusconi’s biggest mistake was to have played by the rules even if Italy’s interest demanded breaking those rules. People say he did not dare put at stake his economic empire and his family, which his enemies would have destroyed had he gone too far.

When NATO began bombing Libya on March 19, 2011, he should have taken Italy out of NATO. His gov-

ernment had signed a groundbreaking Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation with Muammar Gaddafi's Libya just three years earlier. It was the first treaty ever, in which a former colonial power recognized responsibility for the colonial past vs. a former colony. As a reparation, Italy committed to build infrastructures in Libya, including a coastal highway, hospitals and schools. Libya assured it would continue supplying Italy with oil.

Furthermore, the treaty included a clause of mutual defense against aggression by a third party.

As NATO started to bomb Libya at the initiative of French President Nicholas Sarkozy and U.S. President Barack Obama, Prime Minister Berlusconi tried to stop it. He should have threatened to leave NATO, but he did not. Had he done it, he would probably not have found a parliamentary majority to back such a decision, and he would probably have been forced to resign. But he would have come back with a vengeance, and with larger popular support.

Promoter of Infrastructure, Nuclear Power

Domestically, Berlusconi launched an ambitious plan for infrastructure investments, called "Legge Obiettivo," which he could not complete due to government crises and sabotage by the opposition. Exemplary is the case of the great Messina Bridge project that would connect Sicily with the mainland, whose construction started in 2010 but was canceled by the pro-EU government of Mario Monti in 2012. The current Italian government, which includes Berlusconi's Forza Italia party, has resumed the project; groundbreaking should take place by July 2024.

Berlusconi also canceled the law that, in the aftermath of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster, had banned nuclear energy in Italy; he started procedures to build four new nuclear plants. This, again, was stopped by a popular referendum which rode the mass hysteria induced by the media over the 2011 Fukushima nuclear power plant accident.

Recently, when asked what he thought about the climate-crisis activist, Greta Thunberg, Berlusconi said that you could not pretend that billions of people on the planet, who longed for a better quality and dignity of life, should renounce their aspirations because of the so-called climate crisis.

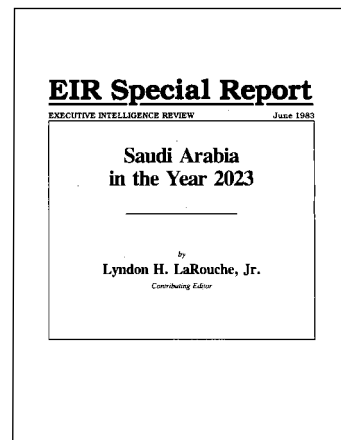
Berlusconi polarized public opinion. His economic policy had many flaws, mainly because of its free-

market preoccupation. But as flawed as his domestic policies could be, the opposition had nothing better to oppose them; on the contrary, the center-left recipes were much worse. His enemies attacked him, with help of Italy's judiciary, on the level of his private life and alleged corruption, and succeeded in banning him from the Senate in 2013. This helped reduce popular support for his Forza Italia, which went from an historic high of 25% to less than 10% in the 2022 general elections.

Half of Italy believes Silvio Berlusconi was the incarnation of the successful self-made man: from the largest developer in Italy, to the creator of commercial television; from the all-winner soccer club president, to the prime minister who stayed longest in office.

Italy's other half believes he incarnated the worst character flaws of the Italians and corrupted public morals and politics. Vladimir Putin's judgment was much different: that Berlusconi was "a real patriot," a figure of international stature, someone who defended the interests of his country.

History will judge.



Can a policy written 40 years ago, be so prescient, that it is still as visionary and path-breaking, as well as specific for what might be accomplished today? In "Saudi Arabia in the Year 2023," written by LaRouche in 1983, LaRouche anticipated the mind-set of China's

Global Civilization Initiative, as well China's recent successful diplomacy in Southwest Asia, based in a respect for the long arc of civilization, a concept utterly anathema to the mad members of today's U.S. State Department.

See the review by Gail G. Kay in *EIR*, Oct. 18, 1983, "[Saudi Arabia: a Generation beyond the Dark Ages](#)"

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