

Editorial

Eurasia in the World

The geopolitics of the Eurasian landmass are on the move. In this issue, we reprint the official foreign policy positions of China and Russia, which were published within days of each other in early spring 2023, when President Xi visited Moscow. Increasingly, China seems to be the senior partner in this relationship of states. This big change has unfolded gradually since the 1980s, when China and the Soviet Union began to move beyond their ideological rift. From 1979, Iran's departure from the western political camp reinforced the steady changes. Helena Cobban examines some of the practical consequences of these developments such as expanding rail networks and land-based supply routes.

Russia's war on Ukraine impacts Eurasia and geopolitical developments thereon. Russia made an historic mistake in invading Ukraine in February 2022. For more than two decades, Putin had patiently built constructive relations with the majority of the world's population. The BRICS formation brings together China and India, old foes, as well as strategic allies in South Africa and Brazil. Russia took the initiative in convening this forum, which musters considerable economic clout. The fifteenth BRICS summit will meet in South Africa later this year.

In September 2022, Indian Prime Minister Modi told Putin 'today's era is not an era of war'. At the same face-to-face gathering of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation, Putin acknowledged China's 'questions and concerns' over Ukraine. So it is that Putin's illegal and deadly aggression against Ukraine has begun to undo his patient work of more than two decades to build alliances across and beyond the Eurasian landmass.

Back in 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski saw the task confronting the United States thus:

'how America "manages" Eurasia is critical. Eurasia is the globe's largest continent and is geopolitically axial. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions...'

He summarised the task provocatively:

'The three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.'

Brzezinski took a particular interest in Ukraine, describing it as an 'important space on the Eurasian chessboard'. He identified Ukraine, alongside Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan in Eurasia, as 'deserving America's strongest geopolitical support' — 'the critical state' among 'key Eurasian geopolitical pivots' due to its proximity to Russia.

So the war in Ukraine continues, with no end yet in sight. NATO remains the United States' 'chosen instrument of influence in Europe', as Frank Blackaby of SIPRI described it in 1996 (see *Spokesman 151*). Some 27 years later, this alliance against Russia continues to grow, with erstwhile neutral Finland now enrolled as a member and formerly neutral Sweden also impatient to come under the US nuclear umbrella. Meanwhile, a new generation of hydrogen bombs is apparently being shipped to US bases in Europe where they will be 'shared' with selected NATO allies. Extensive construction is under way at the recipient air bases, as well as Lakenheath near Cambridge in eastern England.

Putin's patience has seemingly run short in the face of these increasing military threats. Yet more forbearance and constructive engagement are urgently needed if escalation, possibly to nuclear exchanges, is to be avoided in and around Ukraine.

On 26 September 2022, three of the four Nordstream gas pipelines under the Baltic Sea, which run from Russia to Germany, were blown up. Counterintuitively at the time, it was put about that Russia was responsible. Why? It had no reason. Now Seymour Hersh has gone to press with how the US began planning to mine the pipelines before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The US government says Hersh's story is 'utterly false and complete fiction'. Nevertheless, the pipelines were destroyed and who benefited? Indeed, on 21 September 2022, Russia had mobilised military reservists having formally annexed four regions of Ukraine (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia).

What would Bertrand Russell make of current developments?

He would certainly be alarmed that Russia's war with Ukraine has been allowed to continue for a year without meaningful or effective attempts to bring about a lasting ceasefire. More positively, Russell would likely be supportive of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which was eventually adopted at the United Nations in New York in 2017. It was the

product of decades of work, mainly by neutral and non-aligned countries such as Austria, Ireland, Mexico and New Zealand, and organizations such as the International Red Cross, which highlighted the catastrophic and unmanageable impacts of the use of nuclear weapons. Brazil and South Africa, two non-nuclear members of the BRICS formation, are amongst the 95 signatories to the Treaty, as is Kazakhstan, which in its Article Two declaration under the Treaty highlights the relevance of the Semipalatinsk Treaty on a nuclear-weapons-free-zone in Central Asia. The Soviet Union conducted some 460 nuclear explosions at the Semipalatinsk test sites. The local Kazakh population has to live with the aftermath of radioactivity and environmental degradation. Compensation for these victims of nuclear testing comes within the compass of the TPNW.

In 2018, the Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council, China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and United States, issued a joint statement about the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Concerning the latter, they said 'it will not result in the elimination of a single weapon'. This was a rare display of common purpose, regrettably with destructive intent.

Russell would have been familiar with such cant. He would surely have related more positively to the high hopes and aspirations of those who champion the prohibition of nuclear weapons, whilst remaining sceptical and clear-sighted about the prospects for persuading the nuclear-armed states to give up their means of threatening mass death.

Tony Simpson