

Editorial

One Belt, One Road

The world changes, although we are not told much about it. Ships of the Chinese Navy are said to be in the eastern Mediterranean, not far from the coast of Syria, but disinformation abounds about exactly which ones. The *UK Defence Journal* asserts, ungrammatically, that ‘China Have NOT Sent An Aircraft Carrier to Syria’ (5 October 2015). Surely, it would be hard to mistake such a ship? As yet, China has one aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, which was originally built for the Soviet Navy in the 1980s.

But there are probably other Chinese ships, alongside Russian ones, in the eastern Mediterranean. Certainly, the Chinese and Russian militaries have conducted joint exercises for some time now. In May, Chinese and Indian soldiers marched in the Victory Day Parade in Moscow, watched by Presidents Xi Jinping and Pranab Mukherjee. Western leaders largely boycotted the occasion to mark the 70th anniversary of the Soviet Union’s part in the victory over Nazi Germany, although Chancellor Merkel broke ranks, somewhat belatedly, and joined President Putin in Moscow to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. A few months later, in September, President Putin went to Beijing to attend another large military parade marking the end of the Second World War in the Pacific and China’s defeat of Japan. Again, the West largely stayed away, although Czech President Milos Zeman attended, as did Jacob Zuma of South Africa, and President Park Guen-hye of South Korea.

Unappealing as such military ceremonials are, with their highly polished displays of might, they point to an emerging military reality in the world. Notwithstanding its claims to ‘Full Spectrum Dominance’ and ‘AirSea Battle’, the United States finds its outright military supremacy contested. The US may still spend far more on military violence than any other country, but its scope for acting unimpeded reduces. In recent weeks, the tragedy of Syria has highlighted this change, with Russian aircraft bombing extensively, supplemented by cruise missile strikes launched from Russian ships in the distant Caspian Sea. These missiles flew thousands of kilometres across Iran and Iraq, changing direction numerous times, to reach their targets.

If global military developments are increasingly confrontational, they have an interesting economic and cultural counterpart in the geopolitics of the Eurasian landmass. ‘One Belt, One Road’, sometimes described as the ‘New Silk Road’, is China’s development strategy focusing on connections and co-operation among countries mainly in Eurasia. An audacious long-term project, it comprises the land-based ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’,

invoking old trade routes through Asia, including Iran, to Europe, and the oceangoing 'Maritime Silk Road' linking Indonesia, India, East Africa and Europe via the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal. The maps differ, but always include a lengthy branch line northwards to Moscow.

In this context, as but one example, we can interpret China's interest in the substantial port of Pireaus in Greece as part of the Maritime Silk Road. More surprising, perhaps, is the pitch made this September by British Chancellor, George Osborne, to interest the Chinese in financing and building high speed rail networks in England's so-called 'Northern Powerhouse', as well as reviving the United Kingdom's declining nuclear power programme. (Post-Fukushima, as much of the world recognises, nuclear is NOT the way to go.) As yet, the British Isles are peripheral to 'One Belt, One Road' and beyond its reach on most of the illustrative maps. But Chancellor Osborne has been quick to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which China has established to finance projects advancing the goals of 'One Belt, One Road'. New and improved railways will link the many countries that stretch across the Eurasian landmass. Who better to build them than the Chinese, whose network of high speed trains runs smoothly at 300 km per hour?

Of course, these developments will not have gone unnoticed by the world's hegemon. In response, the United States actively encourages Japan to jettison its solemn constitutional commitment that

'the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.'

Prime Minister Abe's moves to do so this year have generated great unrest in Japan itself. They have also sparked heightened concern in China, where there is enduring suspicion of Japan's intentions, borne of much painful experience. In addition, the US challenges China's claims to islands in the East and South China Seas which, it alleges, threaten international trade routes. Yet China thrives on such seaborne trade, which is at the heart of its 'Maritime Road' component of 'One Belt, One Road'.

Of course, there are always alternative options, and plans may be varied as developments proceed. But 'One Belt, One Road' sets clear direction for geopolitical developments across much of Eurasia over the medium to long term. In that context, it is perhaps encouraging that Bertrand Russell's lifelong struggle for peace, human rights and the advancement of civilisation continues to find a sympathetic and interested audience in contemporary China. We relate something of his encounter with China, and his enduring influence there, in this issue of *The Spokesman*.