

La importancia de los corredores terrestres (III): El Intermarum

Resumen:

Entre los mares Báltico y Caspio se puede recorrer, por vía terrestre, una ruta que pone en comunicación a una serie de Estados euroasiáticos periféricos de Rusia. Más allá del Caspio se abren las tierras del Asia Central, donde también convergen los intereses de China. A lo largo del tiempo los pequeños pueblos de Eurasia han luchado por su independencia, destacando el ideal del prometeísmo, que pudiera ser un ejemplo válido en el S. XXI. En consonancia con esta teoría se encuentra el modelo de conectividad de la Unión Europea, que busca la prosperidad y los valores democráticos para el corazón de Eurasia. Las tendencias geopolíticas de las principales potencias y las potencias regionales euroasiáticas están marcando una senda de conflictos, de cuya resolución se determinará el orden mundial de la próxima era.

Palabras clave:

Conectividad, Prometeísmo, Miedzymorze, Intermarum, Eurasia

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Introduction

The isthmus linking Europe to the rest of the Eurasian continent can be easily traversed from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea along several land routes, one of the main ones being between the Polish port of Gdańsk and the Romanian port of Constanta or the Bulgarian port of Burgas. Although the Black Sea is a connecting space, the Georgian city of Batumi can be reached by land across the Bosphorus from Istanbul. From there, the Caucasian corridor opens up to Baku on the shores of the Caspian Sea. This Sea is once again an area of relations, which enters the heart of Central Asia with a constant flow of goods and energy products.

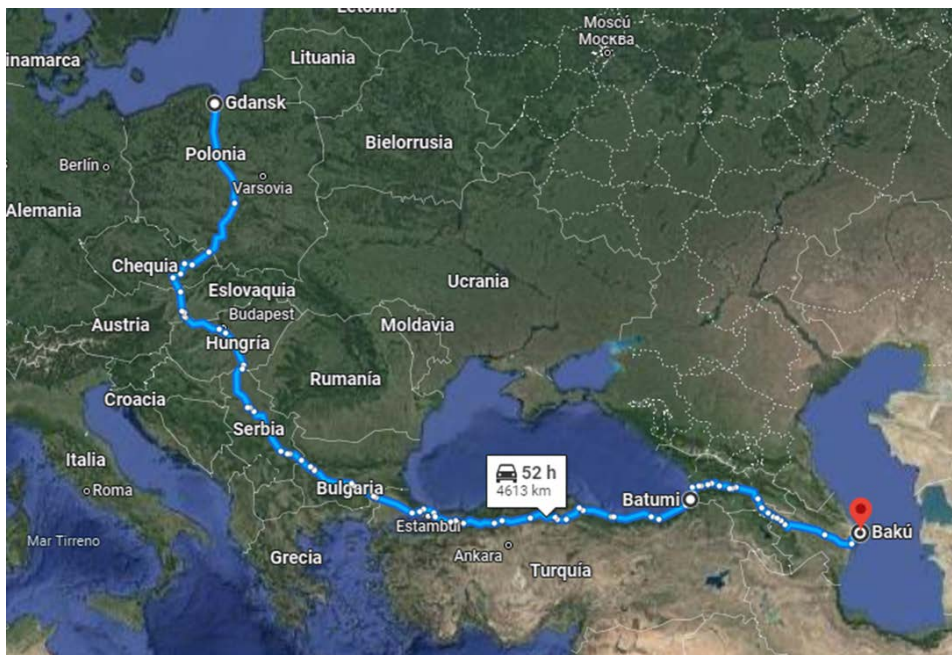


Figure 1: land connection between the Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas. Source: prepared internally from Google Maps.

In this region, there is a geopolitical tendency to create a 'buffer zone' between the expanding areas of Western Europe and Russia. This zone became a reality in the early 20th century, extending as far as the Caucasus and creating a geopolitical current that coined a new term Prometheanism. Similar initiatives were launched at the beginning of the 21st century, which in the second decade have resulted in Russia, the actor occupying

the middle space of the great Eurasian continent, reacting to what it sees as harassment of its immediate periphery¹.

During this almost first quarter of a century, Russian perceptions have led to a series of conflicts throughout the space around it, most notably in Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Kazakhstan. In early 2022, the spectre of armed conflict once again hit the territory of Ukraine with unprecedented severity, creating a scenario of confrontation not seen in Europe since the end of World War II (WWII).

The geopolitical problem of this century is the situation posed by its two largest geopolitically active players, Russia and China, as they collude in the Eurasian continent by exerting pressure on its middle and eastern spaces. A major player in the southern part of the great continent has been added to this collusion, namely Iran². Moreover, Iranian territory is a geopolitical pivot as it straddles the world's two main resource regions and is a gateway for Russia's North-South and China's East-West communications.

One possible solution from a Western perspective may be to seek control of actors in the Central and East Eurasian region through a containment strategy. It should be noted, however, that while this strategy was successful during the long Cold War period, it has not been so successful in the so-called War on Terror.

Another possible option could be to regain the independence of states on Russia's periphery that reach into the heart of Central Asia. Extending this idea would coincide for the Central Asian region with the European Union's (EU) concept of connectivity, in which an alliance of Central Asian peoples would function as one against the extractive tendencies of the Chinese and Russians.

¹ One of these dynamics was the Three Seas Initiative, which seeks to interconnect the Eastern European countries located between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas. For further information, we suggest reading Méndez Pérez, Óscar. 'La Iniciativa de los Tres Mares: configuración y consecuencias geopolíticas mundiales.' IEEE Opinion Paper 48/2021. http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2021/DIEEEO48_2021_OSCMEN_Tresmares.pdf (accessed 10/10/2022)

² The term collusion will be used in this paper in the same sense as determined by Zbigniew Brzezinski, as an association between two or more actors against the interests of a third party.

Birth of the concept of Prometheanism

Polish term *Miedzymorze* is comparable to the Latin *intermarum* which, meaning 'land between the seas', has been used to refer to a traditional alliance of the nations between the Black, Baltic and Adriatic Seas against Russia. Many of these territories once belonged to the community led by the Polish-Lithuanian crown, which ruled from 1569 to 1791 until its partition between the Russian, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian empires³. This large territory made it possible to establish a 'buffer zone', which would avoid traditional Russian-German disputes at the expense of the Poles.

The concept of *Miedzymorze* was first put forward in 1904 by Jozef Pilsudski, a prominent member of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) with noble roots. Educated under Russification policies, he was brought up to resent Russia and to fight for Polish independence, considering non-Russian nationalities under the Tsarist empire as his main allies. Given its strong nationalist character and fierce opposition to Russia, the PSP was in opposition to the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP) party. The latter, founded among others by Rosa Luxemburg, had more affinity with its Russian counterparts⁴. The paramilitary wing of the PPS would soon form a militia under Pilsudski's leadership, eventually becoming a regular force after training at the military academy in Krakow and fighting Russia alongside the Triple Alliance⁵.

In the same year, Pilsudski wrote a letter to the Japanese government in which he emphasised the importance of nations close to Russia in the fight against the country. Textually the document stressed that, "this strength of Poland and its importance for a part of the nations in the Russian state give us the courage to set the political goal of destroying the Russian state into its component parts and [granting] independence to the countries that were placed by force in the [Russian] Empire"⁶. In this sense, this definition

³ Butterwick-Pawlikowski, Richard. *The Constitution of 3 May 1791: Testament of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*. Polish History Museum, 2021. pp. 97-100.

⁴ Moćkun, Sławomir. 'Józef Piłsudski's Exile, Imprisonment, Missions and Peregrinations all Over the World', *The Warsaw Institute Review*, 5 May 2021. <https://warsawinstitute.org/jozef-pilsudskis-exile-imprisonment-missions-peregrinations-world/> (accessed 09/10/2022).

⁵ Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski. 'The Ukrainian Case During The Polish-Bolshevik War of 1919-1921'. Polish History Museum in Warsaw. <https://polishhistory.pl/the-ukrainian-case-during-the-polish-bolshevik-war-of-1919-1921/> (accessed 08/10/2022).

⁶ Weiss, Clara. 'The Strategy of the Intermarium-Part 1'. World Socialist Web Site, 31 May 2016. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/05/31/pil1-m31.html> (accessed 08/10/2022)

would coincide with those peoples who, without belonging to Russia, link the Baltic Sea with the Caspian Sea, entering the heart of Central Asia.

Pilsudski's idea was to be embodied by one of his closest collaborators, Edmund Charaszkiwicz, who under the term 'Prometheanism', developed an entire ideology to counter first Russian and then Soviet imperialism. This was to be done by encouraging and subsequently supporting the independence of non-Russian peoples living under Russian rule, both in Eastern Europe and in adjacent territories such as the Caucasus and Central Asia. The initiative became so successful that the *Promethean Society of Russian Subjugated Nations* was created. This name was made to evoke the titan Prometheus, who stole the fire of Olympus from the gods in order to give it to men⁷.

In geopolitical terms, the theories of Pilsudski and Charaszkiwicz provided a solution to the problem enunciated in 1904 by geographer Harold Mackinder, who, from a British maritime perspective, observed how the tsarist empire was seeking global hegemony. Their approach was based on Russia exerting control over the greater Eurasian continent from a central position, by imposing itself over Eastern Europe and the heart of Eurasia. According to Mackinder, whoever achieved this dominance would in turn be able to dominate the world⁸.

The Poles regained their independence when Russia, constrained by its revolution, withdrew from World War I in 1918 by signing the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty. They were soon threatened again, this time by the Soviets, who would not stop until Pilsudski himself stopped them at the gates of Warsaw in 1920. In 1939, following the agreements between the Soviets and the Germans in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Poland was unable to withstand the pressure and was divided between the two. In 1940, the USSR annexed the Baltic republics and the Romanian territories of Bessarabia and Bukovina, whose Russian-speaking areas it incorporated into Ukraine.

The total occupation by Nazi Germany and the Soviet conquest at the end of World War II left all the territory between the seas within the Soviet Union or under its orbit. The

⁷ Targalski, Jerzy. 'Ruch Prometejski/The Promethean Movement' 04.04.2011 <https://jozefdarski.pl/6674-ruch-prometejski> (accessed 08/10/2022)

⁸ Mackinder, Halford J. 'The geographical pivot of history (1904)'. *The Geographical Journal*, 2004, vol. 170, issue 4, pp. 298-321.

subsequent demise of the USSR led to revivalist movements in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, with many nations regaining their independence and the emergence of state entities that sometimes did not correspond to the nationalities they were home to.



Figure 2: Consolidation of Prometheism after the demise of the Soviet Union. Source: Prepared internally from: Petersen, Alexandros. *The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West*. ABC-CLIO, 2011. p. 75.

Fleeing Russian oppression by returning to conflict.

In a way, Pilsudski's dream was realised when 2004 saw the further enlargement of the EU to include the Baltic republics and several Central and Eastern European states. Romania and Bulgaria subsequently joined in 2007⁹.

At the same time, countries in the region fled Russian influence by seeking refuge in the Atlantic Alliance. The first accessions took place in 1999 with the Visegrád Group

⁹ Official Web of the European Union. 'History of the European Union 2000-09'. https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/2000-09_es (accessed 09/10/2022)

countries, consisting of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic¹⁰. Although Russia accepted it, the new situation was not without criticism from President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Primakov.

The Vilnius Group countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) joined NATO in 2004. The situation was particularly unpleasant for Russia, but President Putin faced domestic problems that prevented him from taking further action¹¹. However, the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine alerted him to a possible change of direction in an area where he could not lose his influence.

In 2008, during the Alliance Bucharest summit, both Ukraine and Georgia announced their application for membership. The Russians perceived that power was slipping from their grasp in the European and Caucasian space, so they decided to act. Following unrest in the Georgian region of South Ossetia, Russia launched a military operation in support of the separatist Ossetian and Abkhazian minorities, resulting in their de facto independence. One of the main conclusions drawn was that President Putin was ready to start a war to force a country to yield if he considered it within his area of influence¹².

President Putin's determination was clearly demonstrated in 2014 during the Euromaidan crisis in Ukraine. The cancellation of several agreements with the EU triggered numerous demonstrators to take to the streets of Kiev, leading to the fall of President Yanukovich. Subsequently, the more EU-friendly Petro Poroshenko was elected. The crisis saw Russian annexation of Crimea and the proclamation of the republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, where the pro-Russian population was supported from across the border¹³.

Nikol Pashinian's rise to power in Armenia in 2018, following the so-called 'Velvet Revolution', set off alarm bells in Russia. It would have to do something if it did not want to lose its influence in the Caucasus, so the revival of the conflict between Armenia and

¹⁰ Csavajda, Edit; Derski, Bartłomiej. 'V4 Countries in context of EU and NATO Security Policy'. Spraw Zagranicznych Portal, 8 July 2010. <https://psz.pl/168-archiwum/v4-countries-in-context-of-eu-and-nato-security-policy> (accessed 09/10/2022)

¹¹ Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). 'NATO Enlargement — A Case Study'. 15 May 2017. <https://medium.com/center-for-strategic-and-international-studies/nato-enlargement-a-case-study-c380545dd38d> (accessed 09/10/2022)

¹² Dickinson, Peter. 'The 2008 Russo-Georgian War: Putin's green light'. Atlantic Council, 7 August 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-2008-russo-georgian-war-putins-green-light/> (accessed 09/10/2022)

¹³ Poyatos, Pedro G. 'Los seis momentos clave de la crisis entre Ucrania y Rusia'. *La Razón*, 24-02-2022. <https://www.larazon.es/internacional/20220226/2kdl5nivbfgxzdluv5vp6l2jhu.html> (accessed 09/10/2022)

Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 was the occasion to intervene. The Armenians lost part of their territories to the Azeris, who, supported by Turkey, demonstrated their military capabilities. Russian interposition forces restored the balance in the region, blurring the clear victory of Azerbaijan and the resounding defeat of Armenia, which learned its lesson for wanting to break away from Russia's orbit¹⁴.

Also in 2020, unrest broke out in Belarus, with popular protests over possible fraud during the election that had put President Lukashenko in power. Following the repression of what he described as a Western-instigated 'colour revolution', he reasserted himself in power. Lukashenko may have been supported by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS) in view of the statements of its head, Sergei Naryshkin, who claimed that Washington financed and encouraged the protests¹⁵.

In early 2022, the situation became particularly tense in Kazakhstan after protests spread across the country as a result of the end of the price cap on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) for automobiles. In this oil- and uranium-rich country, the pro-Russian ruling elites had not carried out all the democratic reforms expected and the disenchantment of a section of the population was more than evident. Other power groups who yearned for a change of course would take advantage this scenario. The government restored the situation after dispatching a Russian contingent under the authority of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)¹⁶. The restoration of order with Russian troops again made clear President Putin's determination to maintain his influence in Russia's immediate periphery and undid the discourse of balanced multilateral politics that was beginning to catch on among Kazakh elites¹⁷.

In parallel to the Kazakh crisis, a more intense crisis was unfolding in Ukraine. From late 2021 to early 2022 a large number of Russian troops had been concentrated in the vicinity

¹⁴ Castro Torres, José Ignacio. 'Nagorno Karabaj: un nudo gordiano en mitad del Cáucaso'. IEEE Analysis Document 34/2020. http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2020/DIEEEA34_2020JOSCAS_Nagorno.pdf (accessed 09/10/2022)

¹⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. 'Lukashenka Accuses West Of Trying To "Destroy" Belarus With Another "Color Revolution"'. 16 September 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/lukashenka-accuses-west-of-trying-to-destroy-belarus-with-another-color-revolution-/30842510.html> (accessed 09/10/2022)

¹⁶ BBC News. 'Kazakhstan: Why are there riots and why are Russian troops there?'. 10 January 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-59894266> (accessed 09/10/2022)

¹⁷ Balci, Bayram. 'Popular protests in Kazakhstan: a new victory for Putin's political agenda?'. Sciencespro 03/02/2022. <https://www.sciencespo.fr/cei/en/content/popular-protests-kazakhstan-new-victory-putins-political-agenda> (accessed 09/10/2022)

of Ukraine's borders with Russia and Belarus, under the guise of large military exercises. Russia made a number of demands on NATO during this period, seeking assurances that the Alliance would not conduct operations in Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and that both sides would not place short- and medium-range missiles within a range that could reach both Allied and Russian territories. The Russians also demanded guarantees that NATO would not expand again and it would withdraw its forces behind the 1997 borders of NATO countries. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov subsequently declared that he had received no reply and that his patience was running out¹⁸.

At the end of February 2022, Russian troops invaded Ukrainian territory. While the intervention profile began in a similar way to past Russian operations abroad, the execution was complicated, failing to conquer the potential strategic objective of Kiev through a change of government¹⁹. Today the armed conflict continues in the form of a war of attrition, against the background of nuclear weapons.

Despite Russia's reliance on Kazakh support, this has not materialised. Perhaps this is because the proliferation of conflicts on Russia's periphery marks a turning point, necessary for Kazakhstan to go its own way. President Tokayev has adhered to Western sanctions against Russia and this summer, at the Saint Petersburg economic forum, declared that he would not recognise the Donetsk and Lugansk republics. Moreover, Kazakhstan has sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine and does not allow pro-war Russian proselytising in its country. It remains to be seen what measures will be taken by Russia, which has control over the shipment of Kazakh gas through its territory and is the main supplier of foodstuffs to Kazakhstan²⁰.

¹⁸ Haltiwanger, John. 'Russia warns it's 'run out of patience' while doubling down on demands the US and NATO have said they won't accept'. Business Insider, 14 Jan 2022. <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-warns-its-run-out-of-patience-with-the-west-amid-fears-of-ukraine-invasion-2022-1> (accessed 09/10/2022)

¹⁹ Burns, Robert. 'Russia's failure to take down Kyiv was a defeat for the ages', AP News, 7 April 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-battle-for-kyiv-dc559574ce9f6683668fa221af2d5340> (accessed 09/10/2022)

²⁰ Umarov, Temur. 'After Ukraine, Is Kazakhstan Next in the Kremlin's Sights?'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 10.08.2022. [After Ukraine, Is Kazakhstan Next in the Kremlin's Sights? - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](https://www.carnegieendowment.org/2022/08/10/after-ukraine-is-kazakhstan-next-in-the-kremlins-sights/) (accessed 10/01/2022)

The approach to the geopolitical problem of the 21st century

Polish-born author Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former adviser to US President Jimmy Carter, predicted the problem facing the West in the 21st century, just as Mackinder did in the 20th century. Brzezinski argued that the US would maintain its primacy in the world as long as it was able to be the dominant player in Eurasia. This condition would be good for the US and international peace, but in the event of the emergence of a successful global rival, stability would be shaken and anarchy would ensue.

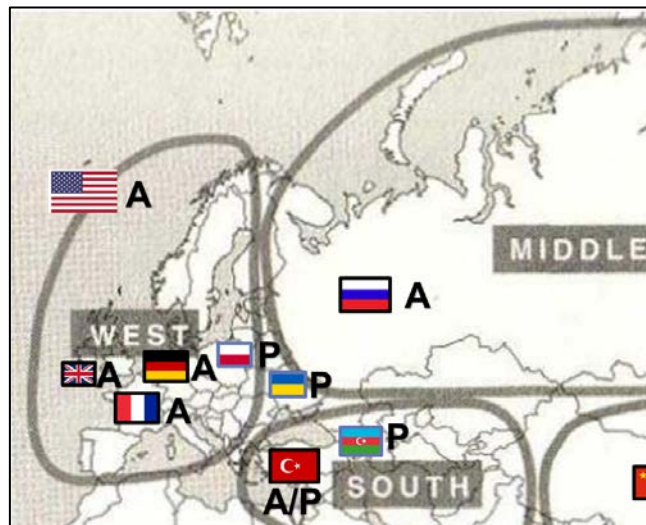


Figure 3: Geopolitical actors (A) and pivots (P) in the *intermarum*. Source: Prepared internally from: Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *The Grand Chessboard*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. p. 17.

According to Brzezinski, the Eurasian continent was a large chessboard stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, providing the space for the game²¹. US prevalence would be achieved if the middle space is drawn into the Western orbit, where Americans are preponderant. Moreover, the southern region should not be controlled by a single player and the east should not be united in a way that would lead to the expulsion of US maritime bases in the Pacific. Conversely, US prevalence would be critically reduced if the middle space rejected the West, becoming a unitary revisionist entity gaining control over the south. Another critical situation would be an alliance between the middle space and the eastern space. This would also include the rejection of the United States by its Western partners, which would mean the end of the game on the continent for the Americans, but also the subordination of Western Europe to the middle space²².

²¹ Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *The Grand Chessboard*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. p. 35.

²²Op. cit. pp. 54-56.

On this grand chessboard there would be geopolitically active actors with the capacity to exert their power and influence over others, and geopolitical pivots, made up of those which, due to their position, could be used as defensive glacis or that contain wealth. Close to the *Intermarum* space, the US, Russia, France, Germany and to a lesser extent the UK can be considered active players²³.

The current position determines Ukraine as a pivot as its independence would transform Russia's situation on the board. Should Ukraine fall under Moscow's orbit, Russia would equip itself to become the great Eurasian empire, controlling access to the Black Sea and Central Europe, and gaining a large population and significant resources of all kinds. If the Ukrainians were to break away from Russia, it could no longer be a Eurasian empire, becoming an exclusively Asian power. This would bring it into confrontation with the Central Asian states and possibly China, which would oppose the return of Russia's dominance over the heartland²⁴.

Poland's situation would be very delicate because, in the event of Ukraine falling into Russia's orbit, it would become the pivot separating Russia from the European Union. Azerbaijan would be another important pivot, as it is the 'stopper' of the great bottle of energy resources that opens up from Baku over the Caspian and Central Asia²⁵.

Turkey is shaped by the land bridge of the Anatolian peninsula and depending on how it behaves in the international arena, it could act either as an actor or a pivot. The Turkish position can provide stability over the Black Sea, balance Russian influence in the Caucasus, defuse tensions in the Balkans and facilitate Russia's extension into the Central Asian states²⁶.

From this starting point we have experienced the passing of the century in Eurasia, watching the expansion of Russia and China. The former has so far controlled events in its immediate periphery, resolving conflicts in Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Central Asia in its favour. The latter has established itself as the global economic power and aspires to extend its military power beyond the first chain of islands

²³ Op. cit. pp. 40-43.

²⁴Op. cit. p. 46.

²⁵Op. cit. p. 46.

²⁶Op. cit. p. 47.

close to its shores. If it managed to break this chain, centred on Taiwan, it would gain access to the free waters that would allow it hegemony over the maritime spaces close to its mainland.

While some may think Russians and Chinese are geopolitically competitive actors, common interests vis-à-vis the Western world mean that geopolitical trends are shifting in favour of an alliance of convenience. This can be seen in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), in a collusion of interests in which China is the organisation's driving force, followed more cautiously by Russia. This is partly logical if one considers that the Chinese have everything to gain in Central Asia, while the Russians have everything to lose. In this context, apart from other considerations, the supply of energy resources to China and Russia's control over them is a crucial aspect of relations²⁷.

The organisation has recently strengthened itself regarding the West by approving the inclusion of Iran, another pivotal state that has become a geopolitically active actor. The Iranian situation is a crossroads because it possesses significant energy resources and is sandwiched between the world's two most important oil and gas basins²⁸.

For the Russians and Chinese, Iran's accession is not just about bringing in a new anti-Western-oriented member. The Iranians will guarantee them the use of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the possibility of an outlet to the sea, where the port of Chabahar is a direct gateway to the free waters of the Indian Ocean²⁹.

Pilsudski vs Keenan. Connectivity versus containment

The approach to the geopolitical problem of collusion between middle (Russia), eastern (China) and southern space (Iran) powers entail two possible solutions. The first would be, in the style of the past Cold War, to seek containment of the Eurasian mass by controlling an outer ring of land and sea to prevent the spread of continental power. The

²⁷ Petersen, Alexandros. *The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West*. ABC-CLIO, 2011. pp. 95-96.

²⁸ KAPLAN, Robert. 'La venganza de la geografía'. *Barcelona, RBA*, 2013. p. 331.

²⁹ Singh, Manjari. 'Iran's Membership to the SCO and what it entails?' The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), 15 September 2022. [Iran's Membership to the SCO and what it entails? - Center For Land Warfare Studies \(CLAWS\)](#) (accessed 10/10/2022)

second solution would be to seek geopolitical penetration through the gap between the Eurasian inland seas and into Central Asia.

Ahead of his time, Nicholas Spykman redefined Mackinder's geopolitical spaces, emphasising the importance of the outer ring containing the heartland and its maritime periphery³⁰. Based on this theory, the first of the solutions could be put forward. Even if this once worked in the long term, it remains to be seen how effective it is today, given the disaffection of some states in this peripheral region.

George Keenan's theory of containment was derived from Spykman's postulates. He advocated the construction of a barrier to contain USSR expansionism on the European continent and in the Asian region of the Pacific Ocean. The results of this policy of containment have served the Americans and their allies well until the era of the 'war on terror', which has lasted for the first two decades of this century. They were hindering the spread of terrorism along Keenan's lines, not only by military means, but also by cultural, economic or political means. The strategy was to attract countries affected by the conflict by offering them the possibility of reconstruction. Such were the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan, which have aroused so much controversy³¹.

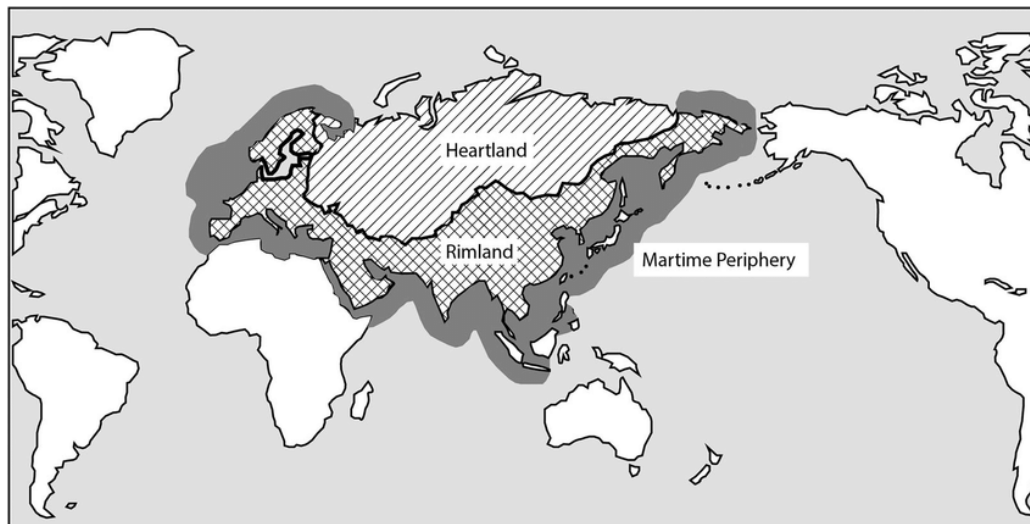


Figure 4. Spykman's interpretation of Mackinder's island-world. Source: Mitchell, Martin D. 'Using the principles of Halford J. Mackinder and Nicholas John Spykman to re-evaluate a twenty-first-century geopolitical framework for the United States'. *Comparative Strategy*, 2020, vol. 39, issue. 5, p. 412.

³⁰ Spykman, Nicholas John. *The Geography of the Peace*. Harcourt, Brace, 1944. pp. 53-58.

³¹ Parente Rodríguez, Gonzalo. 'George F. Kennan y su modelo estratégico'. *Boletín de Información*, issue 289. 2005. pp.4-7.

Spykman's model may be valid for the second quarter of the century if one takes into account that, although the morphology of the so-called heartland remains intact for inland Eurasia, it has pivoted towards the far east, resulting in China's pre-eminence on the continent. In this scenario, the Americans and their allies should avoid both aligning with the Eurasian great powers and becoming embroiled in protracted ground wars that occupy their forces for too long³².

It seems that this model, in line with the Obama 'pivot to the Pacific' doctrine, has not yielded all the expected results because it is not completely resolute, as it does not intervene directly at the root of the problem. Other geopolitical models have thus come to the fore, presenting a different perspective and offering a different solution.

One possible option would be the so-called '3I model' (independence, integration and institutions). Independence has its historical roots in Prometheanism, which in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan has been a source of inspiration since the days of Soviet rule. On the other side of the Caspian, it seems that this flame could be ignited before Russia's loss of influence is transmuted into China's. One way to promote the independence of Eurasian states would be for them to equip themselves with effective armed forces, ruling out direct Western intervention³³. A second step would be integration, which could be achieved by promoting communication routes, facilitating transcontinental trade. In parallel with the previous stage, a plan should be put in place to promote Western institutions and values, without having to consider why the values inherited from the Soviet era should be maintained and why new values from China should be introduced. Respect for democracy, human rights and individual freedoms are principles on which the West should base its international policy. However, the spread of democracy is a slow process that must go hand-in-hand with trade and good governance³⁴.

The *3I Model* would fit very well, at least in its last two facets, with the EU's concept of *Connectivity* for Central Asia, which would comprise much more than just connecting

³² Mitchell, Martin D. 'Using the principles of Halford J. Mackinder and Nicholas John Spykman to re-evaluate a twenty-first-century geopolitical framework for the United States'. *Comparative Strategy*, 2020, vol. 39, issue. 5, p. 412.

³³ Petersen, Alexandros. *The World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West*. Op. cit. pp. 119-121.

³⁴ Op. cit. pp. 133 and 140.

territories. In the words of Ms Mogherini, former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, connectivity includes "physical and non-physical infrastructures through which goods, services, ideas and people can flow unhindered"³⁵. Such a term would cover the establishment of enabling elements with the non-material characteristics of long-distance communications. Customs and transit procedures, legislative frameworks and agreements, and unifying technical agreements would therefore be of paramount importance³⁶.

Conclusions

The 21st century poses new problems in which old geopolitical theories can be accommodated if they are modified to fit with the changing times. In this respect, Russia's situation has evolved since the Soviet era to a position of lacking economic, industrial and military potential, which it is trying to make up for through rudeness and ruthlessness. In this context, China has developed in parallel into a major power, which coincides with Russia in a more authoritarian and commercial model for the new world order. In these circumstances it is logical that the two have conspired to join in an alliance of convenience, of which the SCO is a clear exponent.

None of these major players is interested in engaging with an alliance or association of countries that can negotiate with them from a position of strength. This has led to animosity towards organisations such as NATO or the EU, or to the failure to form an organisation in which Central Asian countries can relate to each other in a common framework of exclusivity. In the case of direct relations between major Eurasian powers and smaller states, these would be conducted from a position of superiority, with the major powers always having the upper hand.

The connection of convenience between China and Russia could result in sharing spheres of influence in the lands of Central Asia, the very heart of the Eurasian continent. This could lead to disaffection from Western influence and a further marginalisation of

³⁵ Delegation of the European Union to Afghanistan. 'Connecting Europe and Asia: time to move up a gear'. 20 September 2018. https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kazakhstan/50900/connecting-europe-and-asia-time-move-gear_en (accessed 09/02/2022).

³⁶ Russell, Martin. 'Connectivity in Central Asia. Reconnecting the Silk Road'. *European Parliamentary Research Service*. April, 2019. p. 2.

Europe in the projection of its values around the world. Equally, other states might choose to join this approach, upsetting the balance of power in Eurasia, as might be the case with Iran or could be the case with India or Turkey.

In the face of this, there may be possible options for the Western world. The first would be reactive, seeking to contain the new Eurasian heartland through a ring of alliances on the land and maritime periphery. Another possible approach could be to try to influence the peoples of the land belt linking the Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas to delve deeper into Central Asia. The independence of this vast region could thus spread values that promote democracy, free trade and respect for human rights.

It is clear that we are at a historic moment of collision between strong geopolitical currents. The outcome of the confrontation between them will determine the future of the new global order.

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