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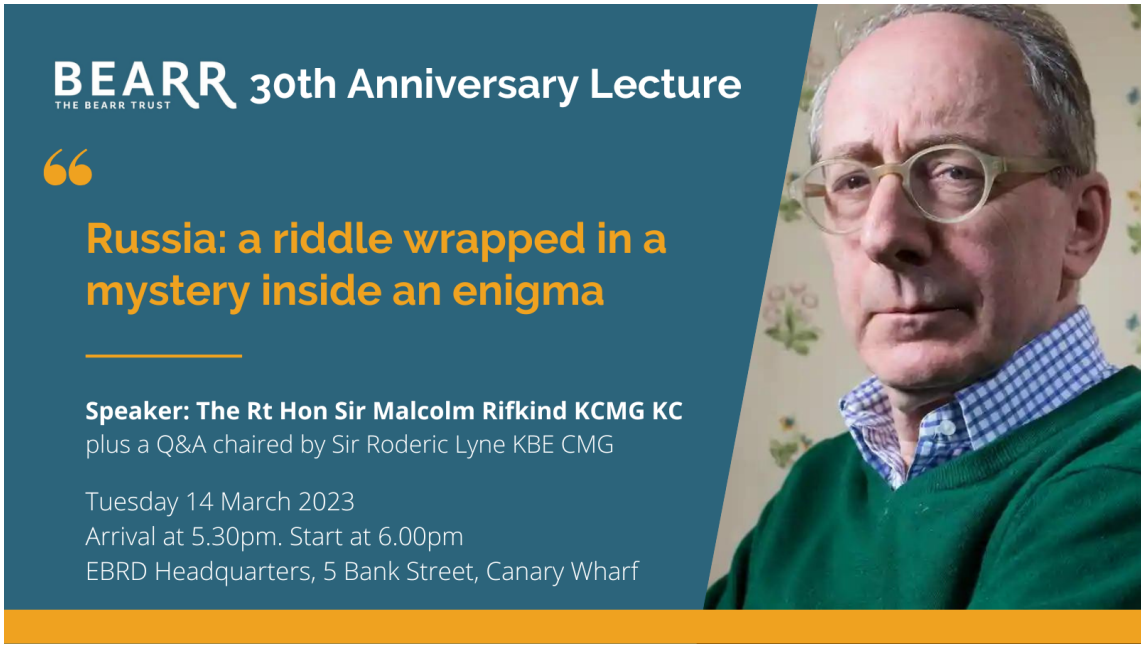
Supporting vulnerable people in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia



Sir Malcolm Rifkind's stellar political career since he was first elected as an MP in 1974 has been marked by a passionate interest in the UK's relations with Eastern Europe. As a junior minister at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office in 1982 he advocated restoring dialogue with the Soviet Union and he was present at the historic meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher at her Chequers 'dacha' in 1984.

When Sir Malcolm became Secretary of State for Defence in 1992, one of his first overseas visits was to Kyiv, capital of the newly independent Ukraine. He wrote in 1994 that "Russia without Ukraine … is not and is unlikely again to become a global superpower" and noted that the truncated borders of the collapsed Soviet Union would "severely limit the options of any future aggressive government." His observation that the Soviet Union was effectively a continuation of the former Russian Empire foreshadowed current interpretations of Russia's foreign policy under Putin.

In 2014 Sir Malcolm strongly criticised Russia's occupation of Crimea and aggressive destabilisation of parts of eastern Ukraine. He also called for tougher sanctions by western nations. When this led to him being banned from Russia, he responded that "If there had to be a list of people banned by Putin, I am proud to be one of them."

As well as serving as Foreign Secretary from 1995 to 1997, Sir Malcolm chaired the Intelligence and Security Committee, overseeing the work of GCHQ, MI5 and MI6 from 2010 to 2015. In 2014 Sir Malcolm was appointed to the OSCE Eminent Persons Panel on relations between the West and Russia.

Since retiring from Parliament in 2015 Sir Malcolm has become Visiting Professor in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London and Distinguished Fellow at RUSI (Royal United Services Institute). In 2016 he published his memoirs, 'Power and Pragmatism'.