REGIONAL STUDIES

# POLITICAL SCIENCE ON CENTRAL ASIA: 2012-2013

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**ABSTRACT**

*The interest of political science in Central Asia has not subsided: the academic community is paying close attention to the ways new national identities are being shaped in individual countries and to the geopolitical processes underway in the region as a whole, as well as to the results being presented in academic periodicals and exhaustive fundamental publications. Political scientists have noticed that despite certain common features, the local political regimes differ greatly from country to country. All the Central Asian states, those bordering on Afghanistan in particular, are very concerned about the rapidly approaching American pullout and the country's possible destabilization.*

**KEYWORDS:** ***Central Asia, political science, historiography, geopolitics, Islam, security, migration.***

## *Introduction*

In the last couple of years, the flow of academic publications addressing Central Asia's political problems has not subsided. Very much as before, authors have been showing a lot of interest in indi-

vidual republics, particularly in the way they are acquiring and have acquired a new national identity. Large-scale fundamental geopolitical studies have appeared, while the veterans of Russian Oriental studies have added several fundamental works dealing with Russia's Central Asian policies to the vast body of works published in other countries.

The editorial board of *Pro et Contra,* a journal published by the Moscow Carnegie Center, concentrated on the region and its problems in a special issue titled *Tsentralnaia Azia i vneshnie derzhavy* (Central Asia and External Powers).[1] The authors proceeded from the assumption that despite many common features, the local political regimes do not necessarily see eye-to-eye on many issues, while their foreign policy preferences differ widely. The generation change at the very top of the power pyramid will push the countries further apart: the nationalist agenda will attract more attention than is really needed, while economic rivalry and symbolic competition will become exacerbated. This makes lumping the five Central Asian states together and regarding them as a closely knit community a rather dubious endeavor.

A problem best described as Afghanistan-2014 dominates the vast body of publications about the Central Asian region very much concerned about the withdrawal of the coalition's armed forces, which will leave the region to face the consequences: possible vulnerability, undermined security, and destabilization.

# Inside the Region

Martha Brill Olcott's recent book *In the Whirlwind of Jihad*[2] deals with Uzbekistan or, rather, as follows from the book's title, with the history of Islam in Uzbekistan. The author has stressed that late in 1991, when Uzbekistan became an independent country, it was still unclear whether it would remain a secular state. Back in the 1980s, this Soviet republic lived through an Islamic renaissance, a process that gained momentum when the Soviet Union left the stage, while the new state was too weak to control the situation.

Today, relations between Islam and the state pose as a severe problem as ever in all the Central Asian countries; it is especially acute in Uzbekistan. The author writes that the first and so far only president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, pays much more attention to the problem than his colleagues in other countries. He was quick to recognize that the state should restore its control over the religious sphere without antagonizing the faithful. The events unfolding in the Central Asian neighbors taught Karimov that to remain in power he must rely on a great part (if not the majority) of the country's population, while political and religious freedoms should be controlled and strictly metered.

Watching the Soviet Union fall apart, Islam Karimov realized that legitimacy of the state's newly acquired independence and popular recognition of his own power rested on a limited compromise with religion. Fully aware of the rapid spread of religious fundamentalism in his country and acting under the pressure of the bloody civil war in Tajikistan, Karimov, and all the other Central Asian leaders for that matter, became convinced that the secular states needed a tighter grip on their Muslim communities so as not to find themselves controlled by religious leaders.

The author points out that the state and the secular elite perceive a threat in the stronger public role of the Islamic leaders. The secular leaders are worried lest an indirect tie between morals and

[1] See: "Tsentralnaia Azia i vneshnie derzhavy," *Pro et Contra* (MCC), No. 1-2, 2013, 126 pp.

[2] See: M.B. Olcott, *In the Whirlwind of Jihad,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 2012, XIV+415 pp.

religion remove them from their social and economic heights. This has already put the Uzbek powers in a quandary: they do not want to rely on religious leaders to promote their own ideas, being fully aware, however, that to secure the loyalty of the people they have to gain at least limited support of the Islamic leaders. This explains why the Karimov regime spares no efforts to find loyal clergy members (willing and able to side with the state completely or partially) and rely on them.

The author refutes some of the stereotypes. She writes that the Uzbek leaders blame the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the structures that originated from it for all the acts of terror that shattered the republic in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005 and 2009, as well as the inroads into Kyrgyz territory. She writes that there were few IMU members among those who attacked the prison in Andijan and triggered the mass riots. They were stirred up and kept going by Akromiya, a movement bearing the name of Akrom Yuldashev, its leader, who left Hizb ut-Tahrir in 1993 and had nothing to do with the IMU.

Martha Brill Olcott points to the contradiction between the idea that the Uzbek version of Hanafi Islam is unique and the interests of the forces that gained power because of the country's independence. The interested foreign actors and main political leaders associated with the people in power are determined to channel the developments in the country in favor of the Central Asian secular forces; this explains many of the decisions made by the Karimov regime. As the country is moving away from its Soviet past, the memory of it becomes dimmer, or is even obliterated completely. The younger generation is being brought up in a society that does not ban Islam but teaches respect of its values as part of secular education and permits free and comparatively extensive contacts with the Islamic world.

The author concludes that, having freed itself from the ideological and social shackles of Soviet times to some extent, Uzbekistan today is a more traditional society and a more devoted heir of its Muslim past than it was at any time in the 20th century. It remains to be seen what will happen to the country after Karimov. One thing is clear: much will depend on the last years of the Karimov regime, on whether Kyrgyzstan preserves its statehood, on whether Afghanistan preserves stability and peace, and on whether the nation's economic possibilities will match its economic expectations.

This is a far from ordinary book, yet certain things, the author's assessments of the meaning of the developments in Uzbekistan in particular, invite comments. She is inclined to positively assess the phenomenon of the post-Soviet Islamic renaissance and to pass over in silence the fact that it is causing de-modernization of Uzbek society: it is growing more archaic and moving toward complete degradation. Islam (state-supported or unofficial) is wiping away what remained of Soviet modernization, in the past an object of quite understandable pride in the Center and in Tashkent. This fully applies to all the other Central Asian republics.

Another book by the same author called *Tajikistan's Difficult Development Path*[3] supplies a complete picture of the country's post-Soviet social and economic evolution. After scrutinizing the republic and its difficult development path in detail, Martha Brill Olcott called it "a country at risk." She has provided a detailed history of the causes, beginning, and contradictory course of the civil war in Tajikistan and concluded: "The resolution of the Tajik civil war created a greater public role for Islam in Tajikistan than in any other country in Central Asia, and during Rahmon's first term in office it seemed that Tajikistan might evolve into a democracy [Islamic?] under his leadership… But over time Tajikistan has moved much closer to one-man rule; it is now somewhere between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in its degree of democratization."

Lingering on the region's margins with its economic potential barely developed, Tajikistan remains a regional security hazard, says Olcott. The beginning of the counterterrorist operation

[3] See: M.B. Olcott, *Tajikistan's Difficult Development Path,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 2012, VIII+455 pp.

in Afghanistan consolidated Tajikistan's international positions and stabilized the situation inside the country. Economic growth in Kazakhstan and Russia positively affected the republic's economy. International aid is extended with economic reforms in view; the Soviet agricultural system has been destroyed, but the country has failed to make a smooth transition to the market economy.

In the late 2000s, the weak shoots of Tajik economic growth wilted under the impact of the world crisis, which slowed down economic growth in Russia and Kazakhstan. The grave economic problems undermined the government's legitimacy: in 2009, IMU fighters and other Islamist groups resumed their inroads into Tajikistan; its international situation also suffered. At approximately the same time, however, the country started moving closer to China and the Gulf countries, even though this is unlikely to help Tajikistan complete its economic reforms.

President Rakhmon could rely on the memories of the tragedy of the civil war still alive in the minds of the people to consolidate society and build a fairly wide social basis for his power. In the course of time, however, the new generations that joined public life in the republic and, especially, the Arab spring deprived this political instrument of much of its previous usefulness. The author did not hesitate to point out that "For the past twenty years, Tajikistan has always seemed to be on the precipice of becoming a failed state, but then either good luck or public lethargy has given the government enough time to right its course, or to at least maintain enough public confidence to allow its leadership to remain in power."

Martha Brill Olcott examines a wide range of interrelated problems: the monarchic (or dynastic, as the author calls it) form of government; the specifics of Tajik parliamentarism; the local power system; the law-enforcement system; freedom of the press; and, finally, the place of religion in politics and society. She points to the very special place Tajikistan holds in the region as the only republic where there is an officially registered religious party with deputies and ministers among its members. This was one of the results of the civil war and the reconciliatory agreement that ended it. The position of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan and of Islam, as a whole, however, is changing: the presidential election of 2006 and the new law on religion passed in 2009 increased the pressure on the religious institutions in the republic.

The author has formulated a fairly sensitive question: Will the West side with Dushanbe if President Rakhmon continues to resist the pressure of Russia (on the issue of NATO weapons used in Afghanistan) which, allegedly, objects to the plans to leave NATO weapons in the Central Asian countries?

She ended her book with an analysis of the future challenges, threats, and risks and concludes that they are highly varied: destabilization caused by the coalition's withdrawal from Afghanistan and the highly vulnerable position when dealing with Tashkent because of the republic's transportation and communication dependence on Uzbekistan and the hydropower disagreements between the two capitals. Moreover, as Tajikistan moves toward membership in the Customs Union, its trade with Afghanistan and China will inevitably suffer. Environmental problems are another source of huge risk, caused, in particular, by the melting glaciers and resultant aridization. This has moved the republic into the "perfect storm" context, that is, the republic has been and remains pestered by every possible kind of external and internal problem.

The author described the economic and demographic problems as insurmountable and concludes that if the Tajik ruling elite does not realize that reforms are long overdue and does not abandon its selfish interests, the country will move even closer to social and political upheavals. The country must finally break the vicious "political patronage, corruption, and criminality" circle. The book is free from the political overtones typical of other works by the same author; her conclusions and commentaries are objective and well-balanced; she tries hard not to succumb to apocalyptic forecasts and succeeds, even though the subject suggests them.

In 2013, the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of Johns Hopkins University published a book by Kyrgyz expert Anvar Bugazov called *Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Civil Society Formation in Kyrgyzstan* written and published within the framework of a program chaired by Prof. Frederick Starr. The book is addressed to the Western reader.[4]

The Kyrgyz academic has formulated the main questions as "Why did the dismantlement of communism lead to the demise of what the country once had, but not to the emergence of a new society of free citizens? Why was Soviet totalitarianism replaced with a strange symbiosis of traditional and patriarchal foundations in social and political relations?" To find answers, the author analyzed various aspects of social order and the place and role of traditionalism in the international relations system and concluded that as long as social life remains dominated by the revived traditions of nomadic tribes no civilized social relations will be possible.

The city/village (aul) dichotomy is another serious problem; in the last few years, urban life in the republic has become "Kyrgyz-ized" to a great extent: new urban dwellers have moved to the towns and cities together with their rural culture and patriarchal relationships. The author points out that under Askar Akaev (his presidency earned, on the whole, complimentary assessments from the author), traditionalism and modernity were well-balanced. Today, people from village communities are actively moving into the bureaucracy and political class together with their ideas about clans and clan relationships. The author points to nepotism as another aspect of tribalism and patriarchal ideas about life. The conclusion suggests itself: on the whole, Kyrgyz society is a traditional community based on mechanical rather than organic solidarity.

The author is rightly concerned: Kyrgyz society is nearing the point at which "all the written laws, including the constitution, are in danger of losing their meaning in a situation where unwritten laws dominate in society" and "legal nihilism has grown and become strong in Kyrgyzstan." Traditional relationships dominate the party and political system, in which the difference between the concepts of party and clan has become indistinguishable; "these relationships are also determined by a geographic nuance: the North-South divide." This means that the republic has acquired two parallel power systems: an official one, which is impotent in the face of the country's reality, and an unofficial one (read: just short of criminalized), which holds real power, especially obvious in the regions. The author blames the appallingly low level of education and culture (probably compared with Soviet times, even if he dismisses the Soviet system as totalitarian).

This logic inevitably brought Bugazov to a discussion of the place of Islam in Kyrgyz society and its great and rising role. Islam, however, has not replaced the old ideology. "Immediately after the collapse of the U.S.S.R., Kyrgyzstan tried to replace the bygone communist ideology with the ideas of pan-Turkic ideology" and, on the whole, failed. The idea of a democratic society has been and remains the prevailing form of ideology. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan, or its South, is the only Central Asian country in which Islamists might come to power.

The author offers three scenarios of the country's future development in the midterm perspective. "The first one is a positive scenario … the country will witness a gradual assimilation of paternalistic relations, a transformation of traditional society into civil society. Unfortunately, there is very little time for this scenario to arise. The second scenario is a pessimistic one. This scenario implies … the strengthening of traditionalist views in the political and legal spheres, the creation of an authoritarian society, and the further criminalization of the state machinery. The third scenario is that of inertia, in which the country will face no radical changes. It is difficult to say how long this can continue. It is obvious that in the current situation, this period is unlikely to last a long time." The

[4] See: A. Bugazov, *Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Civil Society Formation in Kyrgyzstan,* Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Washington, D.C., 2013, 135 pp.

author is convinced that social and cultural (rather than economic, no matter how important) factors will play the main role.

Philip Shishkin's *Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia* cannot be described as an academic publication. It is rather a collection of journalist reports about the recent events in Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley. The author spent many years with *The Wall Street Journal* and has several books about Central Asia to his name.[5]

He has looked at all the painful spots: the secrets of the so-called Tulip Revolution, drug trafficking, and the "anatomy of a massacre" (in the Osh Region in 2010). The titles of other chapters, likewise, smack of journalism: The Dark Years in Kyrgyzstan (2005-2010), The Land of "Perpetual Revolution," The Restless Valley, etc. The author's style speaks of his previous career as a journalist. Much space is given to the involved intrigues around the Manas airbase as part of the Russian-American strategic rivalry; the author goes as far as saying that it was probably the pivotal point of the coups which shattered the republic one after another.

On the whole, the book tells the Western reader that Central Asia is an unstable region and that Kyrgyzstan is one of the "-stans." This goes down well with the Western audience, which has been associating Central Asia with Afghanistan for a long time now. The author, who belongs by birth to the Russian-speaking community, knows enough about the local mentality to translate it into a language that Western readers, who know next to nothing about post-Soviet reality, can understand.

In 2013, Marlene Laruelle, Director of the Central Asia Program, George Washington University, Washington D.C., edited and published a collective effort called *Migration and Social Upheavals as the Face of Globalization in Central Asia*.[6]

The editor gathered together an international team of authors, some of them from Central Asia. She writes in the Introduction that as "a symbol of globalization," migration has become a global social phenomenon and that the post-Soviet territory has not avoided migration "on an immense scale." The post-Soviet population has actively joined the migration flows. Inside the CIS, Central Asia occupies a unique place as a "supplier" of Slavic and Russian-speaking migrants and also as a source of huge waves of labor migrants. According to her assessments, about 5 million people from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have permanently or temporarily settled in Russia as labor migrants; about 1 or 2 million have settled in Kazakhstan. There are Central Asian guest workers in the United States, Canada, Israel, FRG, South Korea and the Arab Gulf countries.

Marlene Laruelle deems it necessary to point out that mass migration flows affect relationships at the personal level, as well as between the people and the state, and leaves its imprint on the state's economic strategy. She has rightly pointed out that Central Asian migration is based on ethnic and clan connections, in particular, and adds that modernization erodes these ties and adapts the new generations of migrants inside the diasporas to their social environment.

The authors have arrived at several important conclusions. "The global economic crisis has shown that migrants represent a powerful stabilizing force for the Central Asian states. Because local governments are not able to create jobs at home, the number of migrants seeking jobs abroad continues to grow. The crisis further demonstrates that the Central Asian countries and Russia must seek to sign bilateral and multilateral agreements to ease the burden of migrants."

At times of crisis, different migrant groups follow different tactics and strategies in order to survive and adjust to the negative changes. There are active and passive individuals (the former pre-

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[5] See: Ph. Shishkin, *Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia,* Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 2013, XI+316 pp.

[6] See: *Migration and Social Upheaval as the Face of Globalization in Central Asia*, ed. by M. Laruelle, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2013, VII+413 pp.

ferred to stay behind in Russia to survive as best they could); age, educational status, the degree of fluency in Russian, etc. can be described as differentiating factors.

The monograph's first part ends with Prof. Laruelle's contribution about Kazakhstan as "Central Asia's New Migration Crossroads." The country, the world's ninth largest recipient of foreign migrants and one of the largest sources of migrants, is unique in this respect. For a long time, while the Republic of Kazakhstan was slow, deliberately or not, to put Uzbek and Tajik guest workers within a legal context, their migration is best described as forced. "The growing 'Uzbekization' of the country's south is of increasing concern to the Kazakh authorities. The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Uzbek migrants, some of whom will seek to settle in Kazakhstan permanently, risks accentuating a trend toward the 'ghettoization' of the country's south" and its de-Russification.

Kazakhstan looks attractive because of its geographic and ethnic proximity to the native countries of the guest workers and absence of xenophobia. Marlene Laruelle compares the Uzbek and Kyrgyz migration flows and points out that the large Uzbek diaspora in the south of Kazakhstan plays the important role of an intermediary between the migrants and the government. In Kazakhstan, however, the people in power and the public are very concerned about the steadily growing number of Uzbek migrants. On the other hand, the cultural and ethnic proximity between the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz rules out contradictions (the periods of revolutionary upheavals in Kyrgyzstan, however, were not free from them). The author concludes that repatriation of the Russian speakers and "the ageing of the Russian-speaking population that remained in Central Asia further accelerated their proportional decline"; coupled with the growing flows of migrants and Oralmans the republic will have to cope with in the future, the ethnic balance will be tipped in favor of the Central Asian ethnicities and cause de-Europeanization, Islamization, ruralization, and archaization of social relations.

Part 2 of the same book "Migratory Strategies as Patterns of Adaptation to Social Upheaval" offers specific examples of how migration processes develop in different political, social, and economic contexts. Part 3 "An Evolving Social Fabric: Mobile National and Individual Identities" demonstrates that the national and individual identities of migrants are flexible enough. Today, all the Central Asian states are building their national and state identities on ethnic consolidation, which seriously affects all other aspects of social life, migration policies being no exception. This means that these states need their migrants back to revive their ties with their homelands.

The authors stress that the massive exodus of so-called Russian speakers has made the urban culture of Central Asia monoethnic. "The emigration of Russians from Central Asia to Russia, however, should not mask other equally essential population movements. Although the departure of Russian-speakers took center stage during the migration of the 1990s, it is now surpassed by flows of Central Asians to Russia. Central Asia seems therefore destined to remain one of the main sources of emigration in the Eurasian space for years to come. The participation of Central Asians in this geopolitical and social re-composition and the subsequent demographic changes prove that the relationship between Russia and Central Asia will not disappear as quickly as some observers had predicted following the disintegration of the Soviet Union."

Part 4 "Impact on Gender Relations: Masculinity and Femininity in Flux" is based on factual material and sociological studies. The authors are inclined, to different degrees, to see the Uzbek and Tajik women involved against their will in migration as victims of the social and economic upheavals that befell the post-Soviet population in the 1990s and the economic model and economic relations built on the ruins of the socialist system. The authors of this fundamental work have studied all the aspects of migration processes (political, social, economic, and demographic) going on in Central Asia and also in a much wider geographic and geo-economic space.

# Russia's Central Asian Policies

Alexey Malashenko of the Moscow Carnegie Center proceeds from several important premises: Moscow cannot affect, in any tangible way, the domestic political situation in the Central Asian countries; its national interests in the region are formed:

- First, by its desire to preserve its influence in the region, to keep what has remained of the post-Soviet expanse under its aegis, and to confirm its status if not of a world, then at least of a Eurasian power.[7]
- Second, Russia needs loyal and cooperating regimes. To achieve this it supports them and helps them survive, not an easy endeavor today and will become even harder tomorrow.
- Third, Russia wants to keep external forces, the U.S. and China in particular, away from the region. Fully aware that its power is not enough to cope with the task, the Kremlin is seeking a balance between rivalry and cooperation. Having reconciled itself to Chinese pressure, Russia stands opposed to the United States in an effort to limit its impact on the region.
- Fourth, Russia has no choice but to contain the flow of Afghan drugs to its territory via Central Asia.
- Fifth, the problems caused by Central Asian migration—a double-edged challenge fraught with mutual complications and mutual advantages—figure prominently on the list of Russia's national interests.
- Sixth, its national interests are inseparable from the problem of fuel transit across its territory, even though this goes beyond the Central Asian and, wider, Caspian scope.

The author proceeds from the assumption that Central Asia does not belong to Russia's foreign policy priorities and the Russian influence in the region is waning. This sounds strange against the background of the Kremlin's repeated statements that throughout the last two decades the region has been and remains high on Russia's foreign policy agenda. Here is a paradox: regional stability is not Russia's strategic imperative. On the one hand, stability in the region has been and remains the "sacred cow" of Moscow's policy; while on the other, Russia profits from political instability: tension fraught with conflicts along its southern borders promises it the role of a guarantor of regional stability.

How does Russia realize its national interests in Central Asia? It armed itself with integration as the main strategic weapon implemented through existing and, most important, new regional organizations with the participation of both the Central Asian countries and other post-Soviet states. In the past, Moscow made the mistake of insisting on the integration of the largest possible number of post-Soviet republics.

Today, when dealing with external players, the U.S. in particular, the region's countries can put the trump card of their CSTO membership on the table. It guarantees the continued presence of Russia's military facilities across the post-Soviet space.

The international organizations Russia set up in Central Asia, however, cannot reverse the gradual waning of Russia's influence in the region. While building its influence in one of the region's states, Russia might lose a large part of its impact in another; new forces, meanwhile, are actively entrenching themselves in Central Asia. Finally, practically all the countries are nearing a regime change that will bring to power people no longer orientated toward Russia and create new problems for Moscow.

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[7] See: A. Malashenko, "Interesy i shansy Rossii v Tsentralnoy Azii," *Pro et Contra* (MCC), No. 1-2, 2013, pp. 21-34.

Alexey Malashenko is convinced that throughout the post-Soviet period Russia failed to formulate its national interests in the region. He goes on to say that Russia's economic and political potential is enough,

- first, to preserve its influence in the region;
- second, to maintain an authoritarian form of governance (to which the region is inclined anyway);
- third, to be involved in practically all the fuel transit routes outside its territory;
- fourth, to limit drug trafficking across its territory (why this has not been done so far is a horse of another color);
- fifth, to allow it to maintain strategic cooperation with Washington and Beijing in order to share the responsibility for regional stability and security with them.

Prof. Malashenko has pointed out that Russia can no longer perform the civilizational mission it has been carrying since the mid-19th century. It does not belong to the West-Islamic World dichotomy locked in a struggle to perform one of the scenarios of the region's civilizational future. The author perceives the failure of the Russian establishment to accept Central Asia as part of the Islamic world as a fatal error fraught with strategic consequences. So far, the region remains outside the framework of Russia's relations with the Muslim world.

The author concludes his article with a sacramental question: What forces are challenging Russia in Central Asia? and points to three geopolitical challenges created by China, America and Islam. Alexey Malashenko writes that the Chinese challenge is of an economic rather than political nature, which might develop into a more serious challenge. The Islamic challenge is of an external and internal nature; in fact, it is not a challenge but a signal to Russia that it should take the local peoples' civilizational affiliation into account.

Russia has responded to the geopolitical shifts by moving (or being pushed) to a defensive position, writes the author, which cost it part of its former influence in Central Asia. He does not invite Russia to remain idle and to indulge in criticizing the "economic weakness and politically backward foreign policy mentality" of the people in power, but to move to a new and dynamic political line of the "new Russian challenge."[8]

Other authors think differently. Vladimir Evseev, Director of the Center for Social and Political Studies, does not think that Russia has no future in Central Asia; to ensure it Russia merely has to

(1) balance the rising influence of the West and China;

(2) preserve its own military presence;

(3) encourage military-technical cooperation with the region; and

(4) consolidate its economic impact.[9]

He traces the ups and downs of Moscow's regional policies starting in the first half of the 1990s when Russia made a very bad political mistake by discontinuing its economic aid to and political cooperation with the Central Asian countries. This caused an outflow of Russian speakers and a "geopolitical void." In the latter half of the 1990s, Moscow tried to restore its political domination in the region, but time had been irretrievably lost. In any case, Russia's regional policies were hardly consistent. The first half of the 2000s was dotted with its fiascos, which were especially obvious against the background of the West's stronger position. The latter half of the same decade was marked by

[8] See also: A. Malashenko, *Tsentralnaia Azia: na cho raschityvaet Rossia?* ROSSPEN, Moscow, 2012, 118 pp.

[9] See: V.V. Evseev, *Tsentralnaia Azia: vnutrennie i vneshnie ugrozy,* Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 2012, 358 pp.

what the author described as Moscow's relative achievements, while the current period is seen as a period of indefiniteness. The shortage of its own resources and the strong opposition of other players (the West, China, and Iran) will not allow Moscow to regain its role of a driving force behind the region's development.

In conclusion, the author formulated several (tactical rather than strategic) recommendations: to strengthen its fairly wobbly position, Moscow should use Turkmenistan's period of relative openness to move closer to Ashghabad; it should capitalize on the political indefiniteness in Kazakhstan, help Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to strengthen their military potential, and remain undaunted by Tashkent's incessant geopolitical wanderings. Judging by the recent changes in Russia's regional policies, some of the above has been taken into account.

Dmitry Trenin, who chairs the research council of the Moscow Carnegie Center, has offered a fairly novel idea: "For new Eurasia to emerge the old one had to go. Besides the Russian Federation, it is Central Asia, the Caspian and the Caucasus" which form a bridge between the east and the west of Eurasia. The quintessence of Eurasianism is embodied by Kazakhstan and Turkey connected with Europe and Asia. "Virtually all security risks and potential threats are of local origin. Kazakhstan's continued stability remains Russia's principal interest."[10]

The author further wrote that, since the last days of the Soviet Union, "many observers have been regarding Central Asia as a venue for a new edition of the Great Game. In reality, the former Soviet backyard saw multi-corner competition… the Great Game is a false analogy." He goes on to predict: "The future of Central Asia will not be decided by a match between Moscow and Washington, or a three-corner tournament with Beijing's participation. The deciders sit in Astana and Tashkent, as well as in the other capitals of the region. Not one of those capitals imagines itself as a Moscow satellite. By the same token, however," warns the author, "no Central Asian leaders would think of fully entrusting their security to the United States. China is welcome throughout the region as a trading partner, investor and lender, but it is nonetheless feared as a potentially powerful regional hegemon."

This brings the author to the conclusion: "As a result, Central Asians have developed 'multivector' foreign policies which elevate maneuvering among the major power centers—such as the European Union, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, Japan and others—to the level of strategy. The two leading countries of the region, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, also vie for regional leadership. Their three smaller neighbors cannot afford to ignore those ambitions." Dmitry Trenin has pointed out that Russia "needs to pursue a differentiated policy in support of its specific interests. A nostalgic approach aimed at keeping the region in the Moscow sphere of influence is bound to fail" and said: "Russia also needs to develop its soft power potential to work as a power of attraction for Central Asians."[11]

# The Chinese Question in Central Asia

In 2012, two well-known experts on Central Asia, Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, published their new monograph *The Chinese Question in Central Asia. Domestic Order, Social Change and the Chinese Factor,*[12] which can be treated as a continuation of their previous joint book

[10] D. Trenin, *Post-Imperium,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., 2011, pp. 16, 126.

[11] Ibid., pp. 132, 133.

[12] See: M. Laruelle, S. Peyrouse, *The Chinese Question in Central Asia. Domestic Order, Social Change and the Chinese Factor,* C. Hurst&Co., London, 2012, VII+271 pp.

*China as a Neighbor* that appeared in 2009. In their new book, they expanded or even repeated some of their previous observations. The authors, who can hardly be called French scholars (in the past they represented the Johns Hopkins University, today—George Washington University), have numerous articles on relations between China and the Central Asian countries to their names.

They divided their monograph into two parts—Part 1 looks at China as a globalized actor, while Part 2 gives the reader a chance to look inside the region in the form of national narratives on China. Part 1 deals with a wide range of questions related to the fundamental problems of the relations between the Central Asian countries and their great neighbor: borders, ethnic diasporas, interaction within the SCO, China's economic expansion, China's energy diplomacy, and investments in infrastructure as China's brand.

The authors have formulated the central question in the following way: What place does Central Asia, which plays a "very modest role" on the international scene (very much inflated by the media attention caused by its proximity to Afghanistan and the revived Great Game), occupy in China's foreign policy strategy?

The authors deem it necessary to point to the following subtlety: "In China's perception of its environment, Central Asia is not only a part of the post-Soviet world, but also a part of West Asia." They have the following to say about the role Central Asia plays in Beijing's policies: "Finally, Central Asia has come to position itself on the Chinese radar as a partial solution of two concerns: first, to secure continental energy supplies that are not subject to global geopolitical complications, and secondly, to help China to appear as a peacefully rising power able to play the card of multilateralism. In Chinese energy strategies, Kazakhstan is emerging as an exporter of oil and uranium, and Turkmenistan as an exporter of gas, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have the potential to export hydroelectricity." At the same time, the authors refer to well-known Chinese experts, Zhao Huasheng being one of them, to point out the absence of a clear and consistent Central Asian strategy. In this respect, China has found itself in the good company of its two rivals—Russia and the United States. Each of the sides of the geopolitical triangle "wants to have a privileged relationship with each of the other partners, since any alliance between two of the actors will weaken the position of the third."

Each of the sides is pursuing its own aims suggested by their strategic interests or traditional ideas. The United States "does not want to see any fundamental strategic alliance between Moscow and Beijing." Russia "works within the schemes inherited from the Cold War by focusing on U.S. containment strategies, and so fails to measure China's pace of advancement. As for China, it unambiguously prefers Russian control in Central Asia."

By the 2000s, the Central Asian countries had awakened to the changed geopolitical environment: they no longer had any influence on Washington's involvement; while Europe remained too modest a partner; Turkey and Iran were yielding their interests in the region; while Japan's involvement had not produced the expected effect. This left China as the only power whose weight in Central Asia allowed it to talk on equal terms with Russia and the West.

The authors have posed themselves the task of identifying and discussing "the multifaceted impact of the China factor on Central Asian domestic affairs" and deemed it necessary to stress that "since 2005, Beijing has been trying—still timidly—to establish ways to promote its language and culture and to train Central Asian elites according to the Chinese model." The authors expect that over the long term, China's presence in Central Asia will be comparable to that of Russia: "It is therefore a globalized actor in the same way as Russia: a diplomatic neighbor, a geopolitical ally, an economic partner, and a bearer … of an attractive societal and cultural model."

Part 2 moves along the lines of the previous book by the same authors; however the material that focused on an analysis of the impact of and response to China's presence in the region has undergone restructuring. The authors point out an interesting, if not telltale, detail: the region's academic circles show little interest in China because of their geopolitical and worldview orientation

toward Russia and Europe. The country is still seen through the predominantly Russian prism. The media in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan still use long-standing (or fossilized) clichés when talking about China. This means that China is facing a great challenge: the old prisms and clichés should be removed while the countries should receive new elites knowledgeable enough to have their own opinion on China.

By way of a conclusion, the authors point out that each of the Central Asian states is dealing with a Chinese Question of its own. The attitude toward China and relations with it differ from country to country; China's immediate neighbors treat it differently than countries that have no common borders with it. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the poorest republics, perceive the Chinese presence mainly as a positive factor; in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan the Chinese Question is one of many on their political agenda; Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not very concerned. Pan-Turkism is another regional factor that Tajikistan can safely ignore along with Turkey's position and the Uighur problem. The authors point to the paradox of close ties between China and Kazakhstan, a country in which Sinophobia is more pronounced than elsewhere in the region.

On the whole, Sinophobia and Sinophilia are both present in the region; the Islamic factor adds to the former, while the business community nurtures practically both. The intellectual and academic circles, on the whole, treat China as a potential threat or even as an alien and hostile civilization—this is typical of the pro-Russian circles and those looking toward the West and Turkey; the Islamists are of the same opinion. The authors point to Tajikistan, where Sinophilic sentiments are the strongest.

The authors make no secret of their conviction that the region's geopolitical leeway is narrow: closer Russian-Chinese partnership, either bilateral or within the SCO, will narrow down their field of maneuver and their freedom to choose partners. The authors, therefore, see the region's geopolitical future as moving from being "Russia's south" to becoming "China's west." They refuse to go beyond the vague statement that the Chinese impact on the region cannot and should not be ignored and offer no more or less definite conclusions about the future of Sino-Central Asian relations.

Raffaello Pantucci and Alexandros Petersen, two European scholars, proceed from their conviction that China, with no intention of building an empire in Central Asia, remains the only power operating multilaterally and looking far ahead. "A number of American strategists, Robert D. Kaplan among them, have written that a potential U.S.-Chinese cold war will be less onerous than the struggle with the Soviet Union because it will require only a naval element… But it misses the significance of the vast landmass of Central Asia, where China is consolidating its position into what appears to be an inadvertent empire."[13]

The authors have deemed it necessary to point out that "for most of its unified history, China has been an economically focused land power. In geopolitical terms today, China's rise is manifest particularly on land in Eurasia, far from the might of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and Washington's rimland allies—and far also from the influence of other Asian powers such as India. Thus, Western policy makers should be dusting off the old works of Sir Halford MacKinder, who argued that Central Asia is the most pivotal geographic zone on the planet, rather than those of Alfred Thayer Mahan, the great U.S. strategist of sea power. Greater attention needs to be paid to China's growing presence in Central Asia if the United States is to understand properly China's geopolitical and strategic rise."

The authors have further specified that "it isn't clear that even China grasps the incidental impact of its regional activity in reshaping Central Asia or how it is perceived by regional states, as Chinese actors are simply so focused on developing Xinjiang and extracting what they want

[13] R. Pantucci, A. Petersen, "China's Inadvertent Empire," available at [http://uyghuramerican.org/article/chinas-inadvertent-empire.html].

from Central Asia. With Russia's influence in the region at a historically low ebb and the widespread perception across Central Asia that the United States will strategically abandon the region once most combat troops have withdrawn from Afghanistan, Beijing has carved out an inadvertent empire."

In this context, the interest in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is obvious and logical: "As the only regional organization set up and led by China, it is a symbol of the importance Beijing places on the region to its west." The authors conclude that even though the structure lacks institutional potential, it is steadily moving toward the status of the most representative and influential international structure in Central Asia, gaining geopolitical weight without much ado.

This suggests the following conclusion: "In the long term, China's inadvertent empire in Central Asia will have geopolitical consequences for U.S. and Western influence in MacKinder's most pivotal geographic zone on the planet. Should Washington become preoccupied with the Asia-Pacific in its China policy, it will not only be missing the more profound manifestation of China's global posture, but might also find it far more difficult to cultivate relationships with the countries of Central Asia... If other outside powers do not also engage, China's lock on Central Asia, to the exclusion of the United States, will not only be inadvertent, but also inevitable."[14]

*The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Central Asia's Security Challenges,* a collective effort realized within the framework of a research program carried out jointly by the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the Foreign Policy and Security Research Center in Minsk, also addresses Chinese policy.[15] The SCO has already filled a niche of its own in the international relations system in Eurasia and is gradually enlarging the sphere of its activities and increasing its involvement in many vectors. The authors have taken a somewhat unexpected approach to the Organization, its history, and its present activities as an experience of contradictory and competitive cooperation between China and Russia driven by the shared desire to maintain and strengthen the status quo in the region. Security has been and remains the most outstanding issue in a region where the SCO is trying to acquire the status of one of the key elements of an emerging system of international interaction. "The authors concur on the relatively 'moderate' role of the SCO in the Eurasian security architecture and the partial realization of its potential in the field of security."

# Central Asia Amid Globalization and Geopolitical Rivalry

Alexander Cooley's *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Powers Contest in Central Asia* reads like a political thriller rather than an academic effort. The American author analyzes regional developments from the position of the so-called Great Game—the latent and obvious rivalry of the great powers in the region.[16]

He is convinced that what he calls a geopolitical paradigm of what each country is doing in the region was determined from the very beginning: "The U.S. regional policy has become a function of

[14] See also: M. Boulègue. "Xi Jinping's Grand Tour of Central Asia: Asserting China's Growing Economic Clout," *Central Asia Economic Paper*, Washington, No. 9, October 2013. 7 pp.

[15] See: *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Central Asia's Security Challenges,* DCAF, Almaty, Minsk, Geneva, 2013, XI+160 pp.; *Shankhaiskaia organizatsia sotrudnichestva i problemy bezopasnosti Evrazii*, ed. by A.A. Rozanov, the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Foreign Policy and Security Research Center, Belorussian State University, Minsk, Almaty, Geneva, 2012, 194 pp.

[16] See also: A. Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Powers Contest in Central Asia,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, XIV+252 pp.

supporting military operations in nearby Afghanistan"; Russia "as a former imperial power and after a decade of neglecting the region … has sought to play a dominant or privileged role" which placed certain responsibilities on it; the absence of resources adequate for the claimed role of a partner narrowed down the Kremlin's freedom to maneuver.

"China's use of the SCO as its primary instrument of regional influence and engagement offers important insights into a broader question of China's growing role in world affairs." At first China's regional involvement was limited to security issues (Xinjiang); later Beijing developed serious economic interests and geopolitical ambitions. The author points to Kyrgyzstan as the most convincing example of how geopolitical rivalry destroys political stability.

He goes on to say that "the Central Asian states, even the weakest ones, are not passive pawns in the strategic maneuvering of the great powers, but important actors in their own right." This brings him to an important conclusion: there are no winners in the geopolitical struggle unfolding in the region; it is a miniature model, or the prototype of a multipolar world in which the great powers' interests are very close, while their equal might and competition force them to tread cautiously and take the interests of others into account. The author has demonstrated that these powers know not only how to compete, but also how to cooperate. Alexander Cooley believes that the experts dealing with Eurasian geopolitics will also appreciate his work as a pioneering attempt to outline the future "post-Western world."

In 2013, Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse published another of their joint books *Globalizing Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development,* which presents an in-depth analysis of what globalization is doing to the region. The title suggests that geopolitics is investigated from the point of view of geo-economics. The region's natural resources compel the attention of rivaling great powers and ambitious internal factions. Russia and China dominate the horizon, with the other global players close behind.[17]

The local regimes are caught between the need for international collaboration to valorize their resources and the need to maintain control over them in the interest of state sovereignty. Local patterns of development thus become a key driver of external actors' involvement and shape the mechanisms by which the Central Asian states are forging a place for themselves in the globalized world.

Part 1 deals with the Great Games and so-called small games from the point of view of the strategies and methods of external big and small actors, the list of which is long enough. Three chapters deal with each of the three big actors—Russia, China, and the United States. Chapter One "Russia in Central Asia: Old Patterns, New Challenges" discusses, as the title suggests, Moscow's tendency to proceed from the old patterns (imperial influence) while facing new challenges. The authors seem to be fairly pessimistic about Russia's long-term achievements in Central Asia.

The United States, aptly called "the too distant, but unavoidable partner," is motivated by strategic security interests. The European Union, the aims of which in the region suggested the question "soft power or Realpolitik?", seems to be moving toward strategic security considerations when dealing with the Central Asian region. The authors explain the failures of European strategy by the Union's complicated bureaucracy and very limited efficiency of its foreign policy mechanisms. The authors have their doubts about the efficiency of the main instrument of European influence, its economic policy.[18]

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[17] See: M. Laruelle, S. Peyrouse, *Globalizing Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development,* M.E. Sharpe, N.Y., Armonk, 2013, 376 pp.

[18] See also: J. Boonstra, M. Laruelle, "EU-US Cooperation in Central Asia: Parallel Lines Meet in Infinity?" *EUCAM Policy Brief,* No. 31, 2013, 5 pp.; R. Fjaestad, "Overland, Norway and Central Asia," *EUCAM Policy Brief,* No. 16, 2013, 5 pp.; T. Tsertsvadze, J. Boonstra, "Mapping EU Development Aid to Central Asia," *EUCAM Factsheet*, No. 1, 2013, 13 pp.; T. Tsertsvadze, V. Axyonova, "Trading Values with Kazakhstan," *EUCAM Policy Brief,* No. 32, 2013, 5 pp.

When writing about the strategy and politics of smaller geopolitical players, the authors have pointed to the main or even dominant features: Turkey has moved from "cultural strategy" with its emphasis on the common Turkic heritage to trade pragmatism; Iran, on the other hand, has moved away from "a promising partnership hampered by geopolitical issues" to a geopolitical agenda. The Gulf Emirates and Israel are described as alternative partners.

The relations between the smaller geopolitical players and the region are described aptly and succinctly. "India's Involvement: Hopes and Disillusionment," a formula related to both sides, and "Pakistan: Dashed Hope, Political Suspicion" describes Islamabad's failed hopes to turn the region into its strategic rear, while the Central Asian states suspect that Pakistan seeks regional instability through its Afghan policies.

"Japan's Policy in Central Asia: From Idealism to Realism" sums up Tokyo's regional involvement. "South Korea: A Discreet but Growing Presence" stands for the country's pragmatism, pure and simple, based on corruption practices—a discreet but growing presence indeed. "The Malaysian Model Emulated in Central Asia" describes the Malaysian experience of economically successful authoritarianism as one of the models the local regimes can use while looking for a political-economic model of their own.

Part 2 deals with the economic successes and failures of the Central Asian countries in the context of globalization.

The book, which is based on rich factual and statistical material related to many, economic in particular, aspects of the region's development, can be described as a valuable addition to previous publications. It seems that foreign (particularly Western) political science has finally abandoned its absorbing interest in the region's geopolitical status of the 1990-2000s for the sake of identifying the region's real place in the world economy and politics in the geo-economic context. The authors look at both sides of the same process—an impact of the global economy and globalization on Central Asia and the region's impact on international economic ties.

In one of her articles,[19] Prof. Laruelle concludes that not infrequently (especially in newly independent states) the foreign policy course is determined by domestic factors for the simple reason that these countries badly need legitimacy inside the country and outside it. The author points to the following aspects of fundamental importance.

She writes that there is no former unanimity in Central Asia and that Ashghabad and Bishkek or Astana and Tashkent have their own and very different ideas about the world and international relations. All discussions about the region's international role are inevitably flawed: first, foreign actors, both distant and near, are constantly in the limelight of the authors' attention, while the regional states are dismissed as passive entities of the geopolitical struggle too weak to affect it. Second, experts and politicians pay too much attention to how the Central Asian countries respond to the key international problems and too little attention to what is going on inside these countries and strongly affects their foreign policies.

Marlene Laruelle has arrived at the conclusion that national identity is one of the main elements of foreign and domestic policy and that the Central Asian states have to disentangle numerous highly divergent processes, which explains why the government attaches great importance to sovereignty as the main aim of a nation state. All the Central Asian countries seek greater openness to the world and greater isolation from neighbors.

In an article published on the same issue, Martha Brill Olcott criticizes her colleagues: analysts and even politicians tend to ignore the changes that have been taking place in the Central Asian countries in the last two decades. Practically all discussions of the region's future completely and unjustly ignore ev-

[19] See: M. Laruelle, "Vneshniaia politika i identichnost v Tsentralnoy Azii," *Pro et Contra* (MCC), No. 1-2, 2013, pp. 6-20.

erything that has happened in this part of the world; at best these changes and trends are discussed outside the global context, or as part of broader problems. The author insists that today the five Central Asian states are very different from what they were in December 1991 when the Soviet Union ceased to exist.[20]

She goes on to say that these changes will affect the next generation of Central Asians; as was to be expected, the Soviet identity is disappearing along with the previously important role of the Russian language. None of the newly independent states has acquired a fully developed national identity, while regional, ethnic, and religious identity is superimposed on the predominantly secular model the ruling elites are trying to impose to their populations.

The author concludes that the region lacks a shared Central Asian identity, this being especially obvious among the younger generation. Today, after twenty-one years of independence, it has become abundantly clear that serious problems are in store for all five Central Asian states.

Martha Brill Olcott pays attention to another, no less important, fact: most of the local countries' criticism of the United States and the European Union is caused by what in Central Asia looks like double standards. She goes on to point out that even if Kazakhstan does not pull out of the Customs Union, it obviously does not intend to advance economic integration, something the Kremlin wants. China is too generous to be opposed and too big to be ignored. Washington and the Central Asian capitals often agree that if Afghanistan or the Central Asian region plunges into serious riots that might threaten America's security (this happened on 9/11), the U.S. and NATO will move in. This remains to be seen, which means that the local regimes and public opinion are deluded about America's intentions and possibilities.

Jeffrey Mankoff, Deputy Director of the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program, is fairly critical of his country's role in the region. He points out that in the last two decades, U.S. policy in the region has, at times, been a hardly palatable mix of two different approaches. Within the first of the two, typical of the 1990s and still very much alive, Washington treated Central Asia as a field of strategic rivalry with the neighboring powers, Russia and increasingly China.[21]

The second approach formulated in the wake of 9/11 and intensified by the Obama Administration has put the region into the context of the Afghan war. The American political scientist predicts that in the next ten years the Central Asian states will have to cope with urgent domestic challenges rather than with a threat of external domination and concludes that after 2014 Washington will have to cope with very different problems than in the 1990s.

The author says that the United States should revise its Central Asian policy; it should remain in the region and concentrate more than ever on setting up more efficient (but not necessarily democratic) governance. Washington should accept the fact that Russia and China, neighboring powers with strong economic and political contacts in the region, will inevitably pursue their wider interests and that in multipolar Central Asia of the 21st century, the strategic "zero-sum" rivalry of the 1990s will not help to remedy the fairly widespread social ills.

Cooperation in the transit sphere and in ensuring security in Afghanistan has created a certain amount of interdependence between the United States and some of the Central Asian countries and raised the tension between the U.S. and Afghanistan's other neighbors (Iran and Pakistan), which has cost Washington some of its levers of influence on the Central Asian countries. Their domestic and regional problems, on the other hand, have become even more prominent. Unwilling or even afraid to become involved too closely in the local problems, the United States has not succeeded in invigorating local trade.

Moscow is still concerned about what it sees as the United States' intention to perpetuate its military presence in the region, which will cripple its own interests there. In November 2008, when Barack Obama was elected president, the two countries made cooperation one of their priorities again.

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[20] See: M.B. Olcott, "Gosudarstva Tsentralnoy Azii idut svoim putem," *Pro et Contra* (MCC), No. 1-2, 2013, pp. 70-76.

[21] See: J. Mankoff, "Politika SShA v Tsentralnoy Azii posle 2014 goda," *Pro et Contra* (MCC), No. 1-2, 2013, pp. 41-57.

Moscow insists that, after stabilizing Afghanistan, the United States should leave the region. The author describes the Northern Distribution Network as the best illustration of how the Afghan war made the U.S., Russia, and the five Central Asian states partners, curbed strategic rivalry among the Central Asian countries, and supplied them with enough financial and material resources to allow their governments to fortify their positions.

America's withdrawal from Afghanistan will inevitably narrow down the scope of its interests in Central Asia, which will probably tempt Washington to resume the strategy it pursued during most of the 1990s that reduced the region to the status of an area of geopolitical rivalry with Russia and China. The author deems it necessary to warn the people in Washington that the country has already reached the main aim of the 1990s, that is, sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian countries. Today intra-regional pathologies rather than China and Russia constitute the major treat to the region's stability and, therefore, America's interests.

The author concludes that since Russia's domination no longer threatens Central Asian stability, to say nothing of America's interests there, Washington has essentially no reason to oppose Russia's wider presence there. America should demonstrate more caution when deciding on the degree of its involvement in the sphere of regional security. Its continued post-2014 military presence could revive strategic rivalry with Russia and, later, with China.

At the same time, Jeffrey Mankoff warns that the United States, wishing to leave the ten years of war behind, should not abandon the region, either Afghanistan or Central Asia. At the strategic level, the Central Asian states appreciate America's presence because they know that the U.S. does not threaten and will never threaten their sovereignty and independence.[22]

# MacKinder Revived

In 2013, two academics—Nick Megoran of Newcastle University and Sevara Sharapova of the Academy of State and Social Construction under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan—initiated and published in the U.K. a collective monograph called *Central Asia in International Relations: The Legacies of Halford MacKinder,* weighty proof that the geopolitical theory of the great British thinker is as viable as ever. The contributors seem to agree that MacKinder's theory, which remained shelved throughout the latter half of the 20th century, was revived in the post-Soviet period and inspired by a new geopolitical configuration in Eurasia. Confronted with a baffling variety of opinions and assessments of the theory and its topicality, the authors decided to gather them between two covers to find out whether it has lost its former relevance.[23]

The editors' conviction that the theory and its continued applicability can be checked in the Central Asian context serves as the point of departure. They point out that "although not defining it precisely, MacKinder used the term 'Central Asia' and explicitly and implicitly included the region in his geostrategic theorization" and add that "in the nineteenth century 'Central Asia' was defined in more expansive terms than are commonly used today." They offer another observation: MacKinder's theoretical legacy is used in the post-Soviet space by pro-Western thinkers and anti-Atlanticist Eurasians, both groups finding practical applications for MacKinder's geopolitical ideas.

The book is divided into three parts, the first of which deals with the historical and international context of MacKinder's geopolitical ideas and the second with the way these ideas, and geopolitics as a whole, have adjusted themselves to the post-Soviet contexts of Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

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[22] See also: R. Kangas, *Is There a Viable Future for US Policy in Central Asia?* OSCE Academy, Bishkek, 2013, 19 pp.

[23] See: *Central Asia in International Relations: The Legacies of Halford Mackinder,* ed. by N. Megoran, S. Sharapova, Hurst & Company, London, 2013, XVI+331 pp.

Milan Hauner, a Czech scholar, has identified three schools of thought in contemporary Russia: the so-called Westerners (who want integration with the capitalist West), the traditionalists (Slavophiles in pre-revolutionary Russia and "pochvenniki" of Soviet times), and the neo-Eurasians, Lev Gumilev being the most prominent figure among them. He built a bridge between classical and post-Soviet Eurasianism represented by a large group ranging from political scientists, politicians, and environmentalists to filmmakers, all of them "greatly attracted by MacKinder's vision of the heartland," which they skillfully transformed from MacKinder's negative image into a positive image of their own. The author counts philosopher Alexander Dugin, writer Eduard Limonov, and President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev among them; there is also communist neo-Eurasianism.

When writing about the theory and practice of Eurasianism in Kazakhstan, Milan Hauner formulates the question, Kazakhstan—The New Pivot of Eurasia?, suggested by Kazakhstan's initiative to set up a Eurasian Union, the cult of Lev Gumilev in the republic, and the transfer of the republic's capital from Almaty to newly-built Astana. The author suspects that this shows the Kazakhstan leader's deeply concealed desire to balance out the Russo-centric trends obvious in integration with Eurasianism.[24] The author concludes his chapter with "since 1992 Russia has become more Asian than ever in her history" and is convinced that for Russia "Eurasianism seemed at first the preferred alternative—provided she wanted to survive as a great power."

The third part deals with the region's post-Soviet specific foreign policy and geopolitical problems. Chris Seiple of the U.S.-based Institute for Global Engagement has traced, in geopolitical frameworks, the course of the post-9/11 American-Uzbek relations. He describes MacKinder as a "democratic imperialist" and interprets American policy in Eurasia in the 2000s as a struggle for liberal values and democracy. The geopolitical instruments devised by MacKinder are fully applicable to American-Uzbek relations and explain a lot in their bilateral relations. However, Seiple concludes that U.S. policy ended in "a geostrategic and geosocial (MacKinder's term.—*M.L.*) failure."

Alexey Dundich of MGIMO University regards Central Asia as a platform of cooperation and an arena of struggle for domination, which he calls a "new Great Game." Very much in line with this he says that "the Central Asian region today has become a place of intense diplomatic and foreign policy activity for the 'great powers,' principally Russia, the United States and China. There is also a second level of competition here, involving the EU, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Indian interests" and further "some Russian researchers believe that China has its own new variant of MacKinder's theory, namely the concept of 'Central Eastern Asia'." He also points out that "on this account, MacKinder's ideas can be said to have developed in an unexpected way. Cooperation in the heartland on a multilateral basis can be a substitute for the zero-sum struggle for power." There is another, no less striking feature of the New Great Game, i.e. "the Central Asian states employ a variety of contrasting and at times contradictory strategies to establish themselves as independent players in the new regional state system. In so doing they have moved beyond being the mere pawns in the chess game of external powers, whether in the first or the 'new' Great Game." He points out that Kazakhstan based its strategy on Eurasianism as a method, not a final aim, to find its own place on the international arena and concludes his article with: "…Russia and China, and the United States with the EU should be able to help each other to keep the heartland stable."

Gulnara Dadabaeva and Aigul Adibaeva from Kazakhstan have put the new geopolitical challenges faced by Kazakhstan and Central Asia into the context of MacKinder's theory, which led them to the conclusion that the West, determined to pursue its traditional strategy of isolating Russia from

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[24] See also: N. Kassenova, *Kazakhstan and Eurasian Economic Integration: Quick Start, Mixed Results and Uncertain Future,* IFRI, Paris, 2012, 29 pp. (RNV 14); R.N. McDermott, *Kazakhstan-Russia: Enduring Eurasian Defense Partners,* Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen, 2012, 84 pp.; F. Vielmini, "The Challenges of Eurasian Integration for Kazakhstan," *ISPI-Analysis* (Roma), No. 151, 2013, 7 pp.

Central Asia, is allowing China to strengthen its position in the region. Levent Hekimoğlu of the York Centre for International and Security Studies in Toronto is an uncompromising critic of MacKinder's ideas: MacKinder overestimated some of the geographic factors and underestimated others, "the costs of distance from accessible seaports in making the resources of the region commercially viable." He has also written that the region should "overcome the tyranny of its geography"; to achieve this it should shed infatuation with the myths rooted in the theory of MacKinder and reject the neoliberal prescriptions imposed on the region's countries from the outside.

The editors summed up the collective efforts by saying that MacKinder left a vast and varied legacy, "his ideas reappearing in multiple contexts" have supporters and opponents. The latter rely on his theory to justify reintegration of the post-Soviet space. In different periods of the 20th and early 21st centuries, wrote Megoran and Sharapova, these ideas cropped up unexpectedly and were exploited by political forces and ideological trends, their scope ranging from Atlanticist neo-liberalism to American neo-cons.

# Central Asia and Afghanistan

In her fairly short yet well-packed article (published as part of the program of the Peace Research Institute Oslo), Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh of L'Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Sciences Po) in Paris looked at the contacts between Central Asia and Afghanistan in the context of the region's security issue. She proceeds from the assumption that the so-called Great Game has both external and internal dimensions to formulate three large groups of related issues, each of them scrutinized as small elements of a big picture.[25]

Part I "The Central Asia RSC and its Characteristics" is divided into smaller parts with revealing titles: Common Geography, Common History, Trans-Border Security Threats; Extremism, Terrorism and Criminality; Nuclear Non-proliferation; Conflictual Water/Energy Swaps; Nation State Identity versus Localism and Ethnicity, and Personality-Driven Regimes. The author is convinced that the Central Asian countries have failed to agree on a common stand vis-à-vis Afghanistan because,

- first, there is s lot of rivalry between them and,
- second, because all of them have to meander among the great powers.

Moreover, "Afghanistan represents both a threat and an opportunity for CA states: continued instability can be a substantial source for threats from bleeding extremism, terrorism, and organized trafficking of drugs and arms.

At the same time, stabilization and reconstruction could lead to an opportunity for cooperation over electricity, gas, roads, pipelines, and hydroelectric power transfers."

Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh has formulated three conceptual theses: first, despite geographic proximity, common history, and shared security interests, the region is dominated by centrifugal rather than centripetal trends. In Part II, which deals with the global influence on regional security, the author discusses two categories of the regionally involved actors: the great powers (Russia, China, and the United States) and the second-echelon powers (Iran, Turkey, India, and Pakistan). Hence the second thesis: on the one hand, the region's strategic dynamics fan the rivalry between the great, and partly between the second echelon, powers, while on the other, they are superimposed on the rivalry among the regional powers. The great powers rely on multilateral organizations: Russia relies on the CIS and the CSTO; the U.S. on NATO and the OSCE; and China on the SCO.

[25] See: Sh. Tadjbakhsh, *Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia,* Peace Research Institute, Oslo, 2012, X+62 pp.

The third thesis proceeds from the fact that the degree of the Central Asian countries' involvement in the Afghanistan-related issues is an extension of their own security-related dynamics. Part III, therefore, deals with Afghanistan as the key factor of regional security. The Central Asian countries are tied to Afghanistan by many threads; the author points to the ethnic factor as one of the strongest and most important of them and puts the Afghanistan-related strategies in the ethnic context. The author concludes her work with a section aptly called the CA RSC-Global Powers-Afghanistan Triangle and concentrates on the main features of the global powers' strategies: Russia's deliberate distancing; Chinese "checkbook diplomacy"; Eurasian multilateralism for Afghanistan: the SCO/CSTO axis, and Western-led multilateralism for Afghanistan (the New Silk Road and regional economic cooperation as a panacea for peace).

The author concludes that the Afghan problem is seen as a dilemma: "For the future, the CA RSC is poised to choose between developing closer relations with, and possibly being integrated in, South Asia, as the U.S. administration may want it, or being part of Eurasia, as the Russians and Chinese would have it." She has also pointed out that regional cooperation and its potential are greatly undermined by the geopolitical rivalry between the great powers and the lack of trust among the Central Asian states, which, on the whole, is correct.

The collective work *Vyzovy bezopasnosti v Tsentralnoy Azii* (Security Threats in Central Asia) published by the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO RAS) concentrates on Afghanistan. Dina Malysheva, a prominent expert and one of the contributors, has voiced her apprehension that if the United States and NATO enlarge their presence in Central Asia, both military (in the form of bases) and economic (in the form of the functioning Northern Network potentially transformed into a transcontinental network that will cover the entire post-Soviet space), they will finally realize their far-reaching strategic aims. The U.S. and its allies will seek military-strategic control to contain China, keep Afghanistan under control, undermine Russia's export monopoly, and reorient the security structures of the Central Asian states from post-Soviet to NATO.[26]

The authors conclude that the planned pullout of the coalition forces from Afghanistan will probably plunge it into its prewar (2001) state, invigorate Islamic radicals, increase drug trafficking and, therefore, create risks for Central Asia. There is another conclusion related to the Central Asia's foreseeable future connected with the situation in Afghanistan. Even if the Taliban regains power there will be no large-scale war between it and the Central Asian states. Very much as before, these countries will capitalize on their advantageous geographic location to pursue multivectoral cooperation and use their foreign policy trump cards (Russian, American, Chinese, and European) to profit as much as possible from the geopolitical rivalry to which they also contributed.

## *Conclusion*

The widely varied or even opposing views and opinions about the future of Central Asia and its geopolitical drift, nevertheless, suggest certain conclusions. Central Asia has traveled a long road since the Soviet Union's disintegration.[27]

- First, the region has lost its homogeneity (if it ever existed) and has not acquired a new (Central Asian) identity. Each of the region's states is following its own road with its own

[26] See: D.B. Malysheva, "Vyzovy bezopasnosti v Tsentralnoy Azii," in: *Vyzovy bezopasnosti v Tsentralnoy Azii,* IMEMO RAS, Moscow, 2013, pp. 5-18.

[27] See: S. Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia: Politics and Contested Transformation,* Routledge, London, 2012; S. Cummings, R. Hinnebusch, *Sovereignty after Empire: Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia,* Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2012.

landmarks and developing according to its own model. Strange as it may seem, this became possible only when the countries shed their old Soviet identity, which more or less kept them together. Today they are traveling along very divergent roads leading to nation states.

- Second, Russia is losing its dominant position, a fact that Western observers and their Russian colleagues (the latter with certain reservations) have accepted. The process is very complicated, multilateral, and painful; it is obvious in the economic, strategic, social, civilizational, demographic, and linguistic spheres. All the expert communities agree on this, but they disagree over the scope of Russia's residual influence and its special relations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.
- Third, China is augmenting its geo-economic and geopolitical influence in the region (no matter how unpleasant this may be for certain circles); in the future, the region may become part of the People's Empire of China. So far, it is not absolutely clear how the states, ruling circles, and major external players will respond to this scenario, however none of the authors discussed above would like to see this happen.
- Fourth, Central Asian security and the problem of Afghanistan are interconnected; for once, Western, Russian, and Central Asian experts demonstrate unanimity on this issue. All of them agree that the 2014 coalition withdrawal will dramatically lower the region's security level.[28]
- The fifth, and final, conclusion is related to the future position of the West in the region. Unwilling to leave the region, America and its allies in Brussels are gradually awakening to the fact that they have neither the resources nor enough geopolitical clout to insist on their old strategic methods. Sober-minded Western experts, however, who call on Washington to take into account the interests of Russia and China, agree with the Atlanticists that the U.S. and the West as a whole cannot and should not leave the region to the discretion of its neighbors. The West has reached the point of bifurcation: it should take into account the security-related issues (Afghanistan's in particular) and the so-called normative values (democracy and human rights). So far, no one in the West can predict whether America and Europe will be able to cope with the task and how: the expert community has limited itself to generalities against the background of the West's diminishing strategic influence.

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[28] See: *Afghanistan after 2014: Five Scenarios*, FOI, Stockholm, 2012, 100 pp.; N. Coburn, "The Political Economy of Withdrawal and Transition in an Afghan Market Town," *Central Asia Policy Brief* (Washington, The George Washington University), No. 12, October 2013, 5 pp.; A. Giustozzi, "The Next Congo: Regional Competition for Influence in Afghanistan in the Wake of NATO Withdrawal," *Central Asia Policy Brief,* No. 10, September 2013, 13 pp.; S. Harnisch, *German Afghanistan Policy after 2014,* Institute of Political Science, Heidelberg, 2013, 2 S.; E. Stepanova, *Russia's Concerns Relating to Afghanistan and the Broader Region in the Context of the US/NATO Withdrawal*, Report by U.S.-Russia Expert Group on the Afghan Narcotrafficking , *Policy Research Papers*, CIDOB, Barcelona, June 2013, 23 pp.; B.G. Williams, *Afghanistan Declassified: A Guide to America's Longest War,* University of Pennsylvanian Press, Harrisburg, 2012, XII+248 pp.