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The Royal Institute of International Affairs

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Democracy in Central Asia: competing perspectives and alternative strategies by Mariya Y. Omelicheva

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Source: *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, March 2017, Vol. 93, No. 2 (March 2017), pp. 493-494

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Royal Institute of International Affairs

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48569571>

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nist Party had evaporated, and the coup failed. This was not a coup by the army against the government, since the coup was led by the entire government except Gorbachev. It was really a coup against the democratically elected republican government, and Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin in particular. Miller does not integrate Gorbachev's gamble with glasnost and democratization into his analysis. It is not until the conclusion that he addresses the question of the political dynamics beyond the prism of interest group politics. Gorbachev intended democratization to pressure bureaucrats to reform, but it had the opposite effect—it made them afraid to make the budget cuts and price increases that reform would require. Miller suggests that Gorbachev would have been 'toppled immediately' by his conservative opponents had he not democratized, because of the radical nature of the changes he was proposing (p. 180). But it is at least conceivable that a Deng Xiaoping-style gradual reform (without democratization) could have worked in the Soviet Union.

Miller's account of how bureaucrats resisted and stymied much-needed reforms—which could have saved the Soviet system—is persuasive. He offers an original analysis of the role of the Chinese example: at first encouraging Gorbachev to promote reform, and then emboldening his opponents to resist it.

Peter Rutland, Wesleyan University, USA

Democracy in Central Asia: competing perspectives and alternative strategies. By **Mariya Y. Omelicheva**. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. 2015. 220pp. £55.00. ISBN 978 0 81316 068 9. Available as e-book.

Central Asia is a fascinating region. It is also one of the most problematic parts of the former Soviet Union in which to work on democracy and human rights, as all five republics face what sometimes seem like insurmountable challenges. Mariya Omelicheva is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Kansas and far from new to the region—she has previously published a book on counterterrorism policies in Central Asia (*Counterterrorism policies in Central Asia*, Routledge, 2010), and has spent considerable time on the research for her latest work.

In many ways, the process of democratization of Central Asia takes place not only among the people and elites of the five 'stans themselves, but also at board meetings in DC, European Union hearings in Brussels, UN reviews in Geneva, during OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) seminars in Vienna and conferences in Warsaw. Peculiar, perhaps—one should think these were matters best discussed by those most directly affected in Bishkek, Astana or Tashkent. That is, however, how the world is currently set up, making the study of Central Asia complex in a way that demands that scholars and activists—local as well as foreign—regularly look up and beyond what they can see from their regional office window or during fact-finding missions in the field.

Democracy in Central Asia does a fine job of demystifying and explaining the business of democratization, from its conception in the corridors of bureaucracy to its reception at your local bazaar. Importantly, it also asks the overarching question of whether these efforts ultimately do what they set out to do—namely, to improve respect for human rights and democratic principles in the region. While a number of books have covered US and EU policy abroad, Omelicheva's work fills a gap—Central Asia is different from eastern Europe and deserves a closer and more specialized inspection, such as this one. The author's inclusion of efforts by Russia and China to be part of the discussion are also highly interesting and lead to a refreshing change of perspective.

Omelicheva provides a bird's eye view of developments in the three Central Asian states where she has carried out her research—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan—and the results of her surveys among ordinary folk who as often as not express exasperation at the mere mention of the word 'democracy'. The sentiment will strike a familiar tone with those who have spent time in the region. The book turns the tables on western stakeholders, who must rethink their approach if they truly wish to make a difference.

The book should be of interest to scholars and activists alike. While certain chapters are clearly orientated at an academic audience, Omelicheva's points on framing perspectives on democracy promotion are worthwhile reminders also to those working in donor organizations or on the ground, that not everyone perceives concepts such as freedom in the same manner. Omelicheva outlines the understanding of democracy as perceived in the United States, versus the views disseminated by Moscow and Beijing, and the ways in which they are received by Central Asians.

But the author could have delved further into certain aspects of the way democracy promotion in Central Asia works. Particularly in Kyrgyzstan, local NGOs are often wrongly seen as 'instruments' of their donors, although it is often they who set the agenda for the topics western governments choose to focus on in Central Asia. Authorities in Kazakhstan are less receptive to input from the country's human rights organizations, but they do have a voice that probably helps to curb some of the worst excesses. While many NGOs certainly rely on foreign donors for their office equipment and staff salaries, initiatives are, in many cases, entirely their own and form an integrated part of the overall picture.

Similarly, while US and EU policies in Central Asia may be inefficient partially due to what Omelicheva identifies as cultural insensitivity, a lack of creative programme design and a tendency not to get past the practice of 'naming and shaming', international rights organizations have often criticized the western approach for being half-hearted and too lenient on obvious human rights challenges. For instance, in March 2016, a coalition of 29 organizations asked that the EU's Partner and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Turkmenistan be postponed due to the government's unwillingness to meet basic benchmarks.

The book is written in clear, accessible language, and should find a place on the bookshelves of activists as well as academics—to the former, it is as good a manual as any to the 'hinterlands' of human rights work. Democracy promotion in Central Asia has certainly reached a point where some kind of change needs to happen for it to move forward. Omelicheva's research raises important questions on how western governments perceive themselves and their role in the future of the 'stans, and what needs to be done in order for human rights work to bear real fruits—somewhere down the line.

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Middle East and North Africa

Return to the shadows: the Muslim Brotherhood and An-Nahda since the Arab Spring. By Alison Pargeter. London: Saqi Books. 2016. 296pp. Index. £16.99. ISBN 978 0 86356 144 3. Available as e-book.

In *Return to the shadows*, Alison Pargeter assesses the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Libya and An-Nahda in Tunisia. She is well equipped for the task. A specialist in the Middle East and North Africa with a focus on political Islamist movements, she has published widely, including *The new frontiers of jihad: radical Islam in Europe* (I. B. Tauris,