



Counterterrorism policies in Central Asia

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Book reviews

The new Silk Road diplomacy: China's Central Asian foreign policy since the Cold War, by Hasan H. Karrar, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2010, 272 pp., \$32.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-7748-1693-9

While speaking of China's rise in global power and status has now become cliché, Karrar's book zooms in on one of its least-known regional policies; this policy has, however, possibly an even greater strategic value for its ascendance than the better-known inroads the country is making into Africa, the Arab world, or Latin America.

Chapter one retraces the origins of China's move into Central Asia under the Qing in the mid-eighteenth century. It highlights the predating layered ethnic and cultural influences in the region, as a prelude to an excursus of the dynamic processes that led to the region's current geopolitical configuration at the demise of the Soviet federation.

The author then singles out three phases in China's forays into the region. Chapter two casts light on China's cautious early moves between 1992 and 1996, following the independence of the five post-Soviet republics. Emphasis is placed on two interlocking objectives underlying China's moves: assisting the economic development of the republics as a means of crafting a stable and prosperous neighbourhood on the one hand, and providing a context conducive to the economic development and political taming of China's problematic Xinjiang region on the other. This penetration was an extension and sensitive corollary of China's resuming bilateral relations with Russia. Chapter three then offers a snapshot of the period between 1996 and 2001, which saw the birth of the Shanghai Five mechanism and its successive evolution into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As China was striving to enter a contested regional space, it kept a low profile on the energy front (p. 116), while seeking to construct a political niche without irking the dominant players. Reliance on multilateralism enabled just that, allowing it to define and frame its engagement as a way of transcending the 'cold war mentality' of confrontation and as a non-threatening presence (p. 83).

Chapter four focuses on the setback inflicted on China by the American projection into Central Asia after September 11, 2001. It describes the nature of the challenges this development posed and highlights China's response, namely the conditional support of the mainstream discourse of the 'war on terrorism', which allowed it to simultaneously cast itself as a victim of domestic separatist-minded terrorists linked to al-Qaeda in Xinjiang, and secondly, by strengthening the new-born Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Lastly, Chapter five explores trends and prospects for Chinese influence in Central Asia after 2002. It argues that the driver of China's success in the region during the period taken in consideration is the appeal deriving from its 'posing a tacit challenge to US regional authority' without openly confronting it (p. 151). This is visible in certain postures taken both in bilateral and multilateral relations. Karrar argues that it has allowed China to attain maturity in the region, make striking achievements in energy politics and assert leadership through the development of the SCO. However, he contends that it has been less successful in the fight against terrorism and in containing the consequences of Afghanistan. The chapter also contains a good reconstruction of US perceptions of the SCO in the early 2000s (pp. 139–145).

The author tells an entertaining and fascinating story about China's place in Central Asia, which, without being particularly original, will certainly help to establish a definitive account of the timeline of facts and events to which subsequent writers can refer. Moreover, Chapter

four details and retraces, in a rare and thought-provoking way, the process through which China linked framing of the Xinjiang/Uyghur issue to the broader Global War on Terrorism discourse. Lastly, the work mobilizes a significant amount of information and sources, and illustrates the evolution of Sino-Central Asian relations with a wealth of trade statistics. However, for a book published in 2009, the references, which stop at 2005, are somewhat out-dated. This is particularly noticeable in Chapter five which makes a more intensive use of such data.

Another weakness of the book is a want of self-awareness and analytical depth. Lacking a theoretical framework, the book reads in a little sketchy and unorganized way. The individual chapters are inundated with information and documentary materials, but they are also crowded with different arguments going in different directions, and the reader cannot always follow all of the cues. In other words, in wishing to cover all of the aspects, the book ends up neglecting parsimony.

A related shortcoming is that of conceptualization. Insofar as it explores two particular forms of influence, bilateral and multilateral, the book constantly moves between the former and the latter type of initiatives uncritically. In the latter case, the book does not pause to explain the leading role played by China in ‘institution building’ (pp. 152–157), or in shaping any given issue in the SCO framework. In particular, Chapter five, which contains the main discussion of this subject, reads more like an overview of the development of the SCO, than an analysis of China’s leading role within it. As a result, in spite of the very appropriate caveat that neither of the two leading powers has a licence to merely ‘impose their agenda on the SCO’ (p. 165), the underlying assumption of the chapter seems to be that any output of the organization can be equated with China’s will. These weaknesses notwithstanding, this book provides a comprehensive account of the various reasons for the centrality of Central Asia to China’s foreign and domestic policies. It is readable and informative, and includes fascinating and insightful digressions on the implications and perceptions of China’s role in the region.

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China and India in Central Asia. A new ‘Great Game’? Edited by Marlène Laruelle, Jean-François Huchet, Sébastien Peyrouse and Bayram Balci, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, US\$72 (hardback), xiii + 254 pp., ISBN 978-0-230-10356-6

The title of this book questions the geopolitical scripting of a ‘New Great Game’ in the international relations of Central Asia. Though it focuses on India and China, most authors underline the limited presence of India compared to that of China as the reason why any talk of competition between the two is a misnomer. As some of the chapters indicate, common threats like terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking and organized crime frame the potential for cooperation.

India and China as emerging powers are expected to play an ever-increasing role beyond their borders, even beyond Asia. But what engrosses scholars are the questions of whether their rise will be peaceful and to what extent their mutual relations will be marked by cooperation or competition. The book addresses this question with reference to Central Asia, which, due to its geopolitical importance, energy resources and proximity to Afghanistan, has attracted the attention of China and India.

There are 15 chapters in the book divided into four sections. Some of the chapters bring into focus Russian and Afghan vectors that could define the engagement of India and China in Central Asia. Russia, which wants to advance its vision of a multi-polar world order through tri-lateral cooperation with China and India, is a crucial link in this process. Appropriately, the first chapter by Marlène Laruelle deals with the issue of how Russia looks at the engagement of India and China.

Given the limited capacity to leverage its presence, India is less of a competitor to Russia in the region. In contrast, the Sino-Russian condominium in Central Asia, which Laruelle also calls the 'Axis of Convenience', would crack if China were to pursue political interests that clash with those of Russia. Russia would like India to have greater involvement in Central Asia to balance China, whose strong involvement inevitably could undermine and challenge Russian influence (p. 22).

Is Central Asia going to be a new tributary of the world's second-largest economy? Or, is the region a Chinese foreign-policy priority at all? Jean-Pierre Cabestan thinks that China may be important for Central Asian states, but 'Chinese foreign policy priorities have been and will probably continue to be elsewhere, on its maritime borders and beyond' (p. 38).

Most of the authors agree that India's presence in Central Asia is negligible compared to China's. For Emilian Kavalski, India has failed to offer an alternative vision of a new world order like China appears to have done through the institutionalization of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This has created a position of 'no influence' despite India's aspiration to become a 'model of secular and multiethnic order' with a meaningful and proactive approach in Central Asia since India's 1998 nuclear tests (pp. 43, 56).

One would agree with Kavalski that post-1998 India's emergence as a global economic and nuclear power has allowed it to play an active role beyond its immediate neighbourhood, especially in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Two important landmarks signified India's changing approach towards the region. The first was in November 2003, when the Indian Prime Minister visited Tajikistan and initiated moves to renovate and upgrade the Ainy Air Base. Subsequent reports suggest that India has been using the Ainy facility for its reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The second was in August 2005 when Indian state-owned company Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) combined with Mittal Industrial Group to form ONGC–Mittal Energy Limited (OMEL) and made a serious effort to acquire energy assets in Kazakhstan. The significance of Ainy is underlined by Zhao Huasheng, who says: 'Though officially denied, India's military presence in the region is an important issue and it is probably true that India wants to build up a presence there. This build up of a military presence is to a great extent aimed at Pakistan and has a clear geopolitical purpose, one that is detrimental to the balance and stability of South Asia' (p. 137).

Are relations between India and China trapped within the larger rubric of tension and competition? Alternatively, can the challenges of Afghanistan, terrorism and drug trafficking that Central Asia presents to both countries alike provide a platform for cooperation? Jean-Francois Hutchet points out that Central Asia would be no exception to the current nature of the Sino-Indian relationship in general. Competition and sometimes conflict (though not open) will probably dominate and cooperation (if any) would be for pragmatic reasons (p. 97).

A similar conclusion is drawn by Basudeb Chaudhuri and Manpreet Sethi who use the term 'co-optics' [sic], to describe India–China relations in Central Asia, meaning a relationship marked by both cooperation and competition. In this case the authors underline that radical Islam and drug trafficking would provide a common meeting ground, while energy would be a factor inducing competition (p. 124).

Like many in this volume, Chinese scholar Zhao Huasheng stresses the point that competition among these two Asian neighbours in Central Asia has so far been a non-starter. Even

in the energy sector, China's involvement began much earlier than India's and has been far more extensive.

India's strategic presence and influence in Central Asia are still quite weak and not nearly on a par with that of China. India has not yet entered fully into Great Power relations in Central Asia and, as a result, competition between China and India is not particularly noticeable, Zhao Hua-sheng argues. He also feels that the Pakistan factor could come between any possible cooperation between India and China in the region. Since Pakistan has traditionally been China's strategic partner, China would shy away from any move towards India that would make Pakistan feel insecure (pp. 134–137).

Sébastien Peyrouse likewise questions the assertion that Central Asia has become a field of economic competition between China and India. This perception, he argues, is based not on current reality but on a 'prospective approach'. Such views, he writes, are more relevant to the geopolitical logic of power projection than to the economic realm (p. 155). Though most authors are of the view that China is on its way to become the most important geopolitical actor in the region, there could be factors limiting China's security and diplomatic influence in Central Asia. Jean-Pierre Cabestan underlines that the situation in Xinjiang, Afghanistan and Pakistan would prevent a 'full and trustworthy relationship from taking shape' (p. 38). Peyrouse and Cabestan also argue separately that different powers like Russia, the United States, the European Union, Japan and South Korea, who are all engaged with Central Asia, could impede China's moves. Central Asian elites would welcome this set of 'pluralist influences and interests' due to fear of total Chinese domination and also due to the benefits that would accrue with the involvement of other powers. In that scenario, Peyrouse observes, India would probably look beyond Afghanistan and have better chances of asserting itself in Central Asia, at least in economic terms (p. 169).

Afghanistan is going to increasingly demand the attention of India as the American troop withdrawal approaches. Since bilateral ties with Afghanistan are not enough to meet the challenges posed from multiple sources, India today is keen to join the SCO, which as Kavalski hinted, is the sort of agency that India requires in the region. However, Meena Singh Roy argues that China's leadership of the organization, and India's lack of a border with Central Asia, would limit India's ability to assert itself in the SCO. Thus, 'it is in India's interest to continue with its observer status and boost its cooperation at bilateral level with member states' (p. 76).

This view is questionable. Although robust bilateral relations with Central Asian states would provide greater leverage to India even in the SCO, it is in India's interest to join this important regional organization soon. Membership could boost bilateral ties with the regional states. The SCO's future focus on Afghanistan is also in India's interest. Swaran Singh does not think that Afghanistan can be a cause for cooperation. It has long been an important factor in sustained closer relation between China and Pakistan. He, therefore, is of the view that both China and Pakistan remain determined to evolve joint strategies and expand their cooperation 'to the marginalisation and exit of their common adversaries from their immediate backyard' (p. 92).

One would agree with most of the authors in this volume that India is yet to become a meaningful competitor to China in Central Asia. Although cooperative relations between India and China are possible given some common interests, factors like the Sino-Pakistan axis and competition for energy resources may present serious obstacles. Yet, the book also brings out the other reality that India has recently been proactive in its 'extended neighbourhood', including Central Asia, and has many advantages that its rivals lack. Geographically disconnected from Central Asia, India has obviously no border disputes or any legacy of hostility with the region, and was very closely associated with the Northern Alliance in the war against the

Taliban before September 2011. The Afghan ruling establishment today is dominated by the former leaders of the Northern Alliance. India is politically close to the Central Asian states, especially the two important frontline states for combating international terrorism: Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

In the words of Chinese scholar Zhao Huasheng, India ‘does not have a negative historical legacy nor does it present an ideological, demographic, or territorial threat to Central Asia; it has a good deal of “soft power” and a flourishing information technology sector’ (p. 135).

Though most authors underline the limited presence of India compared to that of China as the reason why any talk of competition between the two is a misnomer, some of the articles also talk of the cooperative possibilities given common threats like terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking and crime, apart from mutual interest in regional stability. The book’s title questions the usefulness of the ‘New Great Game’ rubric to frame the international relations of Central Asia. In the reviewer’s view, Russia will be the determining factor in the geopolitics of the Central Asia. India and China are not going to decide the context of the ‘New Great Game’ if it happens at all in Central Asia. Given the friendly relations that Russia enjoys with China, India and Europe, and its improving ties with the United States in relation to Afghanistan, the possibility of a ‘New Great Game’ in Central Asia hardly exists at all. Like Russia and Afghanistan, Iran is also relevant to the geopolitics of the region and to Indian and Chinese involvement in Central Asia. A chapter on Iran would have been useful.

Such omissions notwithstanding, this book is an invaluable addition to the limited body of literature that deals with the geopolitics of Central Asia and Afghanistan and the comparative influence of India and China in the region.

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Globalisation and Eurasia, edited by Ajay Patnaik and Tulsiram, New Delhi, Knowledge World Publishers, 2010, xxvi + 454 pp., US\$25, ISBN 978-81-87966-82-1

Usually, in their explanation and understanding of the international interactions of Eurasia, commentators tend to either conjure up images of a ‘land of discord’ and a ‘new Middle East’, or position the region as a perennial site of ongoing ‘great games’, or simply frame it as the ‘cockpit of the world’. Such metaphors indicate the difficulty in discriminating between fact and fiction in Eurasian affairs that seems to befuddle pundits, policy makers and publics. Eurasia has thus become emblematic of one of the most marked features of the post-Cold War geography of international relations. This assumption is at the heart of the volume edited by Ajay Patnaik and Tulsiram.

The collection emphasizes that it is the dissolution of the Soviet Union that has propelled Eurasian space back into the thick of global geopolitics. In particular, the contributions to the volume suggest that it is the combination of post-Soviet transitions and the dynamics of globalization that underpins the pervasive uncertainty of Eurasian affairs. From this point of view, it should not be surprising that the region has become an idiom, an intervening variable and an enabling environment for the confrontation with both the modalities and emergent complexities of international politics. This point of departure enables Patnaik and Tulsiram to undertake

a detailed investigation into the changing patterns of regional geopolitics and the shifting perceptions of Eurasian space in world affairs.

Perhaps the greatest asset of the collection is its unwitting contribution to the ‘decentring’ of the study of International Affairs and the endeavour to promulgate ‘non-Western’ voices and perspectives. All the contributors to the collection are from the ‘non-West’ – either from South Asia or different Eurasian countries. In this respect, the volume makes available a particular ‘non-Western’ reading of post-Cold War Eurasian affairs. What is worthwhile about such account is that this is not apparently the explicit intention of either the editors or the contributors. Therefore, the collection offers original (and, perhaps, ideologically, methodologically and epistemologically ‘uncontaminated’) instances of ‘decentred’ investigations.

The volume’s 36 chapters are divided into four parts. The first concentrates on the political, economic and cultural dimensions of globalization in Eurasia. The nine contributions to this section focus on different aspects of Russia’s economic transitions, the dynamics of post-Soviet state building in Central Asia, and a parallel assessment of Russia’s and China’s developmental models. In this respect, some of the contributors draw conclusions that are generally disregarded by ‘Western’ observers. For instance, Kuldip Singh suggests that the search for self-reliance in the region might resurrect ‘the [developmental] model that the former Soviet Union practiced for a long time’ (p. 81). Yet, Phool Badan asserts that despite the precarious nature of the Eurasian transitions, ‘one can look forward to the deepening of the democratic reforms in these countries’ (p. 100). While contradictory, such examinations offer an undiluted version of ‘non-Western’ approaches to the study of international politics.

The second part of the volume interrogates the notion and practices of sustainable development, social welfare and human resources in Eurasia. The six chapters in this section deal with a diverse set of issues – ranging from woman trafficking and transnational organized crime to law making, labour markets and youth development. Again, the contributions to this section offer inimitable ‘non-Western’ accounts of regional developments. For instance, Mushtaq A. Kaw asserts the inevitability of the disintegration of ‘kinship ties and primordial values’ across Eurasia and their substitution with ‘a new space rooted in money and material [rather] than peace and solace’ (p. 208). The value added of this perspective is in eliciting the expectations of regional actors about the future patterns of relations in Eurasia.

The third part of the volume discusses patterns of local governance, informal networks and civil society in Eurasia. The contributors discuss distinct aspects of these trends in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and India. It is interesting that several of the chapters provide accounts not only of current affairs, but also of the historical evolutions of different social networks in the region. As demonstrated by Vikas Jha’s investigation of democratic decentralization in India, this type of analysis can offer useful analytical tools for both conceptualizing local self-governance and modelling ‘capacity-building by civil society’ (p. 300). At the same time the accounts included in this part of the volume provide veritable genealogies for the persistence of informal political actors pervading the Eurasian social, economic and political interactions.

The final part of the volume examines the security and strategic dimensions of globalization in Eurasia. Consisting of 11 chapters, this is the largest part of the volume: a clear indication of the significance of this aspect. The contributors touch upon a variety of topics. Ajay Patnaik makes a detailed investigation of the energy geopolitics of Eurasia. His inference is that the proliferation of various external actors interested to tap the region’s repositories of oil and gas ‘has brought greater instability to the Eurasian region’ (p. 323). The tendency towards the growing militarization of the region seems to be confirmed by Iran’s nuclear programme. According to Nurşin Ateşoğlu Güney, the shadow of the Iranian nuclear weapons programme reinforces the need to strengthen the nuclear-weapons-free-zone in Central Asia in order to ‘prevent

Eurasian security issues from becoming a quasi-Middle Eastern crisis' (p. 341). The fourth part of the volume also includes analyses of India's, China's and America's role in the region.

It needs to be acknowledged that the volume edited by Patnaik and Tulsiram does not resolve the definitional conundrum of the Eurasian appellation. As the contributions to the collection demonstrate, Eurasian space has acquired various geographic ramifications in the theory, history and practice of international relations. While it does not attempt to resolve this issue by offering a definitive account of the geopolitical outlines of the region, the collection offers an insight into the diverse meanings of this term among Indian, Iranian, Turkish, Russian and Central Asian commentators. Thus, what might be interpreted by some as a sign of a lack of coherence, also assists in exposing the particular strategic connotations that Eurasia has acquired in the outlook of different external observers and international actors.

In this way, the editors seem to imply that it is the intricacy of geopolitical imagination that makes Eurasian geopolitics both worthwhile and complex. Thus, the investigations included in this volume offer original perspectives on the construction and individualization of Eurasian affairs as a distinct field of observation. It is therefore expected that collection would benefit, on the one hand, those interested in Eurasian, post-Soviet and Central Asian studies and, on the other hand, the growing cohort of students of 'non-Western' international relations.

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Gog and Magog in early Eastern Christian and Islamic sources. Sallam's quest for Alexander's Wall, by E. Van Donzel and A. Schmidt, Leiden, Brill, 2010, xi + 271 pp., including 4 illustrations and 4 maps, €99 (hardback), ISBN 978-90-04-17416-0

This book deals with an enigmatic question about the geographical image of Central Asia in the Middle Ages, especially in Oriental sources. Its focus is the barrier supposedly built by Alexander the Great against the Gog and Magog. Traditionally these peoples are situated northeast of the Middle East and are considered as apocalyptic peoples, that is, they would conquer the world before the Final Judgement. However, the Arabic literature contains a narrative by Sallam the Interpreter who claims to have reached this barrier on the order of Caliph al-Wathiq, in the middle of the ninth century. Moreover, Sallam describes in details the gate constructed by Alexander in the wall. Since this text was discovered in the nineteenth century, historians have been divided on its validity and reliability. In this latest contribution to this debate, Emeri Van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt attempt to demonstrate its veracity.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part (chapters one to six) tackles the origin and the development of the image of Gog and Magog from the Bible (Ezekiel 38 and 39) to the Islamic literature (Koran, XVII, 93–96) through the Jewish literature and the Early Christian literature, in particular among the Syriac authors. The second part (chapters seven to 12) is devoted to Sallam's quest for Alexander's Wall in 842–44.

The authors explain how the fear of Gog and Magog, expressed by Ezekiel, developed in the Jewish literature. Moreover, in the Jewish Hellenistic circles, this story is merged with the *Alexander romance* and specifically the construction by Alexander of iron gates in order to

prevent barbarous attacks from the North. The fusion of the tradition of Gog and Magog with that of Alexander the Great as the protector of civilization has developed in the Syriac literature (p. 15). The authors show that the episode of Alexander's barrier and Gog and Magog appears for the first time in the Syriac Alexander legend (beginning of the seventh century) in which the gate is described and situated in the Caucasus. Subsequently, the Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius embellished this motif, situated it in the East and invented the episode in which Alexander petitions God to move two mountains against each other. The authors also show that there was a process of acculturation of this motif in Islam. The fourth chapter summarizes the Muslim conceptions of Gog and Magog, and the fifth is a good anthology of Arabic and Persian descriptions of these tribes. However, to rely on Ibn Battuta as the authors do (p. 97) is dangerous, since his travel in China is doubtful. It is also regrettable that Ibn Sa'īd is quoted (p. 54) from Golius (1669) when two modern editions of this author are available.

When van Donzel and Schmidt tackle Sallam's travel, they begin by explaining the origin of the text and its two Arabic versions. To the Arab geographers whom they mention we can add Ibn al-Qaṣṣ (946)¹ and al-Bakri² (1094), who also give versions of this narrative. Al-Khwarizmi³ is also forgotten though his map is mentioned (p. 178). Among the modern scholars, the omissions of Fuat Sezgin⁴ and particularly Kratchkovski⁵ are striking. In the eighth chapter, the authors show that there is a line of transmission between the 6th/7th centuries Syriac tradition of Gog and Magog and the barrier described by Sallam. This line is posited by ancient Arabic poets and Islamic exegetes. The comparison of the descriptions of the gate in these various texts (pp. 171–172) is very convincing.

However, when the authors turn to Sallam's travel itself, they attempt everything to prove its veracity. For them, the reason of Sallam's mission for al-Wathīq to the barrier would have been to verify the Koranic allusions to Gog and Magog (p. 177 and p. 179). They revert to De Goeje's hypothesis⁶ according to which Sallam's gate is the Yumenguan or the Jade Gate. This gate was a frontier post west of Dunhuang. We have to bear in mind that Sallam's itinerary takes him from Samarra to the Caucasus, and from there, he crosses modern Kazakhstan to reach Igu (modern-day Hami), in Xinjiang. But, in the Arabic text, we have no toponyms between Sarīr (modern-day Daghestan) and Igu. The authors imagine the itinerary on the basis of the historical geography of these regions. They detail the various possibilities keeping account of the historical development of these regions (the Bashkirts and the Oghuz, Dzungaria, the Tarim Basin, Qocho in the Eastern Turkestan, and after Igu/Hami Dunhuang). However with such a large number of localities or human settlements it might well be asked why Sallam failed to mention a single one of them. If the authors' hypothesis is correct, he would travel over 5700 km, visit oases and see various cultures: yet he apparently remembered none of these details when relating his journey one year later. If Sallam travelled by Dunhuang (p. 215), why didn't he tell Ibn Ḥurradādhbih?

Sallam's silence is very suspicious and contrasts with the narratives on the same subject of the same epoch, such as Tamim's journey to the Uygurs.⁷ On the contrary, al-Ṭabari⁸ relates a fictive mission sent by 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Rabi'a from the Caucasus to the wall, in 642, in similar words. In order to explain this itinerary, the authors have recourse to gratuitous explanations, for instance when Sallam leaves Atil for Igu (p. 190): 'He may have heard Uygurs met in Atil, mentioning a barrier or gate situated in their central Asiatic homeland.' In the same way, the authors suppose that Sallam met the Christian Syriac diaspora in Central Asia 'with its repertoire of stories about Gog and Magog and the barrier . . . Sallam doubtless regarded these Syriac traditions as a god-speed for his enterprise' (p. 190). For Sallam's homeward journey, the authors use the same method. While Sallam enumerates only five names

between his departure and Taraz (the first city identified), the authors imagine his itinerary of over 1000 km travelling through Loulan and Kucha.

The erudition of Van Donzel and Schmidt is impressive and we only note a few mistakes. They mention (on p. 180) the sketch of a world map kept in the Bodleian Library (Ms. Laud Or. 317) as attributed to al-Kindi (ninth century) and al-Sarakhsi (ninth century), but this map must date to at least the sixteenth century because it mentions the Cape of Good Hope.⁹ In connection with the Muslims whom Sallam meets at Igu, the authors talk (p. 206) about the ‘madrassa’. The madrassa didn’t exist in the ninth century. On the other hand, the identification of Abu Dulaf’s stages (tenth century) to Yumenguan and Dunhuang is very convincing.

On the subject of Sallam’s itinerary, we can note that the exact identification of his stages stops at the boundaries of the regions known by the Muslim in the middle of the ninth century. To ascertain this, it is enough to consult al-Khwarizmi who wrote at this time. Knowing that the description of the gate rests on the literary description going back to a Syriac model, one can imagine that Sallam invented his travel using the geographical knowledge circulating amongst his contemporaries, to which he added the description of the gate. Al-Khwarizmi previously situated Alexander’s wall in northwest China.

In sum, this book perfectly explains the development of the description of the barrier built by Alexander against the Gog and Magog, from the Syriac literature to the Arabic geography, but its reconstruction of Sallam’s itinerary is artificial and unconvincing. This journey might have happened, but van Donzel and Schmidt fail to persuade us by the evidence they adduce. Nonetheless, this book is a very good synthesis of the historical geography of the regions between the seventh and the ninth centuries.

Notes

1. Ibn al-Qāṣṣ, *Kitāb dalā’il al-qibla*, British Library, Oriental 13315, ff. 47r-47v.
2. Al-Bakrī (1992, pp. 455–458).
3. Daunicht (1970, pp. 13–25).
4. Sezgin (2010, pp. 95–97).
5. Kratchkovski (2004, pp. 138–141).
6. De Goeje (1888, p. 111).
7. Minorsky (1947–48, pp. 275–305).
8. Al-Ṭabarī (1991, II, p. 542).
9. Pinna (s.d., II, p. 95.)

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Counterterrorism policies in Central Asia, by Mariya Y. Omelicheva, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, xi + 177pp, £80.00, 192 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-77981-4.

The author's project is straightforwardly presented at the start of the book. She wishes to inquire why we see a convergence of Central Asian states' counter-terrorism policies that emphasize a punitive, military approach rather than a more balanced counter-terror agenda at a time when these states are becoming less alike. She also believes that the actual incidence of terrorism in these states is much less than would be needed to provoke such a response. In other words, she argues that something beyond the actual manifestation of terror attacks has led these states, and especially the two states studied here, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, to adopt such draconian policies. The cause for this convergence upon a punitive forceful response therefore, she believes, must lie outside of these states' actual domestic experience

To answer her question and substantiate her claim, the author employs different theories of international group action that emphasize the group setting in which these states act. Dissatisfied with the three prevailing interpretations of state action – the rationalist, constructivist and perception-oriented schools of contemporary International Relations – Omelicheva instead resorts to concepts from social psychology, namely the idea of the reference group.

Omelicheva sees these Central Asian governments learning from their reference groups, that is, those states with whom it participates in organized socio-political interactions. Through these interactions states are socialized to certain normative standards and behaviours that refer to the standards of the groups and its leading members. Accordingly she focuses on the Central Asian states' interactions with Russia and China in the CIS, CSTO and SCO and with the United States and its counter-terrorism policies. She finds that in many ways these two states (and presumably their Central Asian neighbours') responses to terrorism emulate much of Russia's legislation and policy making. She attributes this pattern of emulation or of adoption to the nature of their interaction with Russia, which, she argues, provides important political and economic benefits to both her main subject states. By virtue of its economic endowment and stable government Kazakhstan has achieved more freedom of manoeuvre than Kyrgyzstan, which is quite dependent on Russia. Nevertheless, both governments benefit in symbolic and material ways from their interaction with Russia; thus this interaction has real benefits that leads them to take positions resembling that of Russia in their counterterrorism legislation. She then proceeds to discuss ways in which other influences might be brought to bear upon these states to induce them to reform their legislation in a more humane and liberalizing fashion.

The evidence of resemblances between Russian and Central Asian legislation are quite convincing and there is no doubt that the author knows the subject well. Yet this reader, at least, was left with questions. Is it really necessary to construct so elaborate a theoretical superstructure to prove that these states have largely taken over Russian legislation on this subject and that they follow Russia's lead

here? After all, even though it is clear that Russia seeks to dominate Central Asia and in fact does not truly accept these states' full sovereignty, it nonetheless conducts a relationship with them that is for Central Asian states, to use the author's terms, both value-expressive and pragmatic.

For all these states, which have become steadily more authoritarian over time, the threat of any opposition, terrorist or otherwise, has become anathema. Even before the current Arab revolutions that have generated so much interest and anxiety among them, these governments unanimously bought into the idea that the colour revolutions of 2003–2005, the demonstrations in Tibet and Xinjiang, and the Iranian election struggle in 2008–2009, epitomized the possibilities of threats to their rule. These seemed like real threats and they were all convinced that the support for this kind of threat came from the United States linked with non-governmental organizations and opposition movements in their countries. Since they had also benefited greatly by playing up the terrorist threat *vis-à-vis* Washington in 2001–2005, it made sense to use terrorism as the cover for suppressing any further democratic or other political opposition. This they have unfailingly done since 2005 if not earlier. At the same time, despite Russia's overbearing tendencies, they received real benefits from their ties to Moscow. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, despite their varying degrees of dependence upon Russia, derive political cover from Russia and China's support for their autocracies in international affairs and from economic benefits that flow to them from Moscow as trade, aid or investment.

In other words, it seems one could account for the problem posed by the author without having recourse to so elaborate a theoretical scaffolding. However, in the author's reference group such a straightforward approach, even if it conforms to Occam's razor and his warning about not multiplying entities needlessly, would be immensely counterproductive since it is now *de rigueur* for theory to substitute for, or even to be, the ground for analysis. And such analysis cannot limit itself to more prosaic and obvious manifestations of self-interest as sketched out here. One could indeed say that the author had to couch the analysis in a very complex way in order to conform to the normative standards of her reference group, that is, political scientists.

This caveat aside, what is of real benefit to the reader is not the theoretical apparatus, but rather the analysis of these states' legislation and of their relationships to each other and to Russia. Anyone with an interest in Central Asia and especially in the question of the viability of their autocratic regimes that are now under renewed pressure will benefit considerably from Omelicheva's analysis.

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The politics of transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus: enduring legacies and emerging challenges, by Amanda E. Wooden and Christoph H. Stefes (eds), Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, US\$135, ISBN 978-0-415-36813-1

The *Politics of transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus* is a hugely significant contribution to existing political and social theory on 'Central Eurasia'; it is also highly readable and will be of interest to both seasoned scholars and newcomers to the region. The book is made up of a collection of absorbing comparative perspective case studies linking the legacies of the Soviet past to current salient issues. Weaving the main theoretical discussions and methodologies into the

introduction and conclusion, the editors, Christoph Stefes and Amanda Wooden, use the contributors' ideas to defy the common belief that these countries are subject to dichotomous policy choices, and highlight the emergence of unique and individual political contexts in the region. Simultaneously, while examining variables such as path-dependency (looking at how the pasts of each of these countries is now influencing their current trajectories) and critical historical junctures (when old paths are abandoned), the editors provide tools to facilitate understanding of the peculiarities of regime change in Central Eurasia. In particular, the authors address the crucial question of why authoritarian rule persists in some countries in the region while opposition protest is successful in others.

As with all comparative case-study edited collections, structure is crucial, and in this case, the organization of material into a three-fold division works well. In the first part, 'Frameworks for analysis', the two principal authors flesh out current theoretical debates and methodological choices, and lay out the most important questions facing the region. Social scientists Medina Aitieva and Tim Epkenhans join Amanda Wooden to provide a somber review of methodological, theoretical and analytical research in the region, which includes the first published pilot-survey analysis of scholarship on Central Eurasia. Although flawed owing to the uneven response from the regional countries, this analysis nonetheless presents some interesting information, including a useful table on funding sources. The authors rightly voice concern about the level of such donor research dependence in the region and its impact on scholarship coming out of the region. They highlight in particular their leaning towards 'hot topics' and 'policy relevance-driven bandwagoning', such as the sudden onset of scholars studying the role of militant Islam in regional destabilization since 2001.

In the second part of the book, 'Political contexts of transitional variations', Lucan Way and Eric McGlinchey examine regime change in two complementary chapters on state power and protest movements. These two important chapters reveal much about state–society relations and potential political developments. Concisely summing up recent political history in Georgia and Armenia, Way rejects the 'bottom-up' argument that the opposition have initiated successful 'revolutions' by effectively comparing how the government in Armenia has resisted much more frequent and sizeable opposition mobilization than Georgia. The strong centralization of the state apparatus in Armenia is attributed to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which has also played a crucial role in uniting disparate forces in the country.

McGlinchey, meanwhile, perceives the role of the state in regime change as overestimated and answers the question of why Central Eurasian governments that 'share similar coercive powers' face such varying degrees of opposition protest by looking back to the early transition period. In doing so, McGlinchey presents an insightful analysis of the history of protest in Kyrgyzstan that is particularly useful in assessing more recent turmoil in the country. In the early 1990s, both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan witnessed significant degrees of protest, including riots, while Kazakhstan has had a history of fragmented and ineffective opposition, which has never targeted the President. Thus, McGlinchey propounds his theory that 'political protests . . . may be grounded in a self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating dynamic of learned co-operation' (p. 135). This theory has arguably been vindicated during recent events in Kyrgyzstan, but has less purchase on Uzbekistan, where the composition of the Uzbek opposition is anomalous for the region. This idea of path-dependency and a pattern of conflict can also be used to understand to some degree the trajectory of political protest in both Armenia and Georgia. McGlinchey presciently notes prior to the turmoil in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, that 'a new political culture is emerging (in Kyrgyzstan) where political change is achieved not through polls and the ballot box, but through protests and bullhorns' (p. 128).

The dispiriting issue of international engagement is the subject of the third and final part of the book, 'Policymaking legacies and futures', which focuses on pressing regional policy

challenges, including human rights, economics, gender and education. Christopher Waters examines the difficulties of internalizing human rights in Central Eurasia, pointing out that in comparison to the South Caucasian countries, which are members of the Council of Europe, Central Asia lacks a regional organization that has a binding legal-enforcement mechanism. This lack, argues Waters, thwarts the implementation of any transnational legal process. Waters also realistically queries the ability of international organizations to improve the human-rights situation without the important role of domestic human-rights entrepreneurs ‘to bridge the gap between international standards and domestic implementation of those standards’ (p. 189). Waters positively points to the work of Article 42, a Georgian non-governmental organization, which has successfully used litigation for the protection of individuals’ human rights.

Ideally placed as a comparative educator and a specialist in Central Asia, Carolyn Kissane provides a concise and well-researched history of education in the majority of the Central Eurasian countries since the Soviet era. She views changes to the system since independence as ‘tinkering’, not transformation, and highlights the increasing inequality and stratification of the system, which reflects current socio-economic disparities in the region. Kissane comments on Turkmenistan’s well-documented regressive education policies under the former President Saparmat Niyazov, but the omission of any reference to changes since Berdimukhamedov’s accession is frustrating. The author admits that it is hard to access accurate and reliable data in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, but Kissane’s on-the-ground research, including interviews and classroom observations, evident in her writing on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, begs for something similar in these two countries. The need for more in-depth research on education is particularly acute in Uzbekistan, where, as actually noted by Kissane, young people constitute a majority (almost 56%) of the population (p. 239).

In a concluding chapter, Wooden and Stefes skilfully weave together the disparate contributions with a plea for better scholarship of the region. Using McGlinchey and Way’s identification of two ideal paths – weak and strong society-based opposition as well as weak and strong coercive capacity – the authors offer a table that presents patterns of state–society relations and clearly shows the potential for stability in each country, which will be useful for further political risk study (p. 253).

In view of recent events in Kyrgyzstan, and the potential for further instability in Central Asia, the book provides future and current students of the region with much-needed parameters for subsequent study. Their exposure of the shortcomings of current regional research, as well as the interesting comparative chapters offered by the contributors, should help students to eschew primarily Internet-based, foreign-funded research and conduct investigations from a better methodological and theoretical basis. Only in so doing can we better understand how the unique historical paths of each of these turbulent countries is likely to impact on future trajectories of state–society relations, in turn improving policy making in the region.

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Empire speaks out: languages of rationalization and self-description in the Russian Empire

by Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber and Alexander Semyonov, Leiden, Brill, 2009, iv + 280 pp., includes bibliographic references and index, US\$171.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-90-04-17571-6

‘The dangers of empire-realism are everywhere in our field’, write five contributors in their introduction to this impressive volume (p. 18). Scholars everywhere, they note, seek a generic definition that will somehow encompass the vast range of experiences that go under the banner of empire. Yet in the search for a single such definition, this book argues, those experiences can all too quickly collapse under the weight of traditional archaisms and limited categories of analysis. Instead, the contributors advocate close readings of imperial situations, ‘when empire becomes visible either as a result of contradictions emerging from its uneven and unsystematic heterogeneity or as a result of conscious attempts to make it more manageable and thus more rational’ (p. 25). As the historical anthropologist Ann Stoler offers in her excellent and programmatic contribution to this book, the goal is to take a careful look at what empires ‘do’ rather than what they ‘are’ (p. 37). Six subsequent chapters set out on this task of defamiliarizing the story of empire, with a special purchase on narratives by key actors explaining how they understand imperial rule in action.

Such a goal sets the bar high, and this book is particularly good at laying out the variety of ways by which rulers rationalized imperial rule to themselves and others. In an essay on governance and education, Jan Kusber urges us to consider the Catherinian age as a ‘process of negotiation’ (p. 61), where Catherine was in permanent dialogue with elites, thus illustrating how empire, in this way, could be a continual work in progress. In an essay on key Polish tensions with imperial Russia from 1815–63, Hans-Christian Pedersen challenges the often self-serving, nation-centred perspectives of the Polish emigration of that period to explore the daily events that up-ended such easy distinctions among Slavic powers. In a thoughtful essay on the ‘Siberian middle ground’, Sergey Glebov revisits key moments in the region’s famously limited non-Russian historiography, reminding us that some Siberian peoples were quite effective at subordinating the same Russian settlers who had come to colonize them into pre-existing economic and political hierarchies. Citing a popular fictional Ukrainian story of a Russian colonist subjugated to a *Iakut* (Sakha) leader, he writes: ‘These developments fed into the growing insecurity of the Russian imperial bureaucrats. The Russian peasant settler, the colonist meant to build and maintain the Empire was giving way to the supposedly weaker and less developed semi-nomadic and half-Christian Iakut ... casting the very nature of the imperial project in doubt’ (p. 150). In an extract from her pioneering work on the history of Russian physical anthropology, Marina Mogilner explores the fascinating debates over the creation of a multicultural, inclusive ‘imperial race’ through 1917, discussions that were the outgrowth of a liberal imperialism of the day, one that has received little attention given its proponents’ inability to deliver a coherent political programme. In an essay on empire as seen through the work of the first, short-lived Russian parliament (1906–17), Alexander Semyonov extends this discussion of unexpected constituencies. Duma representatives, he argues, ‘rarely came from the established ranks of imperial rulers or corridors of power’ (p. 197). Instead, Semyonov suggests wide evidence that these political actors ‘evolved into a non-classical political subject of empire’, creating a remarkably uneven diversity, but a diversity, nonetheless, that has received scant attention in succeeding years. Reprising the same time period, Ilya Gerasimov argues that Russia was witness to ‘a truly mass-scale social movement’ from 1906–16, one that involved tens of thousands of urban, educated, increasingly mobile Russians whose shared goal was the promotion of a modernized notion of imperial citizenship. As in the case of other ideological platforms explored in this volume, this movement fell on history’s deaf ears, he contends, when it produced

no compelling metanarrative to combine all its voices as one. Yet the movement speaks volumes to the difficulties met by early ‘engineers of the human soul’ who advocated a coherent imperial identity.

Readers who anticipate that the ‘self-description’ pledged in the book’s title might foreground traditionally neglected voices or perspectives from the less privileged among the colonized will find less here to work with. By and large, this is a study in Slavic elites and their engagements with the imperial paradigm. We encounter a rich range of voices from among leading Polish and Russian social actors but few from among the many others who were often kept at bay from full membership in the imperial fold. The kind of exemplary work on non-traditional voices of empire being done in the Caucasus by Michael Kemper, or in Central Asia by Adeeb Khalid, is left for another volume. But one can scarcely put this book down without appreciating the considerably greater range of debate over empire’s import taking place at the centres of power than one gets from other recent studies. Evidence of such surprisingly robust debate is this book’s richest contribution.

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