

Aleksei Malashenko, *Tsentralnaia Aziia: na chto Rasschityvaet Rossiia? [Central Asia and Russia's Expectations]*, Carnegie Moscow Center: Moscow: 2012, 118 p., ISBN: 978-5-8243-1712-1

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Aleksei Malashenko is the co-chair of the Religion, Society, and Security Program at the Carnegie Center in Moscow. One of the main message of the book is that Russia is no longer a leading power in Central Asia and its influence has become more and more limited. The author's forecast is pessimistic. He argues that Russian projects (particularly the Common Economic Space and the Eurasian Union) will not lead to any revolutionary change of the situation.

In the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation approved by President Vladimir Putin on 12 February 2013, Central Asia is mentioned as a priority space and field for the national interests of Russia. Malashenko, on the contrary, affirms that Central Asia, and the rest of post-Soviet space, cannot be considered as a main area of Russian foreign policy. Instead the activity of Russian foreign policy is formed under the circumstances of Russian-European, Russian-U.S., and Russian-Chinese relations.

In chapter one, Malashenko argues that the new (depressed) status of Russia does not allow the country to play a significant role in Central Asia, despite Russia's potential to play this role. He argues that Russia will focus its efforts on two or three countries, because it is not able cover the whole region. One of the arguments of Russia's weakening in the region are the processes of "derussification" taking place in the Central Asian states.

The author maintains that Central Asia is not an integrated region. It is a conglomeration of nation states and each of them has their own national interests and vectors of foreign policy. There is no common interest in the region and Central Asian states cannot create international institutions on their own without the participation of non-regional actors.

Russian foreign policy in Central Asia is presented as bilateral relations between Russia and five states but not a united whole. Malashenko believes that the principal mistake of Moscow's policy in the region is the considerable influence of ideology – i.e. the idea of a privileged position for Russia in the region. From his point of view, Central Asian states, in their relations with Russia, rate her attitude as neutral towards such problems as the development of civil society, democracy, and human rights. The author also criticizes Eurasianism and the idea that Russia needs its own ideology in order to justify its own particular historical and cultural development.

In chapter two, Malashenko analyses the international institutions created by Russia. He argues that they are unproductive and their influence nominal, even predicting the collapse of the Eurasian Economic Community. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), according to

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the author's point of view, will continue to conduct maneuvers but is waiting for a threat. However, the organization will not interfere in the internal affairs of its members. Malashenko is convinced that other bodies created by Russia cannot change the main trend in the region: the reduction of Russian influence in Central Asia.

In the final chapter, the author examines the tendency of the transformation of Central Asian societies towards traditional types. The gradual strengthening of religious identity leads to usage of Islam as a regulator of social relations by authorities in domestic policy. Malashenko concludes that further consolidation of Islam in the region will result in the alienation of Central Asia from its former metropolis, Moscow.

In his conclusion, Malashenko analyzes the potential challenges of Russia in Central Asia: The Chinese challenge, the American challenge, and the Islamic one. The Chinese challenge is the financial and economic invasion of the region gradually turning into real expansion. He argues that the Chinese economic challenge is not a political one. The American challenge has an economic aspect (energy resources) but it is primarily a political (even military-political) challenge. The Islamic challenge is the spread of religious radicalism.

This is not an exhaustive list of problems in Central Asia. Malashenko also mentions drug trafficking; efforts to reduce Russia's role in the energy sphere; uncertain shifts in power; and migration as a critical aspect of Russian-Central Asian relations.

To solve these problems, Malashenko advises Russia's authorities to update state policy in Central Asia. He believes Russia will have to accept the fact that its influence in Central Asia is declining and focus on solving real problems. Another important message of the book is that Russia must realize that for a long time already it has been dealing not with the post-Soviet republics but with new states, and Russia still has to figure out what kind of states they are.

However, if there is a criticism it is perhaps that the author is too focused on a rather bleak outlook for Russia in the region and he fails to point out some of the more recent successes. Russia has taken measures to modernize the CSTO and its members conduct regular military exercises. The development of the Customs Union and Common Economic Space suggests that Moscow is ready to expend much effort towards Central Asia in both the economic and security spheres. The interest of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan towards joining the Customs Union, as well as continuing free-trade agreements with the Union and New Zealand, Vietnam, as well as the European Free Trade Association, also point towards an optimistic forecast. Nevertheless, despite neglecting these positive developments, the book presents a comprehensive survey of the current situation in Central Asia today.