

**OVERVIEW OF THE
MAIN WESTERN
RESEARCHES ON
CENTRAL ASIA
(2010-2013)**

The strategic region of Central Asia, which links the key zones of Europe and Asia together, has historically taken center stage due to its geographic significance.

It seemed that the end of the 2000s, foreign interest on our region has exhausted itself and all that could be written about Central Asia, it has been written. West, as it seemed to have lost the geopolitical interest in Central Asia, which hardly supports the presence of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan. «Legitimate» Russia's interests in Central Asia have been informally recognized by Washington as part of the «reset». Perhaps, this was made possible by the hope that Moscow's influence will be constrained by the growing presence of China in the region.

And now all has changed. On the one hand, the West is scared desire of Russia to force the creation of the Eurasian Union; on the other – strengthening of China in Central Asia is also not satisfied with the Western strategists. To this should be added the existence of factors of Iran, India and Afghanistan, again, to understand that the geopolitical struggle over Central Asia is not attenuated, on the contrary entering a new phase.

Confirmation of this conclusion can be found in the works of which are set out below. They focus not only on issues of geopolitics, security and international position of Central Asia, also are dedicated to the internal problems of individual countries in the region, their political and socio-economic development.

Research, released in the framework of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at the University of J. Hopkins, written by Niklas Swanström dedicated to the new role of China in Central Asia. The research «China and Greater Central Asia: New Frontiers?» continues the academic discourse given by his senior colleague F. Starr. As we know, he enters into scientific and political turn the concept of «GCA». But Swanström goes further: for Swedish scientist GCA – it is not only the Central Asia and Afghanistan, but Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia (perhaps part of the Caucasus and Azerbaijan) [1].

Unlike many other researchers Swanström adhere to the viewpoint that Beijing has succeeded in the application of soft power. The basic meaning of the Chinese policy and strategy in the region was the use of countries, resources and markets in the region in its favor, but so that Russia and the Central Asian states do not have the impression that China is a threat to them.

Swanström trying to identify China's strategy in the region GCA. Most likely, Growing Chinese influence is already in conflict with the interests of the United States, Russia and the European Union, but the question is – will it lead to cooperation or conflict – is still open. Create close economic ties in the interior of Eurasia is an integral part of raising and strengthening the power of China.

The author also considers the problem from the point of view of European interests. He expresses the idea that the EU and China can and should boost the trans-Eurasian transport links. Scientist notes that the growing anti-Americanism and falling creditworthiness of Washington makes many countries in the region to change the orientation to Beijing.

Great interest represents the collective monograph of French and Russian scientists «Mapping Central Asia. Indian Perceptions and Strategies». The book was published under the editorship of famous French orientalist Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, which, in turn, attracted to the work of the Indian researchers A. Patnaik, K. Waricoo, A. Sengupta, S. Gopal and others.

From the point of view of composition book consists of three parts. The first part is devoted to the general history of India and Central Asia as a bridge to the present. Relations between the two civilizations and regions are shown in terms of their historic neighborhood, intensity of contacts, and the subsequent «fragmentation» links [2].

The second part the «Contextualization Indo-Central Asian relations» considering this period like the period of the hopes, disappointments and gradual transition to a mutual pragmatism. The third part of the book is addressed to geopolitical problems affecting the Indian policy towards Central Asia – Pakistan factor, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Xinjiang.

The authors emphasize that the main cause of this publication are two paradoxes. The first of them concerns the fact that the problem of relations between India and the countries of Central Asia has become a traditional story from the point of view of classical geopolitics. But the paradox is that the authors believe that the issue actually does not study at the political, economic, strategic and cultural levels of interaction. The main link in the field of security for both sides remains Afghanistan.

The second paradox is the fact that, despite the relatively high level of development for Central Asian Studies in India, the Indian school of political science is ignored in the West and is practically in isolation. Indian achievements in this area are recognized mainly under the auspices of Oriental Studies.

Last year, the famous American specialist in our region Frederick Starr has gathered an international team for the preparation of the project «Fergana Valley. The Heart of Central Asia». According to the scientist, with a population of 12 million people, Fergana is one of the most populated areas of the world. The uniqueness of the region also gives such factors as ethnic and linguistic diversity of the population and political fragmentation, because the valley belong once the three Central Asian states [3]. At the same time a geographical point of view of the valley are peripheral to the capitals of these republics.

This fundamental issue consists of 14 chapters that cover the history of the region from ancient times to the present, with particular problems highlighted in a special chapter on the economy, ecology, culture, Islam and international position of Fergana. But the conceptual basis sets the introduction and conclusion, written by professor Starr.

The valley has gained a characteristic for one of the centers of instability for more than two decades. It is concern primarily to the Uzbek and Kyrgyz sectors of valley.

Frederick Starr, suggest creating a collective international department, as a panacea for all the problems of the region proposes, for which he has already found a suitable name – «Coordination Council of the Fergana Valley». According to the scientist, the Council could to become the basis for a wider mutual cooperation of all countries in the region.

Historiography of Central Asia was incomplete without mentioning the work of our German and Russian researchers. Last year, in a joint project of the German Foundation Rosa Luxemburg and the Institute of Oriental Studies was released the third collective monograph «The political process in Central Asia». In the new work an international team the authors analyze the political processes in the countries of the region, particularly the socio-economic development of Central Asian states, radical changes that have affected all sectors of society [4].

In the introductory article, the authors based on the fact that in Central Asia there is a stable authoritarian model of government, a particular type of clan-bureaucratic capitalism, serving a limited number of the group, the complex interaction of a modernist tradition, the growing influence of religion in public life. Therefore, the political struggle is concentrated not on alternative policies, but mainly on the problems of influence.

In this regard, the author touches upon a very important issue. They note that there are two options

for the configuration of the region that have been proposed as an alternative vision of its history, culture and political interests. One is called the «Central Eurasia», another – «Greater Central Asia». Therefore, according to supporters of the new names, its need to connect to the Central Asia, some neighboring countries and treat them as historical geopolitical entity. Such an argument has already gained popularity in the expert community and institutional support in the names of different kinds of communities, activities and departments.

According to the authors, the problem of a new view on the region and its name (in this case, the difference between the «Central Eurasia» and «Greater Central Asia» is secondary, more stylistic character) is that its designers rather vaguely proclaimed draw the boundaries of cultural geographical structure. In addition to five of these countries, it is include Afghanistan, the list may include, depending on the imagination of a particular author, Mongolia, Chinese Xinjiang, the eastern regions of Iran, north-western regions of Pakistan, Western Siberia, the Southern Urals, Volga region, Caucasus and the Crimea.

The authors of a survey «Central Asia: Decay and Decline», prepared by the International Crisis Group and dedicated to the region, said that the Central Asia occur «disintegration and decay» [5]. To

make this conclusion, the authors had to carefully examine the detailed statistics in socio-economic sphere – health, education, energy and transport.

Previous review adjoins another – «Crisis Management in Central Asia», released by the Asia Society in Washington, DC. The author F. Shishkin is considering the region in two directions: from the point of view of development of each republic and from a position of influence geopolitical actors (Russia, China, US and EU). For each of the states in the region the author find comprehensive definition: Kazakhstan – a specimen of electoral authoritarianism; Kyrgyzstan – a country of eternal revolution; Tajikistan – disastrous state; Turkmenistan – fueled by gas the kingdom in the sands; and finally, Uzbekistan – a police state of strategic importance [6].

Thus, we see a rich palette of opinions, concepts and theories concerning the present state and future development of Central Asia. It should be noted that many experts have expressed the idea that the existence of a relatively quiet period in the region in the international system, which coincided with the end of the legislature George W. Bush and the period of the current administration of Barack Obama, is completed. Now, when the basic problems of long-term destabilization of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Arab East were solved, the West has a problem of destabilization of Iran and Pakistan.

References

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- 4 Политический процесс в Центральной Азии: результаты, проблемы, перспективы. – М.: ИВ РАН/ЦСПИ, 2011. – С. 63.
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- 6 Shishkin Ph. Central Asia's Crisis of Governance. – Washington, DC: Asia Society, 2012. – P. 40.

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