

Prospects for Democracy in Central Asia

Edited by: Birgit N. Schlyter

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While leafing through "Prospects for Democracy in Central Asia," edited by Birgit N. Schlyter, one comes to know about the issue of democracy in the Central Asian States through a broader picture as seen from the different perspectives of people belonging to different regions of the world. This book comprises writings of eminent world politicians and scholars.

Stephen Blank, one of the contributors of the book, apprises the readers about the attributes of democracy required to adapt it for the Central Asian region and also highlights the impediments to smooth transition of this region towards democracy. He points out that for democracy in Central Asia, two pre-requisites are essential. Firstly, inter-regional security should be strengthened to avoid any regional wars and conflicts. Secondly, he suggests that external pressure, for economic and democratic reforms, must be enhanced on the autocratic leaders of the region. He further argues that Moscow's deep military interests in the region could impede swift democratization of the region in the future because it can then be viewed as instrumental for Western and US interests in the region.

Muhiddin Kabiri asserts that all five Central Asian countries have gone through their own individual experiences of democracy owing to their different economic conditions and security needs internally and externally. He takes Tajikistan as case study of his hypothesis and observes that the Tajik elite, even before the Soviet integration, was trained in a totalitarian system and resisted in devolving power to the new political forces. He further suggests the concept of political Islam in Tajikistan has been materialised and has shown that the two arch political divergent groups can sit on the negotiating table for securing the country's future. The Tajik experience also demonstrates how a military-religious political organization can be transformed into a purely political party as the case was with the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Multi-party system in Tajikistan has its own specifications and manifests a new and unique pattern.

Michael Hall refers to the democratic transition in Central Asia — that of all the Republics of the region, Tajikistan has had to face the hardest test for democratization since the collapse of Soviet Union. Despite all the Islamization and political unrest in Tajikistan, the Tajik government can now be viewed as greatly inclined towards the West as the last hope for progressive change in the region.

Pinar Ackali writes about the developing relationship between democracy and political instability in Kyrgyzstan. He notes that the relationship between democratization and political instability in Kyrgyzstan is complex, multi-dimensional and fragile. He suggests that due to the economic decline, the Kyrgyz leadership needs to exploit more resources to satisfy the growing needs of common Kyrgyz people, preventing the country from falling into an abrupt political and social unrest.

Birgit N. Schlyter focuses on Turkmenistan and notes that democratic development in the country flourished during Perestroika (1985-1990). This was the period when potential centres for political movement emerged in the state.

The concept of statehood in Turkmenistan is derived from the Soviet model, prominent among the Niyazov cult that ruled for twenty long years and the opposition was dethroned or exiled. After the demise of the President Saparmurat Niyazov, another President stepped in after a Presidential referendum not widely acknowledged or viewed as fair, free and democratic in nature.

Ariel Cohn looks at the US security policy in Central Asia after 9/11 shook THE echelons of power in Washington. The writer apprises the reader of his concerns regarding the US's prolonged military presence in the region and the heightening hatred of the common citizens vis-a-vis the US forces in the Central Asian region. Moreover, as in the case of Uzbekistan, US has had to face the eviction of its forces from Uzbek bases, losing an important strategic post in the region. Cohn further observes that the US presence and its collaboration with autocratic Central Asian governments have been the root cause of greater dissatisfaction among the local masses and their divulgence towards Islamic militancy and fundamentalism. Ariel Cohn further suggests that US seeks to prevent the hegemonic rule of a single

party or country to take the entire Central Asian region in its fold. He considers that the US will have a pivotal role in regional politics, however it will greatly depend on US relations with China, Iran, Russia and its attitude towards Islamic movements as well.

This book discusses, in detail, the impediments to democracy in Central Asia, as well as the attitude of the autocratic leaders, emergence of vested interest groups and role of international players in the region. This book must be read by researches, social analysts and political theorists for an excellent overview of Central Asian politics, security problems and prospects.

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