

Frankopan, Peter. *The New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018. : 320 pp. (ISBN-13: 9780525656401)

“The real struggle is not between East and West, or capitalism and communism, but between education and propaganda,” said Martin Buber, the Austrian philosopher (1898-1965). I would say more. The book *The New Silk Roads* is not about the Silk Road itself, investment in infrastructure, or even the economy of the region; it is about a nascent new world order and opportunities to establish an alternative. Only at first glance does it seem that the book is about China. Apparently, the book is actually concerned with a newly established world order and norms. Therefore, a large part of the book is devoted to neither India nor China, but to the United States.

The time we live in is extremely volatile. Geopolitics and trade tensions are just part of it. The gap between the elite and working class is obvious. Fundamentally, we can say something is happening with civilization and between civilizations. Meanwhile, development is proceeding faster than ever before, and globalization gives even poor nations a chance to get the benefits of technological and management progress. All these contradictions are shaping the time in which we live. The book *The New Silk Roads* is a challenge to look at the world order from another perspective and poses the question “What is happening?”

The author takes a long journey to a different part of the globe, trying to compose the mosaic of the world map, simultaneously assessing the key places of global decision-making and concentration of power. Shifting from West to East and back again, he explores the contrasts and hidden agendas between super powers. Maybe the advantage of this book is in attempting to evaluate the global picture from Eastern perspectives. Another advantage of the book is the dominance of a global view of the world process, illustrated through different painful occurrences.

The book focuses on the Belt and Road Initiative, which is the best example of how political power can bring real economic dividends to a nation. Until now, this has been demonstrated by the US, and now it is China’s turn. The book gives the impression that the Belt and Road Initiative is not about investment, but rather communication between diverse countries and nations across the region. The author tries to show this based on the current relations between China and the countries of Central Asia. The crucial area to concentrate on is the post-Soviet Central Asia region, which is quite diverse and controversial. From the beginning, China recognized natural-resource-abundant countries like Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan as a delicious titbit and they were not mistaken. However, the Chinese investment process in Central Asia has not been as smooth as was desired by both sides. Despite China’s tremendous efforts to promote the Belt and Road Initiative by regularly putting this initiative on the agenda, there is a very little or almost no mention of it in the book.

It would be better if the above-mentioned initiative was elaborated on as one of the key indicators of the Chinese rapid development model. Education and propaganda as key pillars of today's competition are applicable tools to gauge possible Chinese hegemony in the near future, and not just in the region, but in the globalizing world.

The chapter "The Roads to Beijing" explicitly demonstrates China's economic ambitions. Although the author positively assesses China's development perspective in the near future, he doesn't consider challenges and threats associated with institutional fragility, which may impede development at any time. Hong Kong is a noteworthy example.

The author pays some attention to key regional powers like Russia, Iran and Turkey. China pragmatically cooperates with each of them according to the circumstances and in the context of long-term interest. At the same time, China takes into account global trends and possible disadvantages from such cooperation.

The global role of China is brilliantly analyzed in the chapter "The Roads to Beijing." Particular focus on China's relationship with Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and other unstable countries demonstrates how risky the region is and how difficult it is under such circumstances for political leadership to reach optimal decisions. The main leitmotif of this chapter is how China has been reborn as a new global leader.

The Chinese are taking a soft power approach to extend their global presence. The big question is, of course, how China can carry the load of global investment and how successfully it can compete with the US in the near future. The last chapter, "The Roads to the Future" should clarify this key question. However, the question remains open. The central line of this chapter is that the world is changing and in these circumstances of great uncertainty, each "player" is trying not just to survive, but to find maximum benefit. Too much dedication to the US-Saudi Arabia relationship demonstrates how much the current U.S. administration values commercial gain rather than international reputation. The author tries to contrast this with the case of the China-Russia partnership, which might have some negative consequences for the U.S.

The author's parallel reflection is that the center of gravity is shifting from the West to the East and to China, in this case as the key pillar of the new world order. However, the author offers no words about China's weaknesses. It would be better if the author also considered the vulnerabilities of the Chinese economy such as its high government and corporate foreign debt, and its rank as the world's most polluted economy. In 2017, China accounted for 27.2% of global emissions, and continues to confront a high poverty rate.

However, the author rightly points out that the Chinese middle class is more mobile than that of the U.S., which is one of the key indicators of long-term sustainability. It is noteworthy that although the final chapter is informative, it leads to many open-ended questions such as: What about different perspectives? How realistic is the establishment of a new alliance,

like a “China club” in the near future? President Xi denied it while talking about the Belt and Road Initiative. However, the new competition on technical and technological standards between the West and China has become stronger and definitely might be a new challenge for beneficiary countries accepting Chinese investment.

Will this scenario weaken globalization and reinforce de-globalization?

There are more open-ended questions than answers. This work can serve as a starting point and inspire researchers to work on the questions generated by the book.

Ingilab Ahmadov
Khazar University, Baku