

# **Eurasia's Shifting Geopolitical Tectonic Plates**

# Contemporary Central Asia: Societies, Politics, and Cultures

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# Eurasia's Shifting Geopolitical Tectonic Plates

**Global Perspective, Local Theaters**

Alexandros Petersen

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# List of acronyms

<b>ACG</b>	Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil field
<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>ASSR</b>	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
<b>BTC</b>	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline
<b>BTK</b>	Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad
<b>CAGP</b>	Central Asia-China gas pipeline
<b>CDAP</b>	Caspian Development Advisory Panel
<b>CIS</b>	Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>CNPC</b>	China National Petroleum Corp
<b>CSTO</b>	Collective Security Treaty Organization
<b>DFID</b>	UK Department for International Development
<b>EBRD</b>	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
<b>EGL</b>	EGL Oil Shale, LLC (now American Shale Oil, LLC or AMSO)
<b>EIA</b>	U.S. Energy Information Agency
<b>EITI</b>	Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative
<b>ENP</b>	European Neighborhood Policy
<b>ESPO</b>	East Siberia-Pacific Pipeline
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUCOM</b>	U S European Command
<b>EWTC</b>	East-West Transport Corridor
<b>EWTO</b>	East-West Transport Organization, potential
<b>FTA</b>	Free Trade Area
<b>GIOC</b>	Georgian International Oil Company
<b>GTZ</b>	German Organization for Technical Cooperation
<b>IEA</b>	International Energy Agency
<b>IFC</b>	World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation
<b>IGI</b>	Interconnector Greece-Italy

<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>INOGATE</b>	Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe
<b>IPi</b>	Iran-Pakistan pipeline
<b>ITGI</b>	Interconnector Turkey-Greece-Italy
<b>JCC</b>	Jiangxi Copper Corporation
<b>MCC</b>	Metallurgical Company of China
<b>MCC</b>	U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>OPEC</b>	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>RATS</b>	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
<b>RDI</b>	Regional Development Initiative
<b>SEEP</b>	South East Europe Pipeline
<b>SOE</b>	State-owned enterprise
<b>SOFAZ</b>	State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan
<b>SPPD</b>	Strategic Pipeline Protection Department
<b>SRI</b> s	Socially Responsible Investment Corporations
<b>SSPS</b>	Special State Protection Service
<b>SSR</b>	Soviet Socialist Republic
<b>TACIS</b>	EU Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>TANAP</b>	Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline
<b>TAP</b>	Trans-Adriatic Pipeline
<b>TAPI</b>	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline
<b>TGI</b>	Turkey-Greece-Italy natural gas pipeline
<b>TRACECA</b>	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization



# Endorsements

“This collection of articles, essays, and interviews provides important insight into a part of the world that has been often misunderstood, with global consequences. Alexandros Petersen was a young scholar with knowledge and wisdom beyond his years. We are fortunate to have this body of work to inform us and to help shape future policy.” —**Minouche Shafik**, London School of Economics

“This is a wonderful collection of writings on energy geopolitics and Eurasia by a remarkably talented and well-traveled observer. Alexandros Petersen brought passion and keen insight to issues that demand far more attention from Western policymakers.” —**Theo Farrell**, University of London

“Petersen was well on his way to being one of the leading scholars of twenty-first century international relations, not just as an academic but as someone who engaged with the world around him. He had that essential mix of drive, intelligence, and compassion that made him not only an impressive scholar but also a genuine friend. This volume is a fitting tribute to him, his scholarship, and his ideas.” —**Michael Sulmeyer**, Harvard University

“Petersen understood the good things that could result when the United States is constructively engaged in the world. His work helped build the case for U.S. interests in places many Americans would consider distant lands. He presented eloquently the negative consequences that result when the United States disengages, ceding influence to those who neither share our values nor our interests. Today more than ever we should heed his cautions and follow his advice on how to shape a better world by building stronger partnerships.” —**Damon Wilson**, Atlantic Council

“Alexandros Petersen was a truly original thinker and a truly unique person. This volume captures the breadth of his interest and expertise and serves as a poignant reminder of a life cut tragically short.” —**Samuel Charap**, International Institute for Strategic Studies

“Alexandros Petersen’s work combines the passion of youth with the wisdom of scholarship to give us hope for the future. His relentless curiosity and energy, his gift for geopolitics, and his love for the regions he wrote about will inspire a generation of young scholars.” —**Margarita Assenova**, The Jamestown Foundation

“Alexandros Petersen can be counted among a unique group of scholars who not only sought to interpret the world but to change it. His dedication and passion for political freedom and the construction of a post-imperial world impregnated his work and his life.” —**Janusz Bugajski**, Center for European Policy Analysis

“Alexandros Petersen made significant and lasting contributions to the Woodrow Wilson Center’s European programming as a Public Policy Fellow, an alumnus of its Southeast Europe Project, an advisor to the Global Europe Program, and a driving force behind its European Energy Security Initiative. We miss his scholarship—celebrated in this remarkable book—his entrepreneurial and adventurous spirit, his humor, and his grace. They remain an inspiration to all of us.” —**Christian Ostermann**, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

“This is a magnificent collection of works by Alexandros Petersen, a gifted and precociously experienced expert on the Caucasus and Central Asia. I am grateful to the fate that I came across this remarkable person and managed to become friends with him. It is a pity that our friendship was cut short as his life ended tragically.” —**Archil Gegeshidze**, director of The Levan Mikheilidze Foundation and former ambassador of Georgia to the United States

“Petersen was a singular intellect and an entrepreneurial thinker, unique in his generation of emerging geopolitical strategists. At an early stage, he combined a romantic reverence for an earlier era of great power realpolitik with perspicacious insight into the future of a region perilously overlooked. In this volume, which highlights his prolific contributions in a tragically short period, his voice emerges—relevant, scholarly, illuminating, mordant, and provocative—and offers readers a glimpse of extraordinary potential, not only as a visionary thinker, but as a captivating leader.” —**Joshua Marcuse**, Young Professionals in Foreign Policy

“This is a powerful collection of writing from someone who exemplified the value of getting out into the world and coming to know it deeply, rather than being content to stay in a Western capital and claim to understand complex events observed from afar. I am sad that I never had a chance to get to know him, but I know I can still turn to his writings to help us understand this dark and dangerous age.” —**Ryan Evans**, Center for the National Interest, and Editor-in-Chief of *War on the Rocks*

“Alexandros Petersen possessed a wise mind for such a young man, reinforced by consistently strong issue analyses. Now that his work is available to all in this distinguished anthology, policy planners in Washington and worldwide will better know the prescient mind of this true analytical talent. He departed this life far too young, and his insightful policy work will long resonate with practitioners and scholars of geopolitical strategy in Eurasia and beyond.” —**John Sitalides**, former chairman, Wilson Center Southeast Project




# Foreword

## ALEXANDROS PETERSEN, 1984–2014

On the night of January 17, 2014, a young American perished by a gun at his temple when Taliban fighters bombed and then attacked Rick's Café, a popular Lebanese restaurant in Kabul, Afghanistan, where he and a guest were dining. He was one of twenty-one slain that night. Twenty-nine-year-old Alexandros Petersen had been to Kabul twice before, but this was the first time he had come there to work, teaching history, politics, and international relations at the American University of Afghanistan. What drew him there was his desire to help build an institution he saw as one of the West's chief legacies in that war-torn country. The four days since his arrival in Kabul Alex (or Alexi, as his family and childhood friends called him) had spent doing what he always did, exploring his new environment and chatting with everyone he met. His schedule for the next day had already been packed with meetings with students and fellow faculty members that never took place.

The tragedy devastated the Petersen family in the US, Greece, UK, and Denmark and Alex's close-knit band of friends, but they managed to organize a gathering in Alex's memory, held at Josephine Butler Parks Center on January 25, 2014. Other gatherings were held in Kabul and London. The day was grey but the event provided a bright and joy-filled opportunity for an astonishing range of people to testify publicly and very specifically about what this exceptional young man had meant to them. A remarkable deluge of cards, letters and gifts arrived from around the world, sharing how Alexi had transformed their lives. Then, as always happens, the press of daily life engulfed the participants, as it did the hundreds of Alexi's friends and fans elsewhere. This left his parents, Christian Petersen and Effie Psalida; his beloved sister

Lydia; and his closest friends to ponder alone the life of this bright, engaging, at times naïve, yet also prematurely wise young man.



Two-and-half years [almost three years] have now passed since that terrible Kabul night in 2014. The decision by some of Alexi's professional colleagues to publish a collection of his articles and essays brings the life of Alexandros Petersen once more vividly to mind. Far from fading from the memories of those who knew him, time had vivified and strengthened the recollection of Alexi in the minds of many. Following this decision, his parents and several of his friends asked if I would write a foreword to this collection. I had met Alexi eight years before and sensed at once the restless and enquiring quality of his mind and, still more, the warmth and balance of his personality. We shared an interest in Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Caucasus, and on that basis spent many hours in droll conversations that ranged far beyond narrowly professional concerns to involve music, travel, careers, and, as Monty Python put it, "The Meaning of Life." Though I am nearly old enough to be his grandfather, a bond developed between us that caused his loss to hit me as if he had been a member of my own family. Of course, I agreed to write these lines, meagre though they may be.

Alex Petersen was a star in the world of ambitious young professionals in international affairs, and had declared, or capped, that status by rendering international, at age twenty-two, an organization called Young Professionals in International Affairs. He and Joshua Marcuse, a colleague at the Council on Foreign Relations and his partner in this bold enterprise, soon found themselves heading a burgeoning network of eager young people. Its website trumpets the fact that "We're 2,774 International Relations Advocates," and boasts of its "regular discussions, ...cultural exchanges, international cuisine events, author presentations, social/professional networking events, and guest lectures."

Alex was a mere research assistant at the time he started the group, and a PhD was still in his future. But it was already clear that academia had no place in his plans, and that he would seek instead to build a career in policy-making, perhaps as Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia. In the galaxy of young strivers in which Alex was already a standout, it is customary to launch discussions of people by referring to their curriculum vitae. Alex's most recent CV dates from 2010, when he was twenty-six, and it modestly details his dozen institutional links in America and England, not to mention his membership in the Royal United Services Institute and the Travellers Club in London. It then proceeds to enumerate his three books, one-hundred nine articles, and fifty-one media appearances, a list that would be much longer if it included his activities during his last three years.

A glance at the formidable list of articles suggests that their author's interests focused (at least) on the following main subject areas: the Caucasus,

including Turkey and the Black Sea; Caspian energy and its development; Putin's strategy and plans for both the Caucasus and Central Asia; China and its strategy with respect to Central Asia and Afghanistan; and trans-Atlantic relations and NATO. Most of these were brief and publicistic in character. This was not because Alex could not or would not write more "fundamental" works but because he genuinely wanted to reach a broad, educated public and understood that such brief essays were the best means of doing so. He wanted to participate in both the American and European debates over policy and knew all too well that policymakers were disinclined to assimilate longer studies. Short pieces, he realized, were also the best way to "plant his flag" in a given topic area, so that he could follow up with oral presentations at meetings, fora, press briefings, and Congressional hearings.

But there were also books. Scarcely had he completed his Master's degree in London than, in an astonishingly bold move, he signed a contract to write a book about the strategic evolution of the entire Eurasian landmass. Inspired by the pioneering English geographer Sir Alfred Mackinder (1861–1947), the centennial of whose speech, "The Geographical Pivot of History," had recently been celebrated, *The World Island* sought to identify the main political and economic forces affecting Eurasia in a post-Soviet world and to suggest how they might interact over the coming decades. A book with the portentous subtitle *Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West* is the sort of assignment that someone two or three times Alex's age might approach on tiptoes at the end of a career. Setting normal evolution on its head, Alex proposed to *begin* his career with this mega-topic, jumping into the middle of a dozen academic and policy debates in the process. Doubtless, there was an element of careerism in this decision. Why wait around until a PhD thesis has been written, and then laboriously rewritten for publication, when one could leap directly into writing the Great Book when barely out of the starting blocks? Yet the interest behind this expansive project was genuine and over the course of researching and writing it, Alex gained a solid understanding of many of the great debates of the day.

Once he had taken the bit in his mouth, Alex began framing other book-length projects. With his good friend Richard Cashman, whom he had met in the dinner queue when both were beginning their BA studies at King's College London, he conceived the idea of a kind of memoir and biography on the leader of Georgia's Rose Revolution and President Mikheil Saakashvili. He conducted a number of interviews with Saakashvili, his ministers and advisors, and was emailing on the project with Cashman only hours before he left for dinner at Rick's Café in Kabul. Cashman, now a lawyer practicing in London, is currently completing their joint project. The two of them also planned a further book rewriting *The World Island* in light of Obama's purported "pivot to Asia" but this collaboration died on the night of January 17, 2014.

Meanwhile, Petersen's dissertation on Caspian energy proved sufficiently interesting in Azerbaijan, the hub of the Caspian oil and gas industry, that the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy published it in shortened form under the title "The Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan: Affecting Factors and Strategic Priorities" (2009). Petersen's PhD dissertation is now published in full under the title "Integration in Energy and Transport: Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey" as part of the series *Contemporary Central Asia: Societies, Politics, and Cultures*.

Alexandros Peterson was a solo personality but at the same time extremely gregarious and a born collaborator. He had conceived and planned *The World Island* with his friend Richard Cashman, and his next major project was also collaborative in nature. China's rise as a world power fascinated him and he joined many other analysts in puzzling out its implications for the economics and politics of Eurasia. Staking his claim in this rapidly growing field of enquiry, he published in *Foreign Policy* an article cheekily entitled "How the West Is Totally Missing China's Geopolitical Focus." After throwing down this gauntlet he knew he was duty-bound to follow through with a detailed study of China's emerging role in Central Asia." Fortunately, another good friend of his, Raffaello Pantucci, spoke Chinese and was living and working as a Visiting Scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. No sooner had Pantucci expressed an interest in collaborating on this project than Alex was off to China, where he was to spend the winter and spring of 2011–2012. With Shanghai as his base he travelled by road across much of western China and Xinjiang, and then crossed to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—all to gain first-hand impressions on what China was doing in those regions. The Petersen-Pantucci book on *China in Central Asia* also fell victim to the bombing at Rick's Café but Raffaello Pantucci hopes that it might soon see the light of day. The website and blog that Petersen and Pantucci co-founded—China in Central Asia (<http://chinaincentralasia.com/>)—is very much alive and up to date.

A glance at the Table of Contents of this book may lead one to conclude that the young author of so many articles and studies was exceptionally ambitious, and that his monomaniacal goal was to place himself in the kind of policy-making job to which he aspired. This is only partly true, for these were years in which Washington think-tanks had already completed their major expansion and were fully staffed, and when academic jobs were extremely scarce, thanks to the removal of compulsory age-based retirement. Moreover, deep "area studies" were in disrepute, and leading journals in the social sciences focused more on methodology than on the insights of cultural/historical studies or grand strategy. These realities meant that what seemed like raw ambition was also a strategy for survival.

Acknowledging this, Alexandros Petersen was by any measure a *graphomane*. He loved writing, not only for itself but for the kind of engagements



with others to which it gave rise. Ambition or necessity may have spurred him on, but he reveled in the process of collecting and analyzing information and presenting it in accessible form. This is what he did and what he loved doing.

Alex acquired this passion at home, where both his parents were economists, his father Christian always busy writing studies and analyses for the World Bank and his mother Effie doing the same for the International Monetary Fund. Indeed, while he was growing up in Washington, his parents were practically commuting to many of the same regions and countries to which Alexi was later drawn, notably: the Caucasus and Central Asia, and were busy writing studies and proposing and implementing policies in areas as diverse as fiscal and monetary policy in Kyrgyzstan and an oil fund for energy-rich Azerbaijan. In other words, study and writing on foreign climes was the family business. It was also his good fortune to come under the sights of dedicated teachers at Georgetown Day School, people like High-School History teacher, Sue Ikenberry, who gave him the space to ask questions that others may have found irreverent and urged him to push boundaries.

For all Petersen's commitment to the writing life, this was for him as much a means to an end as an end in itself. His real goal was not simply to advance his own career. Indeed, he had long since figured out what his chosen path demanded of him, and needed only his left hand to "polish up the handle on the big front door," as Gilbert and Sullivan put it in their operetta *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The deeper love which writing came to serve was for travel. At age nineteen he crossed the United States by bus and explored Montana by motorcycle, and by his early twenties his passport bore stamps from Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Russia, as well as most countries in Europe. A trip to Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia culminated in an all-night open-air Christmas eve vigil at an ancient Orthodox Christian shrine in Ethiopia. In subsequent years he explored every country in the Caucasus and Central Asia, Afghanistan, and China.

Alex was a deep-dyed and committed traveler and an explorer by upbringing as well as choosing. This is scarcely surprising, since his father, Christian, had earned the 1970s badge of hippie worldliness by twice making the overland trek from Europe to India and back. His mother Effie made sure that he spent summers with her mother at their Skiathos vacation home in Greece, while they all made frequent visits to the Petersen family in Denmark as well. Later Alex added French to his fluent knowledge of Greek and Danish. During visits to grandparents he heard tales from the Viking sagas and from Greek mythology. When his mother's work for the IMF took her to Kyrgyzstan she brought him a Kyrgyz felt cap and a Kyrgyz flag, which peaked the young boy's imagination, while his father regaled him with intriguing tales about Azerbaijan and the Caucasus. No less important as a source of inspiration was his Danish grandfather Eigil Petersen, an engineer whose work had

taken him as far afield as Japan, Russia, Chile and the Gulf States and whose seeming mastery of the entire planet (he spoke six languages) led Alex later to dedicate his book *The World Island* to his memory.

In 2008 Alex met Chanda Creasy. They quickly became, in the jargon of the day, “an Item,” and more. In addition to everything else, he found in Chanda an enthusiastic fellow explorer of unknown climes, and a sympathetic partner. After making what they called “The Great American Road Trip,” the pair returned to his childhood haunts on the island of Skiathos, and then travelled together to Turkmenistan and Honduras.

One might well ask how a young American in his twenties could afford to travel so much. First, it should be said that Alex was notoriously frugal, following as best he could his father’s “India on \$1 a Day” approach to travel. When he and Richard Cashman made an Inter-Rail trip across Europe to Gibraltar and North Africa they spent less than three-hundred euros in a month, avoiding all expenditures and bargaining hard for anything they had to buy. Equally important, Alex proved adept at garnering grants and speaking engagements that paid for his travel to distant places. Also, in 2009 he landed a major grant from the Atlantic Council that enabled him to buy a dilapidated house on Eighth Street in Washington. After some home-made repairs—his father was a master craftsman and had taught his son basic skills—Alex was able to rent out the property, thus providing himself a steady if modest income. In short, Alex’s extensive travels were the fruit of parsimony, clever dealing, and hard work, and not of parental largesse.

This is worth noting, for Alex emerged from his graduate studies at the London School of Economics as something of a swell, in dress, but not in manner. As an undergraduate at King’s College he had taken to London life like a fish to water. He set up a London branch of his Young Professionals in Foreign Policy and parlayed that to become a very young director of studies at the Henry Jackson Society and a full-time staff member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies. These and other links brought him to the door of the Travellers Club at 106 Pall Mall. Describing itself as “A meeting place for gentlemen who had travelled abroad, their foreign visitors and diplomats posted in London,” this club, founded in 1819, and its members provided young Alex with living models for the kind of man he now aspired to become. The well-groomed gentlemen he observed at the Travellers and the example of one of his mentors at IISS were a far cry from the shaggy students he had lived among at King’s College, let alone the Levi-clad students at Georgetown Day School. In no time Alex reupholstered himself, donning the tailored jackets (with pocket handkerchief), cavalry twill trousers, and gloves that had been the hallmark of fashionable British males in the 1960s. Henceforth his sessions with Cashman were fuelled by good scotch, Peking duck, and Romeo y Julieta cigars.

And yet Alex remained Alex, thoughtful, affable, quick to laugh, and at times simply outrageous. To a degree that is quite exceptional in his generation. Alex Petersen dedicated himself to fashioning a persona that fit his view of the world. Born in 1984, he belonged squarely to the generation dubbed the “Millennials.” *Newsweek* defines the cohort as those born between 1977 and 1994, the *New York Times* has dated them to the years 1978 and 1998 and sociologists Neil Howe and William Strauss, in their book *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1984–2009*, fix their birth between 1982 and 2004. This last generation born in the twentieth century is described as being tolerant, diverse in background, self-confident, uncommitted, optimistic and, yes, unrealistic. All but the last of these adjectives fit Alex; by sheer will and persistence he turned what might in anyone else have been unrealism into reality.

True, there had been earlier personas, just as there surely would have been later ones had he not been at Rick’s Café that night in 2014. Among earlier ones were his identity as a jock: captaining the Georgetown Day School crew and competing as a nationally ranked fencer (epee). But none of Alex’s earlier personas was more heartfelt and more dramatic than his role as lead singer and lyricist for the punk rock group “The AKs,” as in AK-47. Formed with fellow GDS student Justin Parker and two other friends, the AKs became a sensation in what was then Washington’s thriving rock scene. The group appeared throughout the region and between 2001 and 2005 issued three CDs (a memorial CD is now in production). Like the many capital area punk groups that preceded it, bands with names such as Bad Brains, Iron Cross, Scream, and Dag Nasty, the AKs was comprised of young men from relatively privileged backgrounds. But true to their calling, this punk rock group thrived on the kind of blunt irreverence embodied in its hit tune “F---k the Redskins.” Anyone who knew only the studiously dignified Alex Petersen of bespoke London suits and neat cravats would be astounded by the sight of their friend fronting the AKs at the Black Cat in Washington, dressed in black and bellowing out raunchy lyrics.

The AKs was the creative product of Alex Petersen’s teenage rebellion. But it was not his first private revolt nor was it arguably his most important one. That honor goes to his heartfelt opposition to what he felt was the powerful ideological tinge that colored his education at Georgetown Day School. He had benefitted greatly from GDS’s solid Middle School program, with its emphasis on reading, writing, and geography. But even then he had resisted the school’s relentless emphasis on “diversity,” which infused every assembly and even classroom life. He embraced diversity as such, but strongly opposed GDS’s definition of it solely in racial terms, i.e., black versus white. Being himself of a “diverse” European heritage, Alex thought that the school should extend the concept to embrace everyone and all possible points of difference from the mainstream.

This put Alex Petersen squarely at odds with Georgetown Day School. In the ninth grade he penned a devastating essay against the prevailing cult of diversity, and circulated it to students and faculty. It met a solid wall of indifference mixed with hostility. He was marginalized as “not PC” and he responded by railing all the more vehemently against political correctness. His parents shared his view on the matter, but as good European liberals they were very uncomfortable with the conservative direction he seemed to have taken. In this sense, he had mounted a double rebellion.

Over time Alex’s views mellowed, and this more moderate tone prevailed in most of his writings. But he was nonetheless conservative, politically if not culturally. This was evident in his close involvement with the Henry Jackson Society. This British organization, named for the Democratic Senator and “hawk” from the state of Washington, champions individual rights and civil liberties, sees Euro-American liberal democracy as the best model for other societies, and believes that a strong military and NATO are essential to the protection of democratic and economically open societies. These remained Alex’s guiding principles. They directly informed his strong opposition to Vladimir Putin’s efforts to reconstitute Russian might along authoritarian lines and to impose Russian control over the former Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. It was due to these principles that he embraced Mikheil Saakashvili’s Rose Revolution in Georgia and so vehemently opposed Putin’s 2008 armed seizure of two provinces of that small country. Perhaps his Danish and Greek heritage contributed to this sensitivity to the fate of smaller and democratic nations, but his commitment was deep and can be traced through many of the essays and articles in this volume. When he accepted the job at the American University in Kabul he told his father that “I want to teach about democracy.”

Notwithstanding the inevitably uneven course of his life as a teenager, Alex Petersen emerged by around age fifteen as a well-grounded and focused young man. By his junior year at GDS he had resolved to study at King’s College London because this was the only place he could pursue both history and war studies. He was adventurous but his personal relations were, and remained, steady and warm. Because his personality was centered, he could explore new environments at home and abroad without feeling the slightest compulsion to “go native” or appropriate the culture of others. For the same reason he did not hesitate to seek the advice of others but was prudent in evaluating and acting on it.

Along with this, Alex was often stunningly forthright in his opinions about people and events. London classmates who knew him were, as one of them put it, “attracted to his polemical, sometimes reductive, but always refreshing approach, even if they had to disagree with him at times....” Continuing, this classmate and friend recalled that “As we talked, I was struck by his

startlingly straightforward, utilitarian, perhaps amoral, approach to decision-making. Cost-benefit analyses performed in a Hobbesian world were his law, and when he would often speak about us spending time on a deserted island—as I think he had done on a miniature level at the lakes around DC—I would tell him that I was reluctant to join lest he apply his brutal logic and, if the circumstances suggested it, kill me in the night and eat me without compunction.”

The jocular tone of this otherwise serious comment reflects the important fact that Alex had a genuine gift for friendship and was quick to extend his good will to all around him. Until the birth of his sister Lydia when he was eleven years old, Alex had been an only child, restless and capricious as only children tend to be. But with Lydia’s appearance in his world he underwent a kind of transformation, becoming caring and tender, qualities that never left him. He was loyal to friends and extremely generous, quick to lavish gifts on everyone in his close circle. He built up a large fund of experience which he delighted in sharing with others, yet at the same time took a keen interest in what those around him were doing.

Alex was an enthusiast in everything he did. He loved to tell stories, hear jokes, and dance, and he revered classic singers like Frank Sinatra. He also loved to eat, and will be remembered for having once consumed twelve ice cream cones in one sitting. On his capacity for enthusiasm, Chanda Creasy writes that:

“One of the things I loved most about Alex was his passion. He was passionate about the area of the world he worked on in a whole of body kind of way. What most people saw was his polished presentations. But, I had the great privilege of watching him think out loud and process his thoughts when he wasn’t overly concerned that his every word might be parsed and considered for its balance. He would pace around our home as he spoke of history and his theories, his voice escalating into an excited pitch, his eyes gleaming and ... really, the pace would become a bit of a dance. He would bounce around the condo. We were late to many functions as a result of this, a happy fact is that I would join in the “dance.” We would be brushing our teeth to get ready to go somewhere and the next thing we knew we would have put down our toothbrushes to discuss the history of the Byzantine Empire, bluegrass music, the clan system of Somalia or the importance of and challenges facing the US Education system. We would get lost in these adventures of thought and often arrive an hour late whatever dinner party or the like we were meant to be attending. This happened many, many times.”

Gregarious to a rare degree, Alex was at the same time a very private person. He loved to express himself in papers, articles, emails, letters, and postcards, yet cherished and protected what was in fact a very large private zone. Topics as diverse as his personal finances, his social life, and even his

movements and plans he kept beyond the reach of both friends and family, all of whom came to respect the private world that made possible his constant and warm interaction with others.

It is as pointless as it is tempting to ask “What might have been?” Pointless because what he had been down to January 17, 2014, need not have prescribed or determined what he might have become. Thus, his uncle Ted Lowenkopf declared that “Alexi would never be confined to a desk job,” yet Alex could never have written as much as he did unless he was able and willing to spend weeks on end at a desk. Similarly, Alex rarely missed a chance to poke fun at what he considered the follies of academia, yet he had been very happy in the spring of 2013 when he taught history and politics at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek. Indeed, Chanda Creasy affirms that education “was a subject he was passionate toward and held strong views about ... he occasionally pondered if he might one day have a way to contribute to education policy formulation.” Few who knew him might have imagined Alex ending up in the business world, yet his real estate dealing suggest he was a born entrepreneur, a quality that he demonstrated in high school by buying beer outside Redskins games for five dollars a bottle and reselling it inside the stadium for seven.

What we can be sure of is that Alexandros Petersen, through his bewildering array of activities in many realms, imparted to his life a powerful and positive trajectory. Maybe this would have culminated in his being able to add the title of “statesman” to his cv, as he told many friends he ardently wished for. But we will never know. The ultimate course of his life will remain as unknown as is the course of each of our lives. Let those who knew him and those who read this collection of his writings be grateful for a person whose short life brought light and happiness to so many.

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