

Book Review

Houman A. Sadri, Conflict and Cooperation in the South Caucasus Region: From Theory to Policy, Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2024.

Josef Krahulec

University of Defense, Brno, Czech Republic

Krahulec.Josef@seznam.cz

The book “Conflict and Cooperation in the South Caucasus Region: From Theory to Policy” by Dr. Houman A. Sadri provides an extensive study on the foreign relations and security issues of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. He incorporates history and popular international relations theories into a detailed analysis that comprehensively investigates the affairs and events of the South Caucasus states since the fall of the Soviet Union. By examining the region through regional and global power dynamics, Sadri highlights the feuds and partnerships within the region and its critical importance.

Chapter 1 begins by exploring the South Caucasus territory’s strategic location, demographics, historical context, and sovereignty following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This new-found security of the Caucasus region caused a major global rivalry between Russia (i.e., the Commonwealth of Independent States and Collective Security Treaty Organization) and the

West (i.e., the United States, European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe). The author also mentions the regional rivalry between Iran and Turkey. The book even explains the three international relations (IR) perspectives: Realism, Clash of Civilization, and Geopolitics and shows how these theories are relevant to the political affairs of the South Caucasus states.

Chapter 2 examines Azerbaijan’s geography and history from the pre-Soviet era to its independence in 1991. The book highlights factors that led up to the first Nagorno-Karabakh War and Azerbaijan’s involvement in the conflict. Despite experiencing a regional war, the country’s natural resources strongly contributed to its economic military strength and economic growth. The author describes President Ilham Aliyev’s structure of government, the New Azerbaijan Party’s (YAP) dominance over other political parties, and the government’s

mistreatment of women and ethnic/religious minorities within society. Sadri explains the country's foreign policy relationship with the United States, Russia, Western European organizations, and international organizations like the CIS and CSTO. Azerbaijan also possesses close relations toward Georgia and Turkey as opposed to Armenia and Iran.

Chapter 3 covers the geographical area of Armenia and early history up to the time of its freedom from the Soviet Union. The book addresses Armenia's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh War and how the conflict had a negative effect on its economy and military development. The country heavily depends on trade with foreign partners to help boost its economy and to obtain sources of energy. Sadri shows how the Armenian diaspora eventually paved the way for the Velvet Revolution. He even compares how the structure of government, main political players, levels of human rights, access to political freedom, and civil rights were during Serzh Sargsyan's presidency versus how these changed after the Velvet Revolution. When it comes to foreign policy and relations, Armenia has a closer relationship with Georgia, the European Union, Russia, CIS, and Iran than it does with Azerbaijan, the United States, NATO, OSCE, and Turkey.

Chapter 4 describes Georgia's landscape and historical background dating back to the Byzantine

Empire up until its liberation. The book explains the country's separatists (supported by the Russians) conflicts with Abkhazia and former South Ossetia. Due to these challenges, Georgia sought the assistance of major Western partners to help advance its military status. According to the author, these disputes also had a negative effect on the country's economy. As a result, Georgia mostly relies on Azerbaijan for its imports and Russia for its exports to help increase their economic growth. Sadri examines the Georgia Rose Revolution and how the movement influenced its governance, main political parties, civil liberties, and political rights

for the better. He also explores the country's relations with its neighbors and multiple world powers. Unfortunately for Georgia, it is facing hostility from Russia due to its close partnership with the West. To avoid another Russia-Georgia War, the country is trying its best to deescalate Russian hostile tensions within the region.

In the concluding chapter, Sadri briefly summarizes the book's main findings on the security environment, sources of threat, and policy options of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. The author argues that the region's security is shaped by separatist conflicts, internal instability, and international rivalry. He also shows how the three international relations (IR) theories describe, illustrate, and predicts the foreign and security ties of the South Caucasus states among themselves and with other global/regional powers. While these IR perspectives offer some excellent insights into the affairs of the South Caucasus region, they do not perfectly explain the causes of conflict within the territory.

One of the strengths of the book is its ability to provide background information about the South Caucasus states. This alone demystifies the region for scholars, policymakers, and students who are interested in learning more about this area. Sadri acknowledges that much is unknown about Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia after the fall of the Soviet Union. Due to this, he took it upon himself to study and analyze the Caucasus region to help Eurasia specialists understand its importance in geopolitical conflicts between those who hold sway over the current world order versus those who desire to change that order.

In conclusion, "Conflict and Cooperation in the South Caucasus Region: From Theory to Policy" is a vital contribution by the author to the study of Eurasian foreign policy. Sadri's immense research and evaluation provide a deep comprehensive analysis of the South Caucasus states. His work also highlights the region's importance in global politics. By examining the history, strategic location, and geopolitics of the area through IR perspectives, the book properly

evaluates the Caucasus' significance to the security of Eurasia and how this may play a major role in the current global order in the future.