

## **BOOK REVIEW**

Mehdi Parvizi AMINEH and Henk HOUWELING, *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development* (Netherlands, Brill Academic Publishers, 2005)

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# Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development

**Mehdi Parvizi AMINEH and Henk HOUWELING (Ed.)**

*Second Edition, Netherlands, Brill Academic Publishers, 2005, 365 pages. ISBN: 9004144390*

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International Relations (IR) is a field which is characterized by the variety of issues it examines and the complexity of the factors shaping these issues. This variety and complexity bring about a big uncertainty to the IR. Therefore, International Relations theories require a broad and multi-dimensional perspective to decrease the uncertainty. Despite the diversity of the traditional theories, IR is still in need of some new perspectives and syntheses taking into consideration a large number of factors together.

*Central Eurasia in Global Politics- Conflict, Security and Development* intends to improve a new perspective in International Relations. The approach it has brought to bear in the work is called “critical geopolitics” (p.vii). Authors claim that “critical geopolitics” is especially appealing to whom studying “foreign policies of projecting power beyond borders”.

The main merit of this book is its utilization of practical phenomena to explain theory. As the combination of theory and practice is rarely found in IR, this achievement deserves credit. Theoretically it tries to shed light on the concept of “critical geopolitics” by explaining and focusing on the “power projection”. Practically the focus of the book is on the place of Central Eurasia (CEA) in today’s global political, economic, military and socio-geographic global system. The main assumption is that the political culture of power projection by a particular country or its ideological form depends on its prior history on current power relations in the interstate system and on responses by host societies (p.ix)

By taking this assumption on the centre writers try to predict whether the transnational battles among non-state actors force the major powers involved in the region to cooperate and collectively impose a local peace order or not (p.3). To achieve the aim they also try to decide the stand of *critical geopolitics* in relation to classical theories of IR.

According to the examinations *critical geopolitics* shares with domestic society schools the explanation of foreign policy by inputs from domestic society. However, they reject the secondary, derivative role of the state in international politics. It shares with structural realists the selective function of the international system. But the object of selection is different: instead of states, *state-society complexes* are selected. The core of a state-society complex consists of institutionalized state-business-military relations within states (p.8).

In this regard, the book has been divided into four different parts dealing with local dynamics of Central Eurasia and the major powers following the power projection policy in Central Eurasia. Part I is an introduction to the power projecting policy and has two different chapters written together by Parvizi Amineh and Henk Houweling. First chapter is directly related to US power projection in the framework of critical geopolitics under the title of “The Geopolitics of Power Projection in US Foreign Policy: From Colonization to Globalization”. The second one is “Caspian Energy: Oil and Gas Resources and the Global Market”. This chapter develops several concepts of critical geopolitics and relates them to the energy resources of the Caspian Region (p.77).

Part II brings together articles on various aspects of nation-state building, economic development and household, respectively, and gender relations in society in the newly independent states of CEA (p.18). Each article belongs to different authors and has perspective as well. First chapter is “Nation-State Building in Central Asia: A Lost Case?” written by Pınar Akçalı. Akçalı examines the political-legal framework of nation-state building process in Central Asian republics. Author reaches the conclusion that the process of nation-state building in Central Asia is not completed yet and each republic has unique problems (p.95). Second chapter has the title “Political Processes in Post-Soviet Central Asia” written by Shirin Akiner. Akiner focuses on the role of institutional factors such as leadership, political parties, religion and international relations of the Central Asian republics. Following chapter is “The Economic and Social Impact of Systemic Transition in Central Asia and Azerbaijan” by Michael Kaser. And the last one is “Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and Caucasus” by Armine Ishkanian. These last two chapters are talking over different dimensions of the political transitions such as environment, gender relations and migration.

Part III looks at the interests, conflict and cooperation between the various actors striving for influence in CEA (p.19). First chapter has the title of “Sino-Indian Relations: Security Dilemma, Ideological Polarization or Cooperation Based on ‘Comprehensive Security?’” by Kurt Radke. The following one is written by M. P. Amineh and H. Houweling under the title of “The US and the EU in CEA. Relations with Regional Powers”. Last chapter of this part is “Paradigms of Iranian Policy in Central Eurasia and Beyond” by Eva Rakel. Part III is one of the most important and most comprehensive sections of the book. As the titles of the chapters show the regional and global powers trying to have influence over Central Eurasia and the relations between these powers have been dealt with in a multidimensional way.

Part IV has three chapters on local conflicts in CEA that not only threaten security in the region but also pose a threat to global security (p.20). Part IV has four chapters including different patterns of local conflicts. Chapter one is “Growing Tension and the Threat of War in the Southern Caspian Sea: The Unsettled Division Dispute and Regional Rivalry” by Hooman Peinami. Peinami draws a historical perspective on the dispute of legal status of the Caspian Sea. After that Max Spoor and Anatoly Krutov work thorough on water resources management in Central Eurasia under the title of “The ‘Power of Water’ in a Divided Central Asia”. The following chapter is “A Transnational Policy for Conflict Reduction and Prevention in the South Caucasus” by Robert M. Cutler. And the last chapter is “International Challenges and Domestic Preferences in the Post-Soviet Political Transition of Azerbaijan” by Ayça Ergun. Cutler examines the efforts on conflict reduction particularly in Georgia whereas Ergun addresses the political transition in Azerbaijan.

*Central Eurasia in Global Politics- Conflict, Security and Development* is an informative and enlightening book compiling its chapters through a well-organised composition. It tries to harmonise theory with practice, local dynamics with international factors and low politics with high politics. The reader is offered a comprehensive approach including geopolitics, water conflicts, gender transition and economic systems also. this is why this book has an important stand in theoretical IR studies.

However, when the basic dynamics of the region under examination are considered, one can find a deficiency at the first look. Even though the book has a broad approach that comprises local dynamics, energy, economy and policy, there are also some neglected points in part Three. The part with the title “Interactions between outsiders, neighbours and central Eurasian republics” aims to explain foreign forces that have the capacity to influence the region. Therefore, the reader expects a detail explanation on relations between Russia and CEA and Turkey as well. But we find just a small part related to Russia and Turkey in spite of that Indian, Chinese and Iranian policies are discussed more detailed.

To sum up, *Central Eurasia in Global Politics- Conflict, Security and Development* is a comprehensive and multi-perspective book. In addition to clear and coherent expression, it provides the reader with a precious blend of theory and practice. It could be offered to students in International Relations and those who have a special interest in global politics in general and Central Eurasia in particular.