

**Houman A. Sadri, *Conflict and Cooperation  
in the South Caucasus Region. From Theory to Policy*,  
Lexington Books, Lanham 2024, pp. 355  
(Jarosław Jarząbek)**

The book under review, written by Houman Sadri, focuses on the South Caucasus, a small but critically important part of Eurasia. This region encompasses three countries — Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia — which were part of the Soviet Union before gaining independence in 1991. It has always played a key geopolitical role, connecting Eastern Europe with the Middle East and the Black Sea region with the Caspian Sea basin. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the transformations, crises, and conflicts affecting nearly all regions bordering the South Caucasus, its role as a keystone in this part of the world has only intensified. At the same time, the three states of the South Caucasus themselves are far from stable or uninterrupted, repeatedly experiencing periods of political crises, social unrest, and international conflict. In this last dimension, relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan are particularly marked by the history of a long, bloody conflict between these states. Considering the specific nature of the South Caucasus, the interconnectedness of the states located there, their relations with regional powers, and their position in the international system, it is not surprising that Buzan and Wæver (2003), in their theory of regional security complexes, consider this area a distinct Caucasus mini-complex<sup>1</sup>. These security interactions have a particularly strong influence on the course of conflicts and the development of cooperation between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, as well as on the emergence of specific patterns of friendship and hostility among them. It is these interactions that are primarily addressed in this book.

From the very first pages, it is clear that the monograph *Conflict and Cooperation in the South Caucasus Region* is the result of many years of scholarly work devoted to studying this region. The author's deep knowledge of the South Caucasus states is evident, as is his direct, personal experience observing the political, economic, social, and cultural changes and developments that have occurred there over many years. Houman Sadri analyses his observations, empirical research findings, and collected research data using carefully selected research

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<sup>1</sup> B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers. The Structure of Regional Security*, Cambridge 2003, p. 350.

tools. He employs the civilizational paradigm presented in Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*<sup>2</sup>, neorealist theories, and geopolitical concepts as his theoretical framework. Of the latter, his use of Zbigniew Brzeziński's *The Grand Chessboard*<sup>3</sup> concept to analyse the balance of power, influence, and interests of global powers in the South Caucasus region is particularly noteworthy.

The result is a very well-written book, in which each of the three South Caucasus states is discussed meticulously and in detail. It is divided into five chapters. In the first, the author discusses the situation in the Caucasus region and presents an analysis of the ongoing conflicts and emerging forms of cooperation. The following three chapters provide a detailed analysis of the 30 years of independence of each of the three Caucasus states, in terms of their internal situation, their mutual relations, their regional position and relations with their neighbours, as well as their position in the broader international system and their relations with global powers. At the global and interregional levels, relations with major world powers such as the United States and China, Russia, which considers the South Caucasus to be its „near abroad” and sphere of influence, and the European Union, which has a keen interest in the region's affairs, play a particularly important role. Among the regional powers, the most influential in the Caucasus are its immediate neighbours, Iran and Türkiye.

What sets this book apart from others is definitely its comprehensive character and its structured, detailed, and multifaceted description of all the important elements that make up the complex mosaic of international security in the South Caucasus. In the first chapter, the author presents a general overview of the region and the factors affecting its security. The author considers both the region's geography and how it shapes the geopolitics of the states within the region and the external powers pursuing their interests there. Next, the author delves into demographic issues, describing the complex ethnic and religious mosaic of the South Caucasus. The author also outlines the history of conflicts, which is crucial for understanding current international relations in the Caucasus. Finally, the author skilfully discusses the position of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the international system, with particular emphasis on their relations with global and regional powers and international organizations. The three analytical chapters, covering Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, are organized similarly. Each begins with a historical background and then presents the political, economic, social, military, and cultural conditions that influence their mutual relations and international standing. Subsequent sections present the foreign policies of the individual states and their bilateral relations with key international actors. In these three

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<sup>2</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Brzeziński, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York 1998.

chapters, the author does not always manage to avoid certain repetitions, particularly when narrating historical issues. It must be admitted, however, that because of the scale of these connections and the largely shared historical heritage of these countries, completely avoiding thematic repetition when discussing each of them was practically impossible. It is worth noting that the descriptive sections of the work are enriched with numerous maps, graphs, and tables that clearly and effectively present the data cited by the author. This significantly facilitates understanding the complex networks of interdependencies occurring in the region under discussion.

In the fifth chapter, the author draws conclusions and summarizes the results of his research. He primarily points to various interpretations of political processes in the South Caucasus region from the theoretical perspectives of the Clash of Civilizations, the realist paradigm, and geopolitical theories. He also demonstrates the explanatory power of individual concepts and their shortcomings. He presents his conclusions concisely and clearly, making the book both practical and useful for many readers—not only researchers, specialists, and students, but also decision-makers, political commentators, journalists, and general readers interested in international affairs.

In summary, Houman Sadri's *Conflict and Cooperation in the South Caucasus Region: From Theory to Policy* is a valuable work that fills a significant gap in both academic research and the publishing market. It successfully combines theoretical perspectives with political practice and sheds new light on the complex domestic and international situation of the South Caucasus countries.