

Caucasus under review

*recently published books
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Abstract

The recently launched books on the Caucasus and former Soviet territories listed below offer academic insights on key regional issues, including such pressing matters as democratization, state rivalry, ethnic and territorial conflicts, and energy economics.

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The transformation of former socialist republics into democratic and liberal states has occupied national governments and the international community for the past two decades. Institutional reconstruction of these states has been followed by adoption of international norms and standards in economic and social spheres. Fine-tuning of bureaucratic, economic, and social systems to liberal values and policies has been smooth in some countries, notably the Eastern European states that have now gained EU membership. However, in countries such as Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Belarus, liberal values have been transmitted among citizens, and their importance recognized, but ultimately state structures remain rooted in non-liberal practices. The result is autocratic and undemocratic governments presiding over a series of popular protests, due to uneven power sharing.

The circumstances surrounding post-Soviet nation building have paved the way for civilian resistance throughout the former communist states of Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia. The world has watched as the color revolutions of first 2003 (the Georgian Rose Revolution), then 2004 (the Ukrainian Orange Revolution), and 2005 (Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution) erupted, non-violent initiatives to resist and change oppressive and autocratic regimes.

The first book under review address-

es these revolutions, their triggers, and their consequences. Lincoln A. Mitchell suggests in *The Color Revolutions* that these revolutions are the continuation of the dissolution of communist systems, arguing that these events are in one sense, not real revolutions. The initial expectations about the possible outcomes of those civilian uprisings, to Mitchell, were not about substantial democratic change. Rather, they later became democratizing responses to nondemocratic regimes. These characteristics of the color revolutions render the protests complex reflections of both continuity and radical change. Mitchell also explores the reasons behind the failure of revolutions in Azerbaijan and Belarus in 2005 and 2006. *The Color Revolutions* provides a comprehensive account of democratic uprisings across the former communist countries, as well as examining whether there is any kind of revolutionary blueprint that could be exported to other autocratic countries. In this manner, the book opens up a debate about the global impact of the post-Communist revolutions. In addition, the book explores the role of the great powers and their attitudes towards the process of democratization. For example, the U.S. was the chief propagator of democratic ideals and governance, while Russia was the counter balancing actor backing autocratic governments.

Another book, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia*, gives historical accounts of the great power involvements along the Central Asia axis. Alexander Cooley of Columbia University investigates the ways small states interact with great powers in the region. He calls the competition for influence in the region a new “great game”, through which U.S., Russia, and China, during the post-9/11 era, have sought to increase their reach. From a geopolitical perspective, Cooley looks at the regime survival of local states and the interplay between them, alongside the great powers in terms of multipolar politics and geopolitical competition throughout the region. An excellent complement to *Great Games, Local Rules*, Andrei P. Tsygankov’s new book on Russian foreign policy examines Russia’s position. Further insights on Russia’s global power position and its relations with the former Soviet states are provided in Maria Raquel Freire and Roger E. Kanet’s edited book, “Russia and its Near Neighbours”, which offers a well-informed and stimulating analysis of Russia’s fraught relationship with its near neighbors.

Narrowing our perspective to the central Eurasian mainland, the South Caucasus, Ohannes Geukjian of the American University of Beirut, gives a historical survey of the Soviet Union’s nationalities policy and the post-Soviet legacies across the region. Geukjian argues that it was the

Soviet policies of nationality which strengthened, sharpened, and crystallized ethnic and national boundaries within the region. He cites this as a cause of regional conflicts, such as the overlapping national claims on Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The book, in general, aims to offer a historical and detailed account of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by addressing the Soviet nationalities policy and ethno-territorial federalism.

Our final book under review, *Beyond the Resource Curse*, illuminates the relationship between natural wealth and economic performance in resource-rich countries. The contributors of the edited volume demonstrate that the more energy-exporting states rely on their natural resources wealth, the worse their performance in the areas of economic development and good governance. The authors, Brenda Shaffer and Taleh Ziyadov (eds), call this the “resource curse”. *Beyond the Resource Curse* demonstrate how instability in energy markets and excessive economic dependency on natural resources ruin and imperil good governance and economic security.

The Color Revolutions

By Lincoln A. Mitchell, Columbia University, U.S. University of Pennsylvania Press, May 2012, 256 pp.

From late 2003 through mid-2005, a series of peaceful street protests toppled corrupt and undemocratic regimes in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and ushered in the election of new presidents in all three nations. These movements—collectively known as the Color Revolutions—were greeted in the West as democratic breakthroughs that might thoroughly reshape the political terrain of the former Soviet Union. Yet, as Lincoln A. Mitchell explains in *The Color Revolutions*, it has since become clear that these protests were as much reflections of continuity as they were moments of radical change. Not only did these movements do little to spur democratic change in other post-Soviet states, but their impact on Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan themselves was quite different from what was initially expected. To Mitchell, the Color Revolutions are best understood as phases in each nation's long post-Communist transition: significant events, to be sure, but far short of true revolutions. *The Color Revolutions* explores the causes and consequences of all three Color Revolutions identifying both common themes and national variations. Mitchell's analysis also addresses the role of American

democracy promotion programs, the responses of nondemocratic regimes to the Color Revolutions, the impact of these events on U.S.-Russian relations.

Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia

By Alexander Cooley, Columbia University, U.S. Oxford University Press, June 2012, 272 pp.

The struggle between Russia and Great Britain over Central Asia was replaced by a new “great game” among pitting America, aggressive Russia, and resource-hungry China. In *Great Games, Local Rules*, Alexander Cooley, one of America's most respected international relations scholars, explores the dynamics of the new competition for control of the Central Asia since 9/11. All three great powers have crafted strategies to increase their power in the area, which includes Afghanistan and the former Soviet republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Each nation is pursuing important goals: basing rights for the US, access to natural resources for the Chinese, and increased political influence for the Russians. However, overlooked in all of the talk about this new great game is fact that the Central Asian governments have proven themselves critical agents in their own right, establishing local rules

for external power involvement that serve to fend off foreign interest. As a result, despite a decade of intense interest from the United States, Russia, and China, Central Asia remains a collection of segmented states, and the external competition has merely reinforced the sovereign authority of the individual Central Asian governments. A careful analysis of how small states interact with great powers in a vital region, *Great Games, Local Rules* greatly advances our understanding of how global politics actually works in the contemporary era.

Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations

By Andrei P. Tsygankov, Kings College London, UK, Cambridge University Press, June 2012, 324 pp.

Since Russia has re-emerged as a global power, its foreign policies have come under close scrutiny. In *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*, Andrei P. Tsygankov identifies honor as the key concept by which Russia's international relations are determined. He argues that Russia's interests in acquiring power, security and welfare are filtered through this cultural belief and that different conceptions of honor provide an organizing framework that produces policies of cooperation, defensiveness and assertiveness in relation to the West.

Using ten case studies spanning a period from the early nineteenth century to the present day - including the Holy Alliance, the Triple Entente and the Russia-Georgia war - Tsygankov's theory suggests that when it perceives its sense of honor to be recognized, Russia cooperates with the Western nations; without such recognition it pursues independent policies either defensively or assertively.

Russia and its Near Neighbours

By Maria Raquel Freire of University of Coimbra, Portugal and Roger E. Kanet of University of Miami, U.S. (eds) Palgrave Macmillan, June 2012, 320 pp.

Russia has recently re-emerged as the dominant political, economic and military actor in former Soviet nations. Kanet and Freire bring together a stellar cast of contributors to consider Russia's recent return as a major regional and international actor and its likely future policy toward its neighbors. The book traces not only the new geopolitical tensions but also some of the fundamental policy issues, notably the politics of energy, the domestic drivers of Russian foreign policy, and the various security dilemmas faced by individual states. The volume brings together an impressive collection of authors, each one an expert in their respective fields. Taken together, this is a state of the art analysis of developments in post-Soviet Eurasia,

and thus an important contribution to a region that is assuming ever-greater importance in world politics.

Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy

By Ohannes Geukjian, American University of Beirut, Lebanon Ashgate, January 2012, 264 pp.

This book examines the underlying factors of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the South Caucasus from 1905 to 1994, and explores the ways in which issues of ethnicity and nationalism contributed to that conflict. The author examines the historiography and politics of the conflict, and the historical, territorial and ethnic dimensions which contributed to the dynamics of the war. The impact of Soviet policies and structures are also included, pinpointing how they contributed to the development of nationalism and the maintenance of national identities. The book firstly explores the historical development of the Armenian and Azerbaijani national identities and the overlapping claims to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. The author goes on to assess the historical link between ethnicity and territorial location as sources of ethnic identification and conflict. He examines how identity differences shaped the relations be-

tween Armenians and Azerbaijanis during the different phases of conflict and presents a detailed historical account of Soviet nationalities policy and ethno-territorial federalism – the basis of which ethnic relations were conducted between governing and minority nations in the south Caucasus. This invaluable book offers students and scholars of post Soviet politics and society a unique insight into the causes and consequences of this long-standing conflict.

Beyond the Resource Curse

By Brenda Shaffer and Taleh Ziyadov (Eds), University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011*, 512 pp.

When countries discover that they possess large deposits of oil and natural gas, the news is usually welcome. Yet, paradoxically, if they rely on their wealth of natural resources, they often set down a path of poor economic performance and governance challenges. Only a few resource-rich countries have managed to develop their economies fully and provide a better and sustainable standard of living for large segments of their populations. This phenomenon, known as the resource curse, is a core challenge for energy-exporting states. *Beyond the Resource Curse* focuses on this relationship between natural wealth

1 Although this book was published in 2011, we wanted to bring it to our readers' attention, given its relevance.

and economic security, discussing the particular pitfalls and consistent perils facing oil- and gas-exporting states. The contributors to this volume look beyond the standard fields of research related to the resource curse. They also shed new light on the specific developmental problems of resource-rich exporting states around the globe, including Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cambodia, East Timor, Iran, Norway, Russia, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela. *Beyond the Resource Curse* shows that the constant volatility in energy markets creates energy security challenges for exporters as well.