

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Aslan Yavuz ŞİR**  
Specialist of AVİM  
ayavuzsir@avim.org.tr

### CAUCASUS AFTER THE COLD WAR

(SOĞUK SAVAŞ SONRASI KAFKASYA)

Author: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kamer Kasım

Ankara, USAK Publications, 2009, 292 pages (in Turkish)

Caucasus has been the center of power struggles throughout the history. Experts estimated that With the Soviet Union's disintegration there would be a power vacuum, which will be filled by the West. However, this was not truly anticipated, as new states which emerged in the Caucasus after the dissolution of the Soviet Union tried to establish relations with various regional and global actors. However, independence brought conflict as secessionist movements and ethnic struggles lead to clashes. Instability in the region complicated consolidation efforts and state-building processes for the countries in the region. All of the newly formed states in the Southern Caucasus faced serious security problems in addition to economic, political and social problems which all the former Soviet republics experienced. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kamer Kasım's book entitled "Caucasus after the Cold War" examines foreign policies of the states in the region from a historical point of view as well as evaluating major problems common to the states in the region. Kasım's work presents a detailed insight that is of critical importance to have a sound knowledge of the foreign policies of the states in the region and international actors which are influential in the Caucasus.

One fundamental characteristic of Kasım's work is that the regional politics is not only examined in terms of the foreign policies of the Caucasus states but also of those states that are influential in the region. In addition to those chapters that deal with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, Kasım also adds chapters on Turkey, Iran and Russia as regional actors and United States as a global actor. Thus Kasım's work makes a methodological differentiation of the degree of the actors' involvement in the region. Russian Federation is identified as a regional actor, while United States' is defined as a super power, which emerged as the sole international actor after the Cold War. The debate on Russia's role in the international politics and whether revival of Russia's economic and political influence makes it a superpower is a controversial issue for contemporary IR literature. Kasım's work emphasizes that Russia's influence and its foreign policy is comparable to those regional powers such as Iran and Turkey.

Accordingly, “Near Abroad” policy is a specialization of foreign policy priorities for Russian Federation into a regional perspective, therefore giving up empire and superpower ambitions for the sake of holding onto its influence in the ex-Soviet territories. Therefore Russian Federation’s involvement in the Caucasus region is defined in terms of regional rather than global perspective.

Secondly, theoretical approach to the subject matter in Kasım’s work, namely foreign policy issues in Caucasus and strategies to handle them, are discussed in terms of classical balance of power theory. Therefore his work, although includes various approaches to study politics in Caucasus, prioritizes a realist perspective. Ethnic conflicts, energy politics and secessionist movements are defined as major common problems, while socio-economic development, regional integration, state-building and national identity problems are also analyzed in detail.

Thirdly, Kasım mainly argues that integrationist powers are less influential compared to disintegrationist powers. Therefore, foreign involvement in regional politics negatively influences integration efforts, while causing regional problems to become permanent/frozen conflicts. Kasım suggests that struggle for influence in the region and the disadvantaged role of integrationist powers in the region hampers national economic development projects, transportation of energy resources to the West and interregional integration.

Another influence of foreign involvement in the region, although indirectly, is that enduring regional conflicts and inability to provide regional integration also threatens the structure and integrity in these countries. Therefore Kasım claims that one critical issue for Caucasus states is to hold the states intact, secure and stable and only then it would be possible to provide grounds for integration, development and security. Foreign involvement plays a crucial role in this picture.

According to Kasım, there is a critical role of regional and global actors to play in the Caucasus to resolve regional conflicts such as Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Turkish-Armenian and Azerbaijan-Armenia relations. Still Kasım anticipates no immediate solution to these conflicts even by the mediation of regional and global powers. Kasım suggests that even in the case of a positive mediation, these conflicts do not seem to be resolved in the near future. Accordingly these conflicts could be transformed so as to break into new forms of conflicts. Kasım’s argument is especially valid considering the recent developments in Turkish-Armenian relations, which entered a new phase with the signing of the two Protocols for the establishment and development of bilateral relations in October 2009. Putting the theory into practice and considering the developments in Turkish and Armenian politics concerning the bilateral relations, the unresolved problems are beginning to be transformed into new conflicts as these problems are getting more and more interrelated with each other and internationalized.

In chapters that deal with the foreign policies of the countries in the region, Kasim highlights the need of those countries to establish cooperative relations with regional and global actors for the establishment of security and stability. Thus, Kasim underlines that each of these states saw the necessity to become a part of one or another security mechanism to secure their regional roles and economic, political development. This approach is closely linked with Barry Buzan's Regional Security Complex theory, which assumes that regions-in-transition attempt to become a part of a regional security complex in order to survive the competition within an 'uncharted' region. But compared to Kasim's claim, Buzan's analysis also suggests that this complicated condition of the countries in a region with no security integration provides a suitable ground for non-regional actors to penetrate into these regions in order to consolidate their influence. Therefore, Kasim's arguments fit into the regional politics predicted by Buzan, while the role of the region-specific requirements of the Caucasus countries to become a part of a specific security mechanism are analyzed in a more detailed informative figure.

Kamer Kasim's book entitled "Caucasus after the Cold War" provides an insightful analysis of the foreign policies of the main actors in the Caucasus by theoretical and methodological hypothesis, which he supports with detailed historical information on the subject. Thus, it is obvious that a critical region such as Caucasus and its economic, political and therefore social transformation can only be understood by evaluating the foreign policies and the factors that define these policies of the countries in the region. Kasim's work would be a helpful resource for researchers interested in the region.

