

Time to Talk More Georgia, Less Russia

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Statehood and security : Georgia after the Rose Revolution / Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, editors. - Cambridge, Mass. : American Academy of Arts and Sciences ; MIT Press, c2005. - xiii, 406 p. - ISBN 0262033437. - ISBN 026253276X (pbk.)

The book is a part of the series of the American Academy *Studies in Global Security* and the last of five volumes on security challenges in the countries of the former Soviet Union. It addresses the domestic and regional security of Georgia in the context of the wider Caucasus region. The individual chapters are authored by well-known Georgian and Western experts on the country. It seeks to explain how Georgia's present and past leaderships have dealt with the challenge of seces-

sion, attempted to create a defence establishment and promoted military and political relations with outside powers. It also places Georgia within the broader context of the interests and stakes in the Caucasus, such as energy security, the unresolved Karabakh conflict and the lack of regional cooperation. The book sets itself three inter-related tasks: to untangle different layers of security challenges arising within and outside Georgia and their mutual influences, to explain why these challenges matter for the international community and finally, to point out what needs to be done in response.

Christoph Zurcher analyses the origins of Georgian statehood and the uneasy road to independence ("Georgia's Time of Troubles, 1989 – 93"). Chia Nodia explores the complex

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interrelationship between security and statehood, attributing deficiencies in security to challenges of development and state-building, which he calls "competing national projects". His argument is that "issues related to the creation of effective, stable and legitimate state institutions lie at the core of Georgia's security problems" (p. 81). David Darchiashvili's chapter looks at the destructive interplay between the enfeebled state, corruption and the military, arguing that "the fate of military reforms depends on the dynamics within the political system in which they unfold" (p. 117). Oksana Antonenko assesses Russia's policy, using Abkhazia as an example and showing that Moscow's ability to manipulate the internal political developments of its client regions is at best limited. Thomas de Waal discusses relationships within the South Caucasian region, including pipeline politics, arguing that the significance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline for Georgia has been exaggerated. He concludes that "Georgia alone is not responsible for the fractured conditions of its neighbourhood and its uncertain future, but it has done little to mend the cracks and break down the barriers" (p. 337).

The collective monograph is a solid read for students of Georgia and the politics of the Soviet successor states and presents a useful resource for the history of Georgia since it gained independence. The title, however, is misleading. First, most of the space is given to the "pre-revolutionary period" with only some assessments/projections of President Saakashvili's time (the book was

written when it was still too early to explore the policies of the new regime). Second, it concentrates mainly on Russia as the single most important factor in all aspects of Georgia's statehood and security: half the chapters deal with Russia explicitly while the others discuss "the Russian factor" as a derivative of other issues, be it pipeline politics, military reform or rivalry with the West. Thus, a more accurate description would have been "The Role of Russia in Georgia's Security".

This brings out a wider issue of locating Georgia within the post-Soviet context, dwelling heavily on Russia and drawing comparisons with the Baltic states and Ukraine, as Robert Legvold does in his introductory chapter on "Outlining the Challenge". This may have been a valid perspective a decade ago, but is probably insufficient at present, and a paradigm shift from a "transition period" is needed. Bruno Coppieters in his concluding chapter on "Locating Georgian Security" employs an interesting concept of "centre" and "periphery", considering the country from both perspectives. On the one hand, Georgia is expected to exercise authority over its territory playing the role of "centre", especially in problems relating to particular peripheries. On the other hand, it is a small state striving to be recognised on the international legal level as an equal among others, and thus could be seen as a "periphery". The concept of sovereignty is crucial to both types of relationships (p. 342).

However, it may be time to explore other interpretative lenses, such as post-colonial development and the perils of

establishing a state in the aftermath of the breakdown of an empire. In fact, many challenges outlined in the book, including an uneasy relationship with a former colonial master, are akin to those experienced in Africa and the Greater Middle East after the end of the colonial era.

This would be worth considering while discussing policies of Western governments and multilateral institutions towards Georgia, such as maintaining the country's food security, acting on its unresolved conflicts and assisting with the development of its security sector. Helly and Gogia do not give much credit to the "international community" for its role in Georgia, despite the fact that the country is second in the world in terms of official US per capita aid, the only one in the post-Soviet space with the deployment of UN military observers and an OSCE mission, the largest after Kosovo. The authors describe the US and Europe's contributions to peace processes as

"unsuccessful" (p. 281). Arguably, it is too harsh to judge external actors for not resolving Georgia's conflicts if the parties themselves are not interested in making hard choices. Their chapter on the "Georgian Security and the Role of the West" contains recommendations on "what the West should do" (pp. 299-305).

Overall, the book covers a traditional agenda with regard to Georgia, dedicating little attention to newer and more direct security issues – individual safety, organised crime, spillover of instability from North Caucasian republics (the issue of Pankissi Valley is discussed as a point in Russia's policy rather than as a security complex between two parts of the Caucasus) and internal dynamics in the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As such, it presents the existing knowledge in a different fashion, but hardly opens new vistas for research and ventures into controversial themes and ideas.