

# Houman A. Sadri:

## Conflict and Cooperation in the South Caucasus Region: From Theory to Policy

Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2024.

DOI: 10.5817/PC2026-1-72

CC BY 4.0 (<https://www.creativecommons.cz/licence-cc/>)

**H**ouman Sadri, associate professor of political science at the University of Central Florida, is the author of the “Conflict and Cooperation in the South Caucasus Region: From Theory to Policy.” In the text, he explores the various safety concerns and foreign policy goals that are specifically unique to the South Caucasus states. Sadri also discusses how the three international relations (IR) perspectives: Realism, Clash of Civilization, and Geopolitics can help readers understand the political affairs of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia following their freedom from the Soviet Union. Because the book analyzes the territory through a geopolitical lens, it evaluates the discourse/unity that takes place inside the South Caucasus states and even displays the area’s profound significance in global politics.

The introduction chapter offers a thorough examination of the South Caucasus region’s vital position, ethnic/religious makeup, historic information, and self-governance since the end of the USSR. The book also dedicates a chapter going over the landscape and historical background from the pre-Soviet era up until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 for each South Caucasus state. Chapter 2 focuses on Azerbaijan, Chapter 3 concentrates on Armenia, and Chapter 4 centers on Georgia.

After successfully acquiring independence from the Soviet Union, multiple global and regional actors have targeted the South Caucasus territory for its critical geographic placement. This alone has sparked a major geopolitical competition between the United States and Russia within the region. In Chapter 2-4,

Sadri explains the three countries foreign policy relationships with the United States, Russia, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), other Western European organizations (i.e., North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Union), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Iran, and Turkey. He also delves into the relations that Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia have with each other.

The author shows how Armenia has closer ties to Russia, CIS, the EU, Iran, and Georgia while it has weaker ties with NATO, the United States, OSCE, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has a strong connection to Georgia and Turkey than it does with Armenia and Iran. Sadri acknowledges how the first Nagorno-Karabakh War poisoned the relationship between Azerbaijan and Armenia. While both countries were negatively impacted by the conflict, Azerbaijan was able to utilize its raw materials to recover from the regional war economically and militarily. However, Armenia has not been very fortunate. The country is having a challenging time trying to build up its economy and military equipment. As of right now, Armenia mostly engages in foreign trade just to keep itself afloat.

When it comes to Georgia, the country tends to lean more in favor of developing closer connections with Western countries and organizations. The book addresses how Georgia regularly engages in separatist conflicts with Abkhazia, Adjara, and South Ossetia and heavily relies on powerful Western nations to supply its military needs. However, actively participating in these clashes

took a major toll on Georgia's economy. To alleviate their financial burdens, the country imports majority of its resources from Azerbaijan and sends most of its goods to Russia. Unfortunately, the Russian government is extremely unhappy with Georgia's growing relationship with Western powers and has threatened to intervene militarily if the country continues to do so. To prevent a second Russia-Georgia War, the Georgian government decided to steer clear of forming closer ties with the Western nations.

Sadri also examines the diverse governmental frameworks of the three South Caucasus states and how these structures operate within their society. In Chapter 2, the book explores President Ilham Aliyev's very authoritative government. With the help of the New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), this allows Aliyev to secure enough seats to stay in office and enables him to exert brutal power over many Azerbaijani citizens. Sadly, those who are underrepresented in society such as ethnic/religious minorities and women are negatively affected under his administration.

In Chapter 3, it covers the main events that led to the Velvet Revolution. Sadri compares Armenia's system of government, various political affiliations, political liberties, constitutional rights, and fundamental rights during Serzh Sargsyan and Vahagn Khachaturyan's time in office. In Chapter 4, the author even goes over how the Georgia Rose Revolution has slightly improved the country's structure of government, main political players, individual rights, constitutional freedoms, and human rights.

In Chapter 5, the book neatly recaps Sadri's key takeaways assessing the political decision-making, safety precautions, and security-related problems of the South Caucasus states. He asserts that the territory is heavily influenced by separatist movements, domestic unrest, and geopolitical struggles. Not only that, but the author also explains how the three international relations (IR) perspectives can help professionals portray, exemplify, and foresee the foreign/security affairs of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia between themselves, their regional neighbors, and other world powers. Although these IR theories are useful tools in grasping the foreign policies of the South Caucasus states, they cannot fully expound on the underlying cause of disputes within the region.

As can be seen, Sadri presents a substantial amount of preliminary knowledge about Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, this geographical location was a complete mystery to many individuals during that time, and it is still an enigma today. Thankfully, the author identified this problem and dedicated hours of expert analysis to help fill-in the massive gap in knowledge for those who are unfamiliar with the South Caucasus states. He articulates the topic so well that even undergraduates can easily comprehend the dynamics of this re-

gion. Therefore, the book serves as the perfect introduction for those who may not know much about the South Caucasus territory and will be extremely helpful for academics, political analysts, and international relations/affairs specialists alike. As a result, professionals can gain more clarification about the intense rivalry between the West, Russia, Iran, and Turkey when it comes to this area of the globe.

Overall, *Conflict and Cooperation in the South Caucasus Region: From Theory to Policy* is a valuable and timely contribution to the study of Eurasian politics. Professor Sadri offers a well-researched and highly accessible examination of the South Caucasus, one that not only clarifies the region's strategic significance but also deepens understanding of its foreign and security policies. As a result, this book provides an important reference point for experts and policymakers seeking to anticipate how regional and global actors may engage with the South Caucasus in the years ahead. Among the many works written by scholars outside the region, Sadri's stands out for its depth of insight—shaped by his extensive fieldwork, sustained engagement with local institutions, and long-term familiarity with the societies he studies.

Carrie Belisle  
Independent Consultant & Scholar