

Alvin Z. Rubinstein and Oles M. Smolansky, eds.,
*Regional Power Rivalries in the New Eurasia:
Russia, Turkey, and Iran.*
Armonk/London: Sharpe, 1995, xii, 290 pp. + index.

With the breakup of the Soviet empire, the sovereignty of fifteen states in the "new" Eurasia has been internationally recognized. A network of more than 100 bilateral relationships has suddenly emerged. Not surprisingly, entirely new fields are opening up, and are giving rise to new academic disciplines. Border crossing studies are mushrooming, and are overcoming the predominantly monolithic approach of the old Sovietologist cast: Baltic Studies, Central Asian Studies, Caucasus Studies, Eurasian Studies, etc.

The book *Regional Power Rivalries in the New Eurasia* inquires into the new "Realpolitik" of Central Asia and the Middle East. Focusing the book on the triangle of the established powers comprised of Russia, Iran, and Turkey, George S. Harris and Alvin Z. Rubinstein have collected ten essays - most of them prepared for the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies - in order to explore the broader complexity of Eurasia in the 1990s. The book draws an impressive picture of crisscrossing alignments, multipolar competition, and cooperation in the triangle, as well as in the former buffer zones of Transcaucasia and Central Asia. However, as most of the articles make clear, the situation is still characterized by a great deal of uncertainty and flux. Although the multitude of variables and the lack of established ties make analysis extremely complex, some patterns of interaction seem to have emerged.

First, pragmatic approaches to political cooperation have clearly dominated the first years of independence. The Ukraine, for example, tried to wrest its independence from Russia after 1991, but its need for huge quantities of cheap Russian fuel prevented it from achieving economic

sovereignty, despite Iran's offer to sell the Ukraine petroleum and gas, which Iran viewed as a step toward entering the West European market. As the example of the Ukraine illustrates, it was mainly due to a lack of money in the former Soviet republics that most such highflying projects failed.

Second, cultural and religious affiliations in the region are becoming increasingly relevant, although they are limited by political considerations. Iran and Azerbaijan, for example, share mixed Persian-Turkic heritage. The Azeri minority in northern Iran, however, threatens Iran's territorial integrity, making Iran reluctant to play excessively upon its nationalism. To take another case, Turkey made an enthusiastic commitment in the early 1990s toward its 60 million fellow Turks in Central Asia. However, in the meantime, enthusiasm had cooled down considerably. Nonetheless, Turkish businessmen still invest heavily in Central Asia, political and military agreements have been signed, and religious schools have been built.

In a third pattern of interaction, military aspects play a dominant role, particularly with respect to the new Russia. Whether out of "legitimate" security concerns, or out of imperialistic attempts, the Russian army is involved in military actions throughout Eurasia, including everything from border control to peace keeping activities.

In a fourth interaction pattern, personal relations play a decisive role. Azerbaijan's relationship to Russia, for example, nose-dived after pro-Turkish Abulfaz Elchibey seized power from President Mutalibov but became considerably better after 1993, when the former Communist Party Politburo member Haidar Aliev became president.

New skills are required of scholars writing about the complexity of Eurasia. Apart from its highly multi-disciplinary approach, language skills play a crucial role in guaranteeing a broad understanding of Eurasian literature. Mohiaddin Mesbahi's article on "Iran and Tajikistan" is an

excellent example of this phenomenon, using texts in Persian, Arabic, Russian, and English. In contrast to this, Patricia M. Carley, a program officer for the former Soviet Union and Turkey at the US Institute of Peace, only cites literature written in English and French in her article “Turkey and Central Asia: Reality Comes Calling”, which raises doubts about the validity of her argument.

Summing up the “tentative beginning” of a new discipline, as the authors call this collection of essays on the new Eurasia, at least one conclusion can be drawn: Multipolar competition in this area has returned, with Russia, Turkey, and Iran as the main protagonists. Turkey and Iran’s expectations about establishing a major influence in Eurasia have been premature, due to their limited capacities. Moscow, however, still seems to hold the strongest cards in the “Great Game.”

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