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economies and now China – who have all pursued export penetration of high-income country markets – is held as a powerful example of the benefits brought by trade. Yet Buckman declines debate about how this took place and whether it is possible for other states to follow suit, treating the cases as unrepeatable anomalies, especially in a context where ‘quite apart from the politics of global trade the very foundation of global trade is fundamentally flawed and is structurally and systemically tilted against low-income countries’. (p. 130) Finally, and related to this lacuna, is the failure to highlight the mechanisms by which trade is linked to development. In Chapter 5, changes in national levels of inequality over the last twenty years are discussed as if we should consider trade as the sole unmediated variable. No mention is made of the effect of domestic institutions or state restructuring associated with the Washington Consensus, a point made more notable for Buckman’s critique in the same chapter of World Bank economists Dollar and Kraay making ‘a tenuous link between trade and inequality’ in their defence of free trade. (p. 139)

These criticisms aside, for those concerned about the iniquities of the global trading system the book undoubtedly serves as a broad and approachable introduction. Yet as part of a series on prominent global issues that aspires to stimulate new thinking and social action, the book unfortunately falls short. As a result of its polemic style the resulting proposals for trade reform are either so vague as to be vacuous or else dependent on seemingly utopian outcomes, but more importantly, its theoretical weaknesses leave the reader ill-equipped to deal with more nuanced debates on trade.

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RELIGION AND POLITICS


After 9/11, religious and cultural elements have come to surface in international studies more frequently. This study examines the foreign policy of the states in the greater Caspian region throughout the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union and attempts to identify the role of culture in their foreign policy decision-makings. All the contributors of the book were tasked to answer the following questions: ‘Does local culture frequently explain a state’s foreign policy decisions?’ or, ‘Is culture just one among the many factors that have varying influences on a state’s
foreign policy?’. (p.2) Throughout the study, ‘culture’ is used as a broad term and religion defined ‘as a form of culture’. (p.1) Consisting of twelve chapters, the study ranges from theoretical discussions to case studies. In the first and the last chapters, Brenda Shafer summarizes the findings of the study and lays the ground for further studies. In the second and third chapters, culture and foreign policy relationships are investigated in current literature from theoretical, philosophical and historical grounds. Their finding is that culture matters and ‘play a critical role in shaping foreign policy’ either as ‘a delimited frame of reference’ or ‘a logic of meaningfulness to guide action’. (p.76) Chapter 4, written by Ronald Grigor Suny, provides a concise account of national identity formation in the newly independent states in the Caspian region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Chapters five and six look at the issue from the US perspective and analyze the role of ‘perceptions’ and minorities in the making of US foreign policy. Oren and Kauffman’s media analysis of how the US perceived the three oil-rich Muslim states immediately after the 9/11 provides interesting insights. Prior to the 9/11 attacks, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were portrayed as ‘oil rich’ countries; after 9/11 however, a re-characterization took place in the ‘American mind’. This especially affected Saudi Arabia: the phrase ‘the birthplace of terrorists’ has become a dominant description of the Kingdom in the US media that frequently notes that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were Saudi citizens. (p.126) While such a ‘re-characterization’ process in the US media has produced negative results for Saudi Arabia, it was helpful for Azerbaijan. It significantly decreased the impact of the Armenian lobby on US foreign policy towards Baku, a process well-documented in Chapter 6.

Roger Kangas’ contribution is a thorough investigation of the role of culture (and religion) on foreign policy making in Caspian states. He argues that ‘leaders are careful to use Islam as a rallying call to boost their regimes’, rather than as a catalyst in foreign policy. (p. 198) Following chapters on Iran, Taliban Afghanistan and Pakistan all support the argument that in many cases Islam is used instrumentally to advance material and economic interests, rather than as a ‘base’ for foreign policy inclinations.

Svante E. Cornell’s chapter on Taliban Afghanistan and its foreign policy sheds light on the often unquestioned belief that the foreign policy of the Taliban regime has been influenced by religious forces. Cornell argues on the contrary that ‘a variety of cultural factors influenced the policy choices of Taliban’ and ‘Islam was only one among several’. (p.264) Similarly, Cornell in his contributions on Pakistan, the first Islamic state constitutionally, tells us a different story. According to him, Islam and Pakistan’s support to Islamic radicalism is not more than a result of a ‘pragmatic and instrumentalist’ foreign policy. It does not stem from an Islamic cause, but aims to serve ‘the material national interests of Pakistan’. (p.291)

Almost all of the contributors agree that the regimes in the greater Caspian region do not necessarily get trapped in their own rhetoric of national identity (e.g. Islamic). They often act in defiance of their
officially articulated cultural and ideological rhetoric. In that sense, the argument that ‘common Muslim identity played no role in the choice of coalition partners of the states’ in the region, is meaningful. One of the major findings of the book is that culture has an impact on foreign policy outcomes when foreign states take another state’s rhetoric seriously and craft policies in reaction to it. Ali Ansari illustrates this by showing how Washington took Iran’s revolutionary rhetoric very seriously and crafted its policies accordingly, and how Iranian officials have often been surprised by the extent to which the regime’s rhetoric is taken seriously. (p.329)

Overall this study is a fine and timely contribution to the role of culture in foreign policy. As argued in the volume, while more research is needed on this issue, as a starting point such finding is to be accepted: the role of culture (and Islam) in foreign policy should not be perceived as a given, but as part of a process that is both selective and often directed by various political and material national interests.

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