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BOOK REVIEW

MINORITIES AND BORDERS IN THE GREATER MEDITERRANEAN.

Coordinator: Algora Weber, María Dolores. Authors from MESIMA Group (In its Spanish Acronym: Minorities, States, and International Security in the Greater Mediterranean). Publisher: Dykinson. ISBN Hardback edition: 978-84-9085-638-3. ISBN e-book edition: 978-84-9085-725-0. Pages: 412. Publishing date: 2016.



INTRODUCTION

The book *Minorities and Borders in the Greater Mediterranean: A Challenge to Security in the XXI Century* deals with the subject of international insecurity in relation to the Greater Mediterranean from different points of view. Published in 2016, the book is the result of research previously undertaken by the MESIMA Group (In its Spanish acronym: Minorities, States, and International Security in the Greater Mediterranean), coordinated by Professor María Dolores Algora.

The aim of this publication is set forth by Professor Algora herself in her Introduction, «to study the impact on international security, geographically limiting it to the area that in geopolitical terms is known as the “Greater Mediterranean”, which includes the littoral areas of the Mediterranean basin and those adjacent which are affected by factors defining the former», all within a historical period extending from the breakdown of the Balkans at the beginning of the 90’s until the so-called Arab Springs in the second decade of the XXI century.

The publication explores the transcendental effects of minority groups on State territories and borders. Both their territorial aspirations and their transnational movements are described in detail in the book, and they have been fully confirmed by the current cruel reality, which very few predicted when the articles were written in 2014-2015. In this sense, the present study in Spanish may be considered as seminal for future works.

The nation-states chosen for this study, multicultural by nature, face the risk of territorial breakdowns and sectarian struggles, in a context of conflicts that dissolve the different elements of cohesion that had appeared after decolonization, and that had stayed in place until the last decades of the XX century. The recent and current wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria, the repeated conflicts in Lebanon, and the unending and apparently insoluble Israeli-Palestinian conflict, all still present at different levels, as well as the situation experienced during the «black decade» in Algiers, are proof of this.

The first part of the book develops some general aspects that serve as a basis for subsequent studies. The coordinator of the work, María Dolores Algora, sets the reference framework for the work in her article «Minorities, Borders, and Multiculturality as International Security Elements», focusing on the Greater Mediterranean; this theoretical basis is enriched by Justo Lacunza’s article, entitled «Identity, Culture, Religion, and Security». Begoña Casas, for her part, analyzes the «Identity process» as a whole, and its effects on the conflicts in the Middle East.

1 M.^a Dolores Algora Weber is a Professor of Contemporary History on the Faculty of Humanities and Communications Science at the University CEU San Pablo. As principal researcher, she directs the MESIMA Group (Minorities, States, and International Security in the Greater Mediterranean), attached to the Department of Humanities at the Faculty of Humanities and Communication Science at the University CEU San Pablo, and made up of researchers from Spanish and foreign universities.

This first part deals with the definition of minorities, their relation to the State as a territory within borders, and their implication for international security. It also analyzes the relevance of minorities as a risk factor within the general framework of globalization, and always related to sectarianism as applied to the internal and transnational environment. These contributions have been confirmed —beyond any doubt— by the cruel war in Syria, which we continue to witness.

The second part focuses on the effects that minorities have both on borders and on the integrity of States, with an introductory article about sovereignty and borders, and a regional study focused on the Balkans, developing the role of the minorities on the Balkan border, and on Africa, where the situation in the Maghreb and the Sahel is dealt with, as is that of Central Asia.

This more specific part begins with a study carried out by Enrique Madrazo, which deals with the problem from the point of view of international law and international relations, studying the origins of the modern State and its evolution, and the dilemmas posed within a framework where globalization and the re-fragmentation of the Nation-State cohabit, giving rise to a complex multicultural map which is a deciding factor affecting the current state of uncertainty.

Professor José Luis Orella, in his article «The Use of Minorities on the Balkan Borders», carries out a historical approach to the current problem of «Balkanization». Africa is a paradigmatic case of artificial borders resulting from colonization and from a decolonization that responds to the interests of the old metropolis, and which seriously affect security. The study undertaken by Professors Martínez Lillo and Carreño Lara focuses on the Mediterranean environment —the Maghreb— enlarged in the south towards the Sahel, a continuous geopolitical area strongly influenced by the Maghreb.

The effects of the disintegration of the USSR have provoked a paradoxical situation in Central Asian countries. There, the cooperation and ethnic dispersion typical of the Soviet era have given rise to multi-ethnic States, with important minorities and little cooperation, where the unequal distribution of hydrocarbons and water resources have negative environmental and security repercussions on all the countries in the area. Professor Antonio Alonso develops this subject in detail.

The third part of the book, entitled «Minorities in the Security Environment» begins with a study about international organizations and minorities by Ruth Abril and Guillermo Martín, later dealing with the issue of the key role of minorities in the Armed Forces in a study by Sánchez Rojas, and of the international military peacekeeping missions in ethnic wars in another by Manuel María Jiménez.

This third part deals with a fundamental dimension of international security and the treatment of minorities by international organizations, analyzing the position of these organizations when confronting the terrible ethnic conflicts and genocides that have taken place in recent times. Among the regional organizations analyzed are the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the African Union, the Arab League, the Union for the Mediterranean, and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU).

Regarding minorities within Armed Forces, as Professor Algora points out, the author «presents his analysis from the optic of the evolution of military power» in Arab countries, which permits explanation of «different models of armies, and determining factors in their configuration, such as ethnic favoritism and the perception of legitimacy». The author includes an assessment of the behavior of the Armed Forces in the so-called Arab springs.

With reference to military peacekeeping missions, and from a theoretical-practical approach, the article deals with the performance of the Armed Forces, with a contribution from the author's own on-the-ground experience. The lessons learned in these missions are particularly valuable for the prevention and management of crises in scenarios where ethnic minorities are an essential component.

The fourth and last part of the book is the result of the compilation of a series of case studies that enrich the analyses in the previous chapters. The case studies deal with the subject of minorities in the Mediterranean in scenarios ranging from the Balkans in Europe, where Juan Corona analyzes the current state of «permanent Balkanization» as applied to a paradigmatic case such as that of Kosovo, to the western Maghreb, where Cristina Lomba deals with the thorny Berber issue, always present both in Algeria and in Morocco, and Santiago Velasco writes a seminal article about the Arab Berber population in Mauritania.

In the part focusing on the area farthest east, the Syrian-Iraqi-Turkish scenario has led to the writing of three articles that keep interest in this area alive, in spite of the changes that have occurred there. The Kurdish issue, as much overlooked then as it is in the spotlight now, is not ignored in this book, and Diego Moreno deals with this issue in his suggestive article entitled «Beyond the Kurdistan Borders». Without leaving this scenario, María González-Úbeda analyzes it in two highly current articles: on the one hand, «The Centrality of Sectarian Policies», in which she focuses her study on Iraq and the vicissitudes occurring after the American intervention and the fall of Saddam Hussein; and on the other, «Power as an Instrument for Survival», applied to the Syrian Alawites.

Last but not least, the cases dealing most closely with Israel are covered in three articles. In the first one, Begoña Casas analyzes the Palestinian case, no less pressing for being widely dealt with, focusing on the innovative aspect of «identity complexity». Lebanon, a mosaic of minorities which miraculously survives its multiple crises and wars, is discussed by Mar García and the Lebanese, George E. Irani, in their article, «A Failed State or A Federation of Tribes?» Jordan, that miracle of stability in the midst of crisis, threatened by the growing number of refugees, is discussed by Ignacio de la Cierva and Óscar Sáinz de la Maza, in the article suggestively entitled «In Search of Calm in the Midst of the Storm», which clearly describes the complex equilibrium of the Hashemite country.

As may be seen, the work delves into a cross-section of aspects of the minority problem and its effects on security, with multifaceted approaches and from different points of view which are perceived in a coordinated manner thanks to the task of

compiling and arrangement carried out by the principal researcher and coordinator of this work, Professor Alhora Weber, who is also the author of the Introduction and the Epilogue.

Regarding the timeliness of the work, it would seem surprising that this has held, in spite of the effects of the length of time, and in particular, of the determining events, which have transpired since its writing. The scientific rigor and the experience of the authors which are apparent in the work keep its interest fresh; it is one of those rare works which survive certain events in spite of the way in which issues such as the war in Syria and Iraq change perception of reality.

With respect to the form of this work, although each article responds to the style of its author, these are rigorously academic articles, and as such, reading them is generally straightforward and the terminology precise but accessible. It is presented as an academic monograph, but with the aim of being widely read by well-informed people, and even by the general public. There are not many monographs and studies about the subject matter in the book, which reinforces its interest.

In the words of Professor Algora, writing at the end of her Epilogue, «the studies included in this monograph, although dealing with an international situation of the utmost timeliness have not failed to investigate the historic origins that have led to the present. In fact, this has been very useful in order to explain circumstances characterized as the greatest challenges to security that the States in the “Greater Mediterranean” will have to face in the coming years».

Regarding any detrimental feature of the work, this could only be the great number of articles and the proliferation of authors, but, on the other hand, with this format the book takes on an instructional function, appropriate for a wide public, without losing its essentially academic nature. If scholars do not reach the public, they stray from their fundamental purpose, which is to teach.

I strongly recommend reading the book; to the academic reading public in general because it is an academic document, but also to the general public and to participants in media discussion programs, who will find in this book the bases for an understanding of the elements which have triggered the current crises in those «black holes» of security that have emerged in the Greater Mediterranean, and to support, in some cases with more reliability, their daily opinions.

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