



POLS 365 | Conflict and Security in the South Caucasus (1.0 Unit*)

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Time: TBD

Location: Yerevan State University, Faculty of International Relations; Yerevan, Armenia

Number of hours: 75 (5 academic hours per week, over the course of 15 weeks)

**One Bryn Mawr unit is equal to four undergraduate semester credits*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the complex security dynamics and conflict landscapes of the South Caucasus region. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the political characteristics of the region, the course begins with the early 20th century, from the collapse of the Russian Empire to the formation of independent states in the South Caucasus. Regional developments are then presented in light of the Sovietization of the region. The main concentration of the course will be on the contemporary period – current drivers of conflict and security issues, including ethnic tensions, territorial disputes, great power (both regional and extra regional – Russia, Turkey, Iran, USA, EU, China) competition, energy geopolitics etc.. Some questions of global or regional importance, which have affected or continue to affect the region - such as world wars, the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, the war in Ukraine, immigration and refugees issues - will be under special concentration. Policy analysis and case studies will help the students to understand the interests of local, regional and global actors shaping security in the region. Students will examine such questions as: What trends can be identified in the regional politics of the Caucasus over the past century? How might identifying those trends help to avoid future crises? What are the major obstacle to peace and stability in the region today? How has Russia's influence in the region altered since World War Two? How has Iran's position affected the region and how it likely to factor in the future? How will the diminishing role of the U.S. in NATO effect the region? Will conflicts grow larger and more dangerous in the future? Which are the major obstacles for peace and stability in the region? How can diplomacy help to foster peace and security?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course will provide the students with understanding of

- key political drivers and security landscape features of the South Caucasus region,
- current trends and major drivers of the regional processes in the South Caucasus,
- regional and global powers competition,
- conflicts and peace building processes in the region.

After the course, students are expected to have acquired knowledge within the following competencies: critically assess the dynamics of major regional conflicts; analyze the historical and geopolitical context of the conflicts in the South Caucasus; assess the impact of ethnic, political, and economic factors on regional instability; evaluate the role of external actors in regional security and conflict resolution; apply conflict and security theories to the South Caucasus context; develop policy recommendations addressing conflict transformation and peace building in the region.

TARGET AUDIENCE



Students interested or specializing in political science, international relations, security studies and especially in Russian and Eastern Europe area studies, peace and conflict studies and from the other branches of the Social and Humanitarian studies.

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance in this class is required. Make-up work will be allowed in cases of excused absences only, which include documented illness, religious holidays or family emergency. In addition to contacting the American Councils Resident Director, you are required to notify me in writing immediately of an absence. Other absences will be considered unexcused and will result in an immediate reduction of your grade of 10%. Students who arrive more than 15 minutes late without a valid excuse will not receive credit for attending. More than three unexcused absences will result in automatic course failure.

ACCOMODATIONS

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact American Council in keeping with its Accommodations Policy, which was distributed to all participants upon admission to the program. Student seeking accommodations who have not yet informed American Councils of this request, should speak to the Resident Director immediately about their needs. Students are also welcome to contact me regarding accommodation but should be aware that all accommodations are provided in keeping with the American Councils Accommodations Policy.

DISCUSSION RULES

As this class has a discussion component and small group work covering sensitive political topics, please observe the following rules during the discussions and small groups' works: (1) listen carefully and be respectful to the other participants in the discussion or group, (2) be sure that you understand the positions and opinions stated and ask for clarification, if necessary and (3) offer your viewpoint in respectful and non-confrontational manner, in order to achieve constructive dialogue with the instructor and your colleagues.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

Grading will consist of:

Category	% Points
In-class participation	10%
Quizzes	20% (2 quizzes x 10% each)
Mid-term test	15%
In-class presentation	20%
Final research paper	35%
TOTAL	100%

Grade Scale

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
4.0 Scale	4	3.7	3.3	3.0	2.7	2.3	2.0	1.7	1.0	0.0
% Points	94–100	90–94	87–90	84–87	80–84	77–80	74–77	70–74	60–70	0–60

READING LOAD



Participants in the course are expected to read from around 30 to 40 pages per week. Students are expected to budget their time accordingly in order to complete all required reading selections prior to a particular class for which they have been assigned.

IN-CLASS PARTICIPATION

The class is lecture-style but I ask for student participation and feedback multiple times during each session. Participation is key in establishing in-class dynamics and gauging feedbacks regarding the perception of material presented. Thus active participation is very important for our progress. Assessment will be based on attendance, preparation of readings, participation in class discussion with the focus on qualitative contribution to the discussion, ability to answer questions based on the readings, come up with own interpretations and react to comments made by other students. Participation will be graded on one time basis at the end of the semester with overall weight of 10%.

IN-CLASS QUIZZES

You will complete two written, in-class quizzes during the semester. The quizzes consist of 10-15 questions each and are given after each corresponding topical course theme. The quiz should be taken approximately one academic hour to complete.

MID-TERM TEST

The mid-term test is a more complex format that includes an assignment with several components: queries, assertions, text exposition. The test consists of 15-20 questions and is given at late October. The test should be taken approximately one academic hour to complete.

IN-CLASS PRESENTATION

The presentations will be conducted in groups of 2-3 people. The presentation will be based on the topic your group has selected at mid-term from a selected list of topic. It should consist of 10-15 slides that outline the importance of the case selection, relevance, methods and results of your research on the cases drawn from the topical modules of the course. Presentations are due 15th of November, 2026.

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER

For final assignment, students need to write a research essay on a recent political or societal development in Armenia, Azerbaijan or Georgia. The topics will be selected individually by the students from a pre-selected list that will be available on 10th of September. It will be an original paper in the range of 3000 and maximum 4000 words long that includes research question overview, theory, research methods, sources used and the results of your research endeavor. The final paper is due 15th of December, 2026.

REQUIRED TEXTS

These are the texts that contain the required reading for this course:

- Siri Neset, Mustafa Aydin, Ayça Ergun, Richard Giragosian, Kornely Kakachia, Arne Strand (2023). *Changing Geopolitics of the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War. Prospect for Regional Cooperation and/or Rivalry*. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI Report 2023:4).
- Degtyarev D., Kurylev K. (2019). *The Foreign Policies of the CIS countries: A Comprehensive Reference*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Kazimirov V. (2014). *Peace to Karabakh*. VES MIR Publishers.
- Tsygankov A. (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*.

- Ohannes Geukjian (2011). *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy*. Routledge.
- Hille, C. M. L. (2010). *State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus*. Brill.
- Kornely Kakachia and Michael Cecire (2013). *Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Additional and optional reading, when necessary, will be uploaded to Moodle to corresponding lecture units.

COURSE CONTENT

Class	Topic of Lecture/Discussion	Required Reading	Date	Assignment
1.	Introduction to the course and syllabus distribution	Distribution of syllabus, discussion about the aims and the rules of the course	September 2	
2.	Overview of the South Caucasus: definition of the region, the history and geography	Hille, C. M. L. (2010). <i>State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus</i> . Brill.	September 4	
3.	State building in the South Caucasus after the Russian Revolution	Hille, C. M. L. (2010). <i>State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus</i> . Brill.	September 7	
4.	Discussion: Imperial legacies: Ottoman, Persian, and Russian rule & role in the South Caucasus		September 9	
5.	The formation of the territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus: the region under post-first World War turbulence	Ohannes Geukjian (2011). <i>Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy</i> . Routledge.	September 11	
6.	Soviet nationalities policy and its impact on ethno-territorial divisions	Ohannes Geukjian (2011). <i>Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy</i> . Routledge.	September 14	
7.	South Caucasus as a part of the Soviet union	Hille, C. M. L. (2010). <i>State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus</i> . Brill.	September 16	
8.	Discussion: Political transformations and nation-building in the Soviet period. Prerequisites and causes of the collapse of USSR	Degtyarev D., Kurylev K. (2019). <i>The Foreign Policies of the CIS countries: A Comprehensive Reference</i> . Lynne Rienner Publishers.	September 18	
9.	Newly independent and in search for a political trajectory: state building in Armenia	Hille, C. M. L. (2010). <i>State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus</i> . Brill.	September 21	

10.	Independence and state building in Georgia	Hille, C. M. L. (2010). State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus. Brill.	September 23	
11.	Independence and state building in Azerbaijan	Hille, C. M. L. (2010). State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus. Brill.	September 25	
12.	In class quiz	Quiz # 1	September 28	
13.	Discussion: Ruined stability in the South Caucasus: wars in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia	Degtyarev D., Kurylev K. (2019). The Foreign Policies of the CIS countries: A Comprehensive Reference. Lynne Rienner Publishers.	September 30	
14.	Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: origins, escalations, and peace efforts	Kazimirov V. (2014). Peace to Karabakh. VES MIR Publishers.	October 2	
15.	The war in 2020 and the new phase in Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict: post-conflict reconstruction	Siri Neset, Mustafa Aydin, Ayça Ergun, Richard Giragosian, Kornely Kakachia, Arne Strand (2023). Changing Geopolitics of the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War.	October 5	
16.	Georgia–Abkhazia conflict and the role of ethnic nationalism	Kornely Kakachia and Michael Cecire (2013). Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.	October 7	
17.	Georgia–South Ossetia conflict: Russian intervention and frozen status	Kornely Kakachia and Michael Cecire (2013). Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.	October 9	
18.	Russia's role in the conflicting zones at the South Caucasus: peacekeeping and mediation	Tsygankov A. (2018). Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy. Routledge.	October 12	
19.	Discussion: Turkey's involvement: strategic ally or regional power player?		October 14	
20.	Iran's interests and limitations in the South Caucasus	Nareg Seferian (2024). Iran and the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War. ETH Zurich - https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/bitstreams/4df92b35-c67d-43c6-b42d-6183b7e01200/download	October 16	

21.	The United States' strategy in the South Caucasus: democracy promotion vs. realpolitik	Benyamin Poghosyan (2022). US policy in the South Caucasus prior to and after the 2020 Karabakh War in the Context of the Evolving Regional and International Geopolitics. Journal of Political Science: Bulletin of Yerevan University, Vol. 1 No. 3 - https://journals.ysu.am/index.php/j-pol-sci/article/view/8689/7811	October 19	
22.	The role of the EU and OSCE in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the South Caucasus	Kazimirov V. (2014). Peace to Karabakh. VES MIR Publishers.	October 21	
23.	Peace-building in the South Caucasus after 2023: narratives, memory, and reconciliation	Siri Neset, Mustafa Aydin, Ayça Ergun, Richard Giragosian, Kornely Kakachia, Arne Strand (2023). Changing Geopolitics of the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War.	October 23	
24.	Arms buildup and militarization in the South Caucasus	Sossi Tatikyan. Deterrence and Coercion: Armenia and Azerbaijan's Diverging Defense Postures – https://evnreport.com/politics/deterrence-and-coercion-armenia-and-azerbaijans-diverging-defense-postures/ (EVN Report 2025)	October 26	
25.	Energy security and “pipeline diplomacy”: the geopolitical role of regional energetic projects	Yeghia Tashjian (2022). The South Caucasus and the “Great Game” of Energy Security. Armenian Weekly - https://armenianweekly.com/2022/07/27/the-south-caucasus-and-the-great-game-of-energy-security/	October 28	
26.	Mid-term test	Test # 1	October 30	
27.	Discussion: The role and place of the South Caucasus in the new transforming world order		November 2	
28.	Armenia's foreign policy agenda: key drivers, dynamics and diversification	Degtyarev D., Kurylev K. (2019). The Foreign Policies of the CIS countries: A	November 4	

		Comprehensive Reference. Lynne Rienner Publishers.		
29.	Armenia's relations with Russia: will the strategic partnership stand behind the changing geopolitics?	Degtyarev D., Kurylev K. (2019). The Foreign Policies of the CIS countries: A Comprehensive Reference. Lynne Rienner Publishers.	November 6	
30.	Historical memory and new tendencies in Armenia-Turkey relations: genocide, diaspora and current agenda	Hranoush Dermoyan (2022). The Dilemma of Armenian-Turkish Relations. EVN Report - https://evnreport.com/politics/the-dilemma-of-armenian-turkish-relations/	November 9	
31.	United States and Armenia: bilateral relations and US role in peace-building agenda of the South Caucasus region	Degtyarev D., Kurylev K. (2019). The Foreign Policies of the CIS countries: A Comprehensive Reference. Lynne Rienner Publishers.	November 11	
32.	EU's policy in the South Caucasus: from peace-building to integration perspectives	Tinatin Akhvlediani (2024). The EU and the South Caucasus: Geoeconomics at Play. Carnegie - https://shorturl.at/2Kul6	November 13	
33.	Iran's role in the foreign policy agenda of the South Caucasus countries	Nareg Seferian (2024). Iran and the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War. ETH Zurich - https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/bitstreams/4df92b35-c67d-43c6-b42d-6183b7e01200/download	November 16	
34.	China's policy in the South Caucasus: the role of Belt and Road Initiative	Roman Karapetyan (2024). China's Policy in the South Caucasus: Challenges and Opportunities. Armenological Issues, Vol. 1 No. 2(28) - https://journals.yasu.am/index.php/arm-issues/article/view/12051/9787	November 18	
35.	In class quiz	Quiz # 2	November 20	
36.	Georgia's foreign policy agenda: strategy, key drivers and main directions	Kornely Kakachia and Michael Cecire (2013). Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for	November 23	

		Sustainable Security. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.		
37.	Azerbaijan's foreign policy agenda: strategy, key drivers and main directions	Degtyarev D., Kurylev K. (2019). The Foreign Policies of the CIS countries: A Comprehensive Reference. Lynne Rienner Publishers.	November 25	
38.	Border delimitation and demarcation issues between Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan	Kornely Kakachia and Michael Cecire (2013). Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.	November 27	
39.	Georgian-Azerbaijani cooperation in terms of regional transportation and energetic projects	Kornely Kakachia and Michael Cecire (2013). Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.	November 30	
40.	Discussion: Russian-Ukrainian war and its implications on the changing geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus	Roman Karapetyan (2023). South Caucasus in the phase of Russian-Ukrainian war: new security challenges and possible scenarios for development. Journal of Political Science: Bulletin of Yerevan University, Vol. 2 No. 3(6) - https://journals.yasu.am/index.php/j-pol-sci/article/view/11423/8984	December 2	
41.	In-class presentations		December 4	
42.	In-class presentations		December 7	
43.	In-class presentations		December 9	
44.	In-class presentations		December 11	
45.	Conclusion and main takeaways		December 14	