



IREn5019 No War, No Peace: Unresolved Conflicts in the Caucasus

Syllabus
Fall 2025

Lecturer: Zinaida Bechná, Ph.D.

Mgr. Jiří Nykodým

Class Time: Wednesdays, 10:00 – 11:40, Room U35

Office Hours: Wednesdays 13:00 - 14:00, Office #4.67 or online by prior arrangement via email

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I. Goals and Objectives

The course aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of unresolved conflicts in the Caucasus, examining key factors that contribute to the region's volatility. We will analyze various conflicts, such as those in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Chechnya, exploring their origins, development, and the challenges to resolution. The course integrates both theoretical frameworks and empirical case studies to provide students with the tools needed to critically assess conflict dynamics and explore potential avenues for peace.

II. Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Critically engage with theories of internal armed conflicts.
2. Understand conflict escalation processes in the Caucasus region.
3. Analyze the political, socio-economic, and systemic factors that trigger conflict.
4. Assess the role of external actors in conflict and resolution efforts.
5. Develop policy recommendations for conflict resolution in the Caucasus.

III. Requirements:

A. Readings:

Students must complete the mandatory readings before each class and be prepared for discussion. Readings are available in the course materials folder in the Information System (IS).

B. Student Presentations (in sum 10 points):

As part of the course requirements, each student will deliver an individual presentation (maximum 12 minutes) on a selected unresolved conflict or thematically related topic. These presentations are designed to demonstrate a clear understanding of the assigned

readings, the ability to engage critically with scholarly arguments, and the capacity to communicate complex ideas in a structured and accessible manner. In order to foster a more interactive and intellectually stimulating classroom environment, each presentation will be accompanied by a designated student discussant, and the remaining members of the class will also participate in a structured and meaningful way.

Presenter Responsibilities (Total: 10 points)

Each presentation will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- **Clarity and Structure (2 points):**
The presentation should be well-organized, logically sequenced, and clearly articulated. Excessive reliance on written notes should be avoided, and transitions between sections should be smooth and coherent.
- **Summary of Core Arguments (4 points):**
The presenter is expected to provide an accurate and concise summary of the key arguments, findings, or conceptual contributions of the assigned article. Emphasis should be placed on analytical precision rather than descriptive detail.
- **Critical Engagement (2 points):**
A critical assessment of the text should be offered, addressing both its analytical strengths and potential limitations. Presenters are encouraged to reflect on the theoretical framing, empirical grounding, and normative implications of the argument.
- **Response to Questions (2 points):**
Presenters should be prepared to respond to questions posed by their peers and the instructor, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the topic and an ability to reflect critically and flexibly.

Discussant Responsibilities (Rotating Assignment)

For each session, one student will be assigned in advance as **discussant**. This role is an integral part of the presentation process and mirrors academic conference practices. The discussant is expected to:

- Engage thoroughly with the assigned reading in advance of the session.
- Prepare and pose **at least two thoughtful and analytically informed questions** following the presentation.
- Deliver a brief (2–3 minute) **oral commentary**, which may include constructive feedback, critical reflections, or suggestions for further conceptual or comparative exploration.
- Complete a **peer evaluation form**, assessing the presentation based on the criteria provided.

Each student will serve in the role of discussant once during the course.

Class Participation and Structured Peer Engagement

Active participation is expected from all students throughout the presentation cycle. In order to avoid passive listening and to ensure continuous intellectual engagement:

- Students may occasionally be assigned **specific analytical roles** during discussion (e.g., “comparative analyst,” “normative challenger,” “conceptual clarifier,” etc.) to enrich the conversation and encourage diverse perspectives.
- Following each presentation, students will be invited to submit a **brief written comment or one-sentence reflection**, either in person or via the course platform. These comments contribute to the presenter's feedback and encourage continuous peer-to-peer learning.

This format is intended to cultivate an environment of critical dialogue and mutual intellectual support, reflecting academic best practices and preparing students for scholarly communication in professional settings.

C. Unresolved Conflict Simulation Game Instructions

1. Overview:

The *Frozen Conflict Simulation Game* is a dynamic learning experience designed to deepen students’ understanding of the complex and persistent nature of unresolved conflicts in the Caucasus region. Participants will assume the roles of critical stakeholders—ranging from national governments to international organizations and regional actors—and will engage in strategic negotiations based on real-world political dynamics.

2. Objectives:

By participating in the simulation, students will:

- Develop a nuanced understanding of the interests, motivations, and strategic behavior of key actors in frozen conflicts.
- Analyze the potential avenues for conflict resolution or long-term management in protracted disputes.
- Enhance practical skills in negotiation, critical thinking, and diplomatic communication.
- Reflect on the challenges and possibilities of real-world conflict diplomacy.

3. Key Unresolved Conflicts Covered:

The simulation will examine several unresolved conflicts within the Caucasus region, including:

- **Nagorno-Karabakh** (Armenia–Azerbaijan)
- **Abkhazia** (Georgia)
- **South Ossetia** (Georgia)

- **Chechnya** (Russia)

4. Simulation Structure:

I Role Assignment:

Each student will be assigned a specific actor in one of the listed conflicts. These roles may include:

- **National Governments** (e.g., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia)
- **De Facto Authorities** (e.g., Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia)
- **International Organizations** (e.g., OSCE Minsk Group, European Union, NATO)
- **Regional Actors** (e.g., Turkey, Russia, Iran)

II Preparation phase:

Prior to the simulation, students will conduct comprehensive research on their assigned role. This preparation should focus on:

- The historical background and evolution of the actor's involvement in the conflict.
- Core interests, objectives, red lines, and areas of flexibility.
- Past negotiation efforts and the actor's role therein.
- Current strategies to manage, escalate, or resolve the conflict.

Deliverables Before Simulation (Due: December 4, 2025)

- Submit a **one-page position paper** articulating the actor's stance and key priorities.
- Identify potential **allies and adversaries** among the other simulation participants.

III Simulation Phases

Phase 1: Opening Statements (5 minutes per participant)

Each actor presents a concise, strategic opening statement that clearly outlines their position, core interests, and intended negotiation approach.

Phase 2: Negotiation Rounds (45 minutes total)

- **Round 1 (20 minutes):** Participants explore areas of common interest and conflicting priorities. This round emphasizes information sharing and diplomatic positioning.

- **Round 2 (25 minutes):** Actors engage in more assertive negotiations, building alliances, proposing compromises, and testing strategic options.

Phase 3: Proposals and Counter-Proposals (15 minutes)

Actors or coalitions present formal proposals for conflict management or resolution. Other participants may respond with endorsements or counter-proposals. Proposals should clearly address key conflict drivers such as:

- Security concerns
- Territorial claims
- Sovereignty and autonomy
- External influence and mediation

Phase 4: Final Outcome (10 minutes)

Participants attempt to reach a mutually acceptable agreement or declare a stalemate. In the latter case, each actor must articulate the principal barriers that prevented a resolution or compromise.

Key Considerations During the Simulation

1. Understanding Interests and Strategies

- **National Governments** emphasize sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security.
- **De Facto Authorities** seek recognition, autonomy, or full independence.
- **International Organizations** prioritize peacebuilding, rule of law, and humanitarian access.
- **Regional Powers** aim to maintain or expand influence through diplomatic, military, or economic means.

2. Strategic Flexibility

While grounded in realistic positions, students are encouraged to explore innovative pathways—alliances, concessions, or backchannel diplomacy—that might yield progress. Consider:

- Which actors share overlapping interests?
- What are your negotiable points and non-negotiables?
- How can you shape a narrative that appeals to other stakeholders?

3. Time-Conscious Negotiation

Each simulation phase is time-bound. Participants should articulate their objectives and negotiate effectively within the given timeframe. Clarity, precision, and strategic communication are critical to success.

Post-Simulation Reflection Paper (Due: December 15, 2025)

After the simulation, students will submit a **1,500-word reflective analysis** in which they:

- Evaluate the role they played and the strategy they employed.
- Analyze the dynamics and outcomes of the negotiation process.
- Reflect on the extent to which the simulation mirrored real-world diplomatic challenges.
- Discuss key lessons learned about the nature and management of protracted conflicts.

Evaluation Criteria:

- **Position Paper (10 points):** Clear understanding of the role, position, and historical context.
- **Simulation Participation (20 points):** Active engagement, negotiation skills, and strategic thinking.
- **Reflection Paper (20 points):** Analysis of the simulation experience and application of theory to practice.

Important Dates:

- **Role Assignment:** Two weeks before the simulation (November 19, through IS)
- **Position Paper Submission:** One week before the simulation (November 26 into the IS folder)
- **Simulation Date:** Week 12 (December 3 in the class)
- **Reflection Paper Submission:** Week 13 (December 15, 2025).

Key Tips for Success:

1. **Prepare Thoroughly:** Research your actor's interests, alliances, and past behavior. A well-prepared participant will have the upper hand in negotiations.
2. **Engage Actively:** Be vocal during the simulation, but also listen carefully to other participants. Strategic alliances can help achieve objectives.
3. **Be Creative:** Think outside the box when proposing solutions or negotiating with others. Flexibility and creativity often lead to the best outcomes in conflict resolution.

Participation Requirement

Attendance in regular class sessions is not mandatory but is highly recommended, as active engagement contributes to a deeper understanding of

the course material and peer learning. **Participation in the Conflict Simulation Game, however, is essential in order to pass the course.** The only exception applies in cases of illness, documented by an official medical confirmation. In such circumstances, an additional examination will be appointed as a substitute requirement.

IV. Final Grading Scale:

A: 56 – 60 points
B: 51 – 55 points
C: 46 – 50 points
D: 41 – 45 points
E: 36 – 40 points
F: Less than 36 points

V. Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any use of material without proper attribution will result in a failing grade and may lead to further disciplinary action. Please refer to the university's plagiarism policy and follow proper citation guidelines.

VI. Class schedule

Week 1 – 17/9/2025 (Bechná)

Introduction to course goals and requirements.

Week 2 – 24/9/2025 (Bechná)

Causes, Actors, and Trajectories of Conflicts in the Caucasus.

Week 3 – 1/10/2025 (Bechná)

The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Origins and Escalation.

Week 4 – 8/10/2025 (Bechná)

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Week 5 – 15/10/2025 (Bechná)

Abkhazia: The Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict and Its Impact.

Week 6 – 22/10/2025 (no class)

Reading Week

Week 7 – 29/10/2025 (Bechná)

South Ossetia: The Evolution of the Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict.

Week 8 – 5/11/2025 (Nykodým)

Chechen Wars: Conflict Dynamics in the North Caucasus.

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Week 9 – 12/11/2025 (Nykodým)

Russia's Role in Caucasian Conflicts: Peacekeeper or Instigator?

Week 10 – 19/11/2025 (Bechná)

Western Engagement in the Caucasus: Challenges and Influence.

Week 11 – 26/11/2025 (Bechná)

Power Struggles: Turkey and Iran's Influence in the Caucasus.

Week 12 – 3/12/2025 (Bechná/Nykodým)

Conflict Simulation Game: Navigating the Caucasus Conflict Landscape.

Week 13 – 10/12/2025 (Bechná)

Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus: Scenarios and Future Prospects.

Mandatory literature for each lecture, together with the materials required for student presentations, will be provided in the Interactive Syllabus of the course within the IS folders. Students are expected to consult these materials in advance to ensure active participation in class discussions.