

Geography 4100
Spring 2015

Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union

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Office Hours: 2-4pm Tuesdays or by appt
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Background and course goals:

Since the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, there have been numerous violent conflicts in almost all of the 15 successor republics. Most of these have been based on competitive nationalist beliefs about control of territory and many of them have become implicated in external geopolitics, such as the current conflict in Ukraine or the 2008 war between Georgia and South Ossetia/Russia. While the conflicts have waned from earlier violent peaks, all of the disputes remain unresolved and the legacies of the conflicts are enduring in massive displacements, huge housing and infrastructural damages, irreconcilable beliefs about territorial control and worsening of relations between Russia and its neighbors, and between Russia and the West.

This undergraduate seminar will examine the underlying causes of these conflicts stemming from the broader ethnic composition and nationalities policies of Soviet times through to the specific contexts of the conflicts. We will begin with 2 weeks on the nationalism puzzle and the Soviet legacy, and then move to the regions from Central Asia to the Caucasus (North and then South), and then to Ukraine. The last 3 weeks will be devoted to student presentations and associated readings for the other class members.

Format and Readings:

The format will be the seminar style which means that there will be no lecturing and that the seminar preparation is completed beforehand. Generally no material will be presented by the instructor only to extend or explain the materials in the readings. Thus, the course is the reverse of the usual college-level format that highlights lecturing. Its success depends on student preparation through completion of the readings, submission of the responses on time, and engagement in the class discussions.

Readings: there is one short semi-popular book, Tom de Waal's **The Caucasus: An Introduction** New York: Oxford University Press, 2010 that is required, in addition to the additional weekly readings. We will read this whole book. This book should be started before we get to the Caucasus on February 10. The book is readily available on secondhand book sites like half.com for about \$10. The readings – scanned from the source materials – or PDFs of articles will be uploaded to the folder on D2L. The complete bibliography for the readings will be uploaded to D2L.

Course Requirements and Grading:

The course is organized as a so-called “inverted class” where the acquisition of new material is the responsibility of the student outside the meeting time; this process relies on the student coming to class having read the materials and prepared to discuss them. It also expects students to be engaged online through D2L by uploading the short responses, identify questions for further discussion and put up materials for their own presentations late in the semester.

I teach the course from the perspective of political geography but it is truly an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the complexities of the multiple post-Soviet conflicts. With my close colleagues Gerard Toal (Virginia Tech) and Vladimir Kolosov (Russian Academy of Sciences), I have been engaged with research on the post Soviet Union since 1992 when field work and access to conflict zones became possible. Our work has been consistently funded by the National Science Foundation and it is academic work without a specific policy bent. This stands in sharp contrast to most of the writings on the former Soviet Union which tend to carry a strong political orientation, and which has ramped up dramatically in the past year. One key issue to keep in mind is that you can pick your opinions but you can't change or perjure facts. Obviously, you will be selective in emphasizing certain features of conflicts that you consider most relevant but you should not be closed to alternative perspectives and opinions. Certainly, be prepared to argue your case effectively and forcefully.

Toal and I believe that political geography offers a valuable entre into study of conflicts because of its integrative character. Territory – its marking, its competing claims, its historical antecedents, its absolute and relative location and its peoples - is at the core of our discipline. As Toal writes: “We typically consider a triangle of conflict: population collective identity formation (as a ‘nation’ or a ‘people’), power (struggles over control of the state, political authority, and violence) and geography (struggles over territory, resources and whose conception of homeland dominates over competing understandings). The territorial nation state, as the dominant organizational form of power on the world political map, represents this triangle: territory (geography), nation (population and identity) and state(power) in a synthesis that produces identity-territorial power complexes. This emphasis on the geographic components of conflict is neglected in sociological, anthropological and political science perspectives.

We will generally review the readings and discuss them in the second half of each class but the format is freeflowing. we will take a 15 minute break about 5:15-130 each day.

Schedule:

Jan. 13 - Course Introduction and the Soviet Legacy

Readings: none

Jan. 20 – Nationalities and Soviet Policies

Readings:

Mark Beissinger *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. Chapter 1.

Walker Conner "A few cautionary notes on the history and future of ethnonational conflicts" Chapter in Andreas Wimmer et al *Facing Ethnic Conflicts*

Rogers Brubaker "Ethnicity without groups" Chapter in Andreas Wimmer et al *Facing Ethnic Conflicts*

Video: Discover channel 3 short 15 mins videos on the collapse of the Soviet Union

www.youtube.com/watch?v=0g6arFbKZ60

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FS9WYyKN3Y

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkskpsH16A

Jan. 27 – Nationalizing Identities and post Soviet conflicts

Readings:

Stuart Kaufman, Chapter 1 "Stories About Ethnic War" & Chapter 2 "The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War" in *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*

Michael Hechter "Containing ethnonational violence" Chapter in Andreas Wimmer et al *Facing Ethnic Conflicts*

Mark Beissinger "The tide of nationalism and the mobilizational cycle" Chapter 2 in *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*.

Video: Two 30 mins videos on the Nagorny-Karabakh war and after, first from the Karabakhi side and then from the Azeri side. Watch the 10 mins video first with commentary by Tom de Waal on the war and its aftermath

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coCJEozENVI> (Tom de Waal)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8FRyn25rTA> (Armenian perspective)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2J1AaU8r9PY> (Azerbaijan perspective)

Feb. 3 – Conflicts in Central Asia

Readings:

Henry Hale *Patronal Politics* 2014 chapters 8, 9.

Kathleen Kuthnast and Nora Dudwick Who rules rules: Everyday water and border conflicts in Central Asia. World Bank report, 2008. Chapters 1,2,3

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2QsUP-Ff1g>
Ethnic tensions in Kyrgyzstan

Feb. 10 – Conflicts in the North Caucasus – the Chechen rebellion

Readings:

Tom de Waal *The Caucasus: An Introduction* chaps 1,2,3

John Russell "The politics of terrorism: Russia's conflict with Islamic extremism"

Eurasian Geography and Economics 2009

Video:

Feb. 17 – Conflicts in the North Caucasus – the Mobilization of Islam

Readings:

Galina Yemelianova "Islam, nationalism and state in the Muslim Caucasus."

Caucasus Survey 2014.

Charles King "Prisoners of the Caucasus" *Foreign Affairs* 2010

Gearoid O Tuathail "Placing blame: Making sense of Beslan" *Political Geography* 2009

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dk7pRFEq5c> Tom de Waal on the Caucasus (52 mins)

Feb. 24 – Conflicts in the South Caucasus – Georgia

Readings:

Tom de Waal, *The Caucasus* – chap 4, 5

John O'Loughlin, Vladimir Kolossov and Gerard Toal "Inside the Eurasian de facto states" *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 201

Stuart Kaufman, Chapter 4, "Georgia and the Fear of Minorities," in *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*

Laurence Broers "Recognizing politics in unrecognized states: 20 years of inquiry into the de facto states of the South Caucasus" *Caucasus Survey* 2014

Video: [Absence of Will https://vimeo.com/8826939](https://vimeo.com/8826939)

Mar. 3 - Conflicts in the South Caucasus - Nagorny Karabakh

Readings:

Tom De Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction*, Ch 6,7, 8

Stuart Kaufman, Chapter 3, "Karabagh and the Fear of Minorities," in *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*

Gerard Toal and John O'Loughlin, "Land for Peace in Nagorny Karabakh? Political Geographies and Public Attitudes inside a Contested De Facto State." *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 2013

Video: NGO Conciliation Resources film "Memories without Borders" (54 mins)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDTCgvaWZh4>

Mar. 10 - Ukraine I – Composition, Politics and Geopolitics

Readings:

Andrew Wilson *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* 3rd edition Chapters 12-13

Video: Frontline-PBS video -

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/battle-for-ukraine/>

Mar. 17 – Ukraine II – EuroMaidan, Crimea and War in the Donbas

Readings:

Andrew Wilson *Ukraine Crisis: What it Means for the West* Chapter 3-5. 2014 (note that Chapter 3 is optional but helpful for those writing a paper on Ukrainian crises)

Roman Cybriwsky "Kyiv's Maidan: From Duma square to sacred space" *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 2014

Courtney Weaver "Ukraine's rebel republics" *Financial Times* December 2014

Optional: Joshua Yaffa. "The Search for Petr Khokhlov" *New York Times, Magazine*, Jan 7, 2015

Video: It's almost impossible to find a video that fairly represents both sides. Here are two contrasting videos on the war in the Donbas, each about 22 mins

pro-separatist from Russia Today

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urAEszOyJKk>

pro Kiev - this from Professor Taras Kuzio, the best known pro-Ukrainian scholar in the West - a bigger geopolitical vision and scenarios

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rs62OV7LYTo>

SPRING BREAK

Mar. 31 - Ukraine III - What now?

Readings:

Andrew Wilson *Ukraine Crisis; What it means for the West*, 2014 Chaps 6-8

International Conflict Group *Eastern Ukraine: a Dangerous Winter*

Economist "Ukraine's economy: The day of reckoning" Feb. 28, 2015

Michael Weiss "Ghosts of the Maidan: First revolution, then war, now what" *Foreign Policy* September 2014

Apr. 7 –Transnistria and Crimea

Readings:

Alexander Smoltczyk "Soviet yearnings: Hopes rise in Transnistria of a Russian annexation" and "A visit to the front lines" *Spiegel Online* April 24, 2014 (online version has photos)

Lincoln Mitchell and Alexander Cooley "Learning from Crimea" *Foreign Policy* 2013.

Dmitri Treinin" Russia's breakout from the post-Cold War system" Carnegie Foundation for International Peace, December 2014.

Video:

Apr. 14 - *Student Presentations*

Readings and Questions to be distributed by the scheduled presenters

Apr. 21 – **NO CLASS** - Association of American Geographers meeting in Chicago

Apr. 28 - *Student Presentations*

Readings and Questions to be distributed by the scheduled presenters

Assignments and Grading:

Grades: Weekly Assignments (10) – short responses and questions to D2L – 40%

In class participation – 20%

Term paper - 10% in class presentation and 30% written paper.

Assignments: by midday Tuesday (the day of class), upload your short responses to the readings and post 3-4 questions that you believe merit discussion in class. The response should be about 300-400 words and should not summarize the readings but should critique them, extend them or connect to some (other) empirical events. By class time, also access and view the weekly video –most are 45minutes-1 hour in length. These are designed to give you a flavor of the places that we are studying. Most have a strong perspective and you may wish to comment on the videos in your written responses.

In class participation: Obviously class attendance is expected and you should let the instructor know if you cannot attend class for an excused absence. The usual expectations for excused absences apply. Discussion should be free-ranging and open. Again the usual expectations of proper decorum, speech (please no slang), and respect apply. The instructor will call on all students to respond and in some

case, informal debates will be organized with the class divided into 2 to 3 groups for this purpose.

Paper: The paper should be 4000-5000 words in length, including bibliography (about 15 pages). The topic should be agreed with the instructor by March 10 and short meetings with each student in office hours will be designed to help topic selection and focus, suggest readings and alternative perspectives. A sign-up schedule will be distributed in early March for these meetings.

Each student will present preliminary research results in class during the last 2 weeks of the semester. At least a week before the respective class presentation—that is, the Tuesday before by noon – the presenter will send the instructor a key reading that he will upload to D2L for the class to read as background to the presentation. Also, by noon Monday – the day before class -, the student presenter will upload a short outline of the presentation to D2L for students to peruse and to prepare for in-class questions. The instructor can help with reading selections.

The written paper should have these elements that will constitute the basis for the paper grade: Approximate percentages for each element are indicated – please ask for help with sources and/or check with the instructor if unsure.

- ✓ Quality of Argumentation: Ability to make an informed and persuasive argument using the specific paper readings and other course materials. Documentation of points made by explicit references to passages in the texts. (40%)
- ✓ Organization: clear set of points, clear introduction and conclusion. (30%)
- ✓ Quality of the writing: clarity, grammar, spelling, referencing (open parenthesis, author, date, page number, close parenthesis and then period), etc. (10%)
- ✓ Bibliography – mix of academic research and more accessible (newspaper articles, NGO reports, etc) accounts. About one-quarter –one-third should be popular sources and the total bibliography should be at least 15 sources (20%)

Honor Code and Plagiarism

The College of Arts and Sciences passed an Honor Code a decade ago. All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (grade of F) and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion) honorcode.colorado.edu. We will use turnitin.com for final papers.

Disability Accommodations:

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322, and www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices. This office will give you a letter for the instructor that lists the accommodations.

Religious Accommodation:

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. If you believe that you might have such a conflict, please me. instructor.

Classroom Behavior:

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline, including exclusion from the class. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy is especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with the politically-sensitive subject matter of this class. Diversity of opinion is welcomed. ***PLEASE TURN OFF ALL CELL PHONES AND LAPTOPS DURING CLASS.***