

Lara Olson  
DPhil Candidate, International Relations, University of Oxford, U.K.  
Research Fellow, CMSS, University of Calgary, Canada  
Consultant, Peacebuilding & Conflict Sensitive Development  
Email: [lolson@ucalgary.ca](mailto:lolson@ucalgary.ca), [lara.olson@politics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:lara.olson@politics.ox.ac.uk)

## SUMMARY

I have combined leading roles in practitioner-focused research, training, and evaluation of international peacebuilding efforts with academic research and teaching at the University of Calgary. My goals are to merge field-based research focused on local experiences of international aid with innovative methodologies in the social sciences. My work aims to advance peacebuilding scholarship as well as inform practical frameworks to improve international-national partnerships in peacebuilding and the overall effectiveness of international interventions to support peace.

## EDUCATION

**DPhil, International Relations, Department of Politics and International Relations** (*ongoing*)  
*University of Oxford, U.K., October 1, 2014-present.*

My research explores the dynamics of engagement between transnational actors and local civil society in areas of conflict entitled - *Linking Good and Bad Civil Society; How Local Networks Promote Peace or Renewed Violence in Civil Wars*. It examines how international aid for civil society promotion impacts the legitimacy of the resulting local civil society and its influence on restraining and controlling violence generated from within its own community.

**M.Sc. International Relations (With Distinction)**

*London School of Economics, UK. September 1, 1990–August 31, 1991.*

I specialized in international political economy, and Eastern European/Soviet studies. My thesis, “Midwives to the Market” focused on the role of joint ventures in shifting East-West political and economic relations.

**Advanced Russian Language Diploma**

*Lenin Pedagogical Institute, Moscow & University of Alberta, Canada. September 1, 1989–June 30, 1990.*

I attained fluency in Russian in this year-long Russian-Canadian diploma program.

**B.A. Political Science (First Class Honours)**

*University of British Columbia, Canada. September 1, 1985-April 30, 1989.*

I completed a combined political science honours degree with a special concentration in international relations.

## RESEARCH WORK EXPERIENCE & ACHIEVEMENTS

**Co-Director, the Building Durable Peace Project**, May 1, 2009 – August 2014.

This collaborative research project (co-directed with Hrach Gregorian) brought together conflict specialists with systems experts to analyze country-wide, civil-military peace operations as complex adaptive systems. Drawing on case studies in Kosovo, Liberia and Afghanistan, the analysis revealed how unexpected interactions between key processes underway within each of 4 main sectors of the international interventions ended up fueling negative outcomes, as well as positive results. I authored the Liberia and Kosovo cases, and co-directed the overall research. The project engaged practitioners and policy makers in two expert workshops in Calgary and Washington, D.C. and we presented the findings in Washington, D.C. at the Alliance for Peacebuilding. Funders were the US Institute of Peace, NATO’s Public Diplomacy division, the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Institute of World Affairs.

**Research Director, Community Perceptions & Conflict Prevention Needs in the Georgian-South Ossetian Boundary Area & among IDPs in Georgia**, CARE UK & CARE Georgia, Jan.–August 2009.

I led a field-based research process examining the dynamics of the August 2008 war in South Ossetia and Georgia. I designed the research instruments, as well as provided operational guidance for Georgian and Ossetian research teams working across lines of conflict to examine the causes and effects of the war. I co-facilitated a three-day dialogue and analysis workshop bringing together both research teams in a neutral location (Armenia) to review findings and devise joint conclusions and recommendations for possible confidence building and humanitarian initiatives. The final report was disseminated to donors and partners in the Caucasus and shaped CARE's aid programming in the region.

**Co-Director, Coordinated Approaches to Security, Development and Peacemaking, Jan.-Dec. 2007.**

Together with Hrach Gregorian, I organized and facilitated this policy & practice-focused conference and publication taking stock of interagency coordination in two major peace operations, Afghanistan and Liberia. The workshop was funded by CIDA, NATO, and several US foundations and brought together government and civil society actors from Afghanistan, Liberia, Canada and the US with UN, EU and NATO policy makers and experts. The findings were disseminated in a report (“Side by Side or Together”), a policy brief (“Beyond Information Sharing & False Coherence”), and a special journal issue.

**Coordinator & Research Director, Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, July 1999 - February 2003.**

Together with Mary B. Anderson, I directed the initial 3-year research phase of this participatory research project within the global conflict resolution and peacemaking NGO community. The project's innovative model examined the effectiveness of a very broad range of “peace practice” worldwide. The effort involved over 200 NGOs from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America, as well as representatives of UN agencies and regional organizations. I recruited participating agencies and directed the research and writing of 26 case studies of such peace efforts, writing several cases myself. I also managed 25 feedback workshops with partners around the world and personally co-facilitated many of these. I coauthored the final publication and the resulting RPP frameworks that are widely used today for assessing and improving peacebuilding strategies and impacts.

**OTHER RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE**

**Evaluation Consultant, Maintaining and Building Relationships in Societies Affected by the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict, Conciliation Resources, London, U.K., March 2017 and ongoing.**

I am conducting a three-year developmental evaluation process in support of multilevel confidence building initiatives by leading British conflict resolution agency, Conciliation Resources (CR). My role is to provide ongoing monitoring and strategic advice to the leadership team, and conduct a baseline study, a mid-term assessment and a final summative evaluation of the program's impacts.

**Evaluation Consultant, Georgian-South Ossetian & Georgian-Abkhaz People-to-People Reconciliation Program, George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, July 2014 – Aug. 2016, Georgia, UK, & U.S.**

I designed and implemented a developmental evaluation process in support of multilevel confidence building initiatives by a consortium of four leading US and British conflict resolution agencies. The process included conducting a baseline analysis, field visits, providing detailed monitoring reports suggesting course corrections during the life of the project, providing regular consultation and strategic advice to the senior management team, and conducting a final summative evaluation. I was involved with the project team in presenting the findings to US donors and think tanks.

**Co-Director, Peacebuilding, Development and Security Program (PDSP) and Research Fellow, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies (CMSS), University of Calgary, Canada, 2007 – 2013.**

I co-created the PDSP program (with Dr. Hrach Gregorian), whose mission is practitioner-oriented research, graduate teaching and professional trainings to advance effective peacebuilding. The program has hosted numerous workshops and a major international conference and developed the Building Durable Peace research project (described above). It has hosted numerous speakers and panels on peacebuilding for the university and broader Calgary communities and developed a course, The Challenge of International Peacebuilding. As a Fellow at CMSS, I presented my own research on and off campus, informally mentored graduate students working on peacebuilding themes, was a guest speaker in

other graduate classes and created and taught a range of courses on peacebuilding and international assistance in conflict areas. (See the course listing for more information).

**Sessional Instructor, Various Departments, University of Calgary, Sept. 2007–April 2014, Calgary, Alberta.**

I co-created and co-taught graduate-level courses on peacebuilding across different departments with Hrach Gregorian. I also created and taught undergraduate courses in the Department of International Relations and in the Faculty of Social Work, and I co-taught with several other faculty an elective course on Rule of Law at the University of Calgary Law School. For information on specific courses please see the course list.

**Consultant & Conflict Specialist, the Human Security and Cities Initiative, Department of Foreign Affairs & International Trade (DFAIT), Government of Canada, March – April 2008.**

I provided expertise on case study methods, conflict analysis and impact assessment of aid in conflict contexts in an expert workshop held at the Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia, as well as provided editorial review of the project's analytical framework, case studies and report.

**Consultant - Research Design Leader, Peace Operations Monitor Project, Peace Operations Working Group, Peacebuild, Ottawa, 2006 - 2008.**

As an active member of the Ottawa-based working group within Peacebuild, the Canadian peacebuilding network, I developed the pilot phases of this online resource on UN and other current peace operations, directing a group of research assistants at the University of Calgary.

**Consultant - Conflict Sensitivity, CARE International, Georgia, May–June 2005.**

I developed and facilitated an in-depth field-based training process for local CARE staff. The training covered interactive conflict analysis and conflict sensitive development strategies for areas of southern Georgia with large ethnic minorities.

**Consultant - Media and Conflict, the Georgia-South Ossetia Dialogue Project, Conflict Management Group (CMG), Cambridge, MA, USA, 1999.**

I produced an in-depth report guiding CMG's peacebuilding programming in Georgia and South Ossetia, documenting and analyzing the role played by the Georgian, Ossetian and Russian media in the conflict from 1989 to 1999.

**Coordinator, The Georgia-South Ossetia Dialogue Project, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) & Conflict Management Group (CMG), October 1996 – Aug. 1998, Georgia and the Russian Federation.**

I developed and led interlinked relief, development and peacebuilding efforts in areas affected by the Georgian-Ossetian conflict - as head of NRC field offices in South Ossetia and in the adjoining North Ossetian autonomous republic of the Russian Federation. I managed NRC's humanitarian and refugee assistance programs and the agency's central role in the UNHCR-led refugee repatriation process. Simultaneously, I was Caucasus-based coordinator for NRC's NGO partner, the Conflict Management Group, which had initiated a political-level dialogue process funded and supported by the Norwegian government. In this role, I liaised regularly with political leaders and heads of international agencies to support CMG in designing the approach and in maintaining strong relationships with all parties in the region. In addition, I worked with local governments, civic associations and NGOs to devise, fund and implement practical peacebuilding projects to address the legacy of the 1990-92 Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

**Political and Features Writer, The News Review, Santiago, Chile, 1995.**

I wrote feature articles covering the major social and political issues in Chile and the social and economic challenges posed by the legacy of the Pinochet years for this English language weekly paper.

**Project Manager/Coeditor, International Organizations in Ethnic Conflict Project, the Consensus Building Institute, Jan. 1994 - June 1995, Cambridge, MA, United States.**

I managed this multidisciplinary research project on the role of international organizations in preventing ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This Carnegie Corporation-funded project was a joint US-Russian effort, co-directed by Dr. Abram Chayes and Dr. Antonia Handler Chayes (faculty at the Harvard Law School and directors of the Consensus Building Institute) and Alexei Arbatov of the Institute of World Economy and International

Relations (IMEMO) in Moscow. As a Russian area specialist, my role focused on directing a team of six participating Russian scholars in writing case studies of the ethnic conflicts that were emerging in the former Soviet Union. I co-edited the resulting volume and co-authored a chapter in the book on U.S. policy towards the post-Soviet space.

**Research Associate, Dr. William Ury, The Program on Negotiation, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA, USA, 1993 - 1994.**

I conducted wide-ranging interdisciplinary research on the causes of war and applicability of alternative dispute resolution approaches to contemporary interethnic conflicts, contributing to Dr. Ury's book, *The Third Side*, published in 2000. I also directed a group of graduate research assistants and coordinated a Harvard-MIT faculty seminar series on ethnic conflicts.

**Field Coordinator - US Humanitarian Aid Program in Kazakhstan, CARE USA, Kazakhstan, 1992.**

I directed local field monitors across Kazakhstan to support the distribution of U.S. humanitarian aid by national and local government officials, the Kazakh Red Crescent Society, and US Department of Defence personnel. My role also involved liaising with Kazakh local officials and civil society and establishing a CARE sub-office in Almaty.

**Writer and Politics Section Editor, The Moscow Times, Moscow, Russia, 1992.**

Based in Moscow in the months following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, I wrote and edited news stories and contributed in-depth-features on the societal transitions underway for this English language weekly.

## UNIVERSITY TEACHING

**“Rule of Law”, Senior Elective Course, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary, 2013 & 2014.**

In this interdisciplinary course co-taught by several instructors, I taught 4 modules/classes on international development and peacebuilding frameworks and practice and the challenges with international rule of law programming.

**“Contemporary Peacebuilding” - Advanced International Social Work Module, School of Social Work, University of Calgary, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014.**

I taught a concentrated two-day module examining the conceptual, practical and ethical challenges encountered by today's expansive international peacebuilding missions, exploring leading policy and programming frameworks for effectively supporting peace and development in conflict environments. Some years were co-taught with Hrach Gregorian while others I taught alone.

**“Humanitarianism, Peacebuilding and Statebuilding in War”, International Relations Senior Course, University of Calgary, 2012.**

I taught this senior undergraduate course analyzing normative and operational frameworks driving international responses to armed conflict, focusing on areas of convergence across humanitarian, peacebuilding and statebuilding approaches, tradeoffs, ethical dilemmas and the challenges of evaluating interventions for peace.

**“The Challenge of Contemporary Peacebuilding”, Strategic Studies Graduate Seminar, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary, 2009, 2010, 2011.**

I co-taught with Hrach Gregorian this week-long 40-hour course for graduate students and mid-career professionals examining the state of the field of international peacebuilding. The course examined the core policy frameworks for international peacebuilding efforts since the Cold War, and dynamics within key sectors and effective coordination across these, highlighting the challenges of local ownership, civil-military coordination and evaluation.

**“NGOs, Aid & Conflict”, International Relations Senior Course, University of Calgary, 2007.**

I taught this semester-long senior undergraduate seminar focusing on the role of NGOs in the international response to conflict and humanitarian disasters. The course surveyed the origins of contemporary NGOs, operational roles in areas of conflict, and the relationship of NGOs to the military and political actors involved in international peace operations.

## ACADEMIC AWARDS/HONOURS

**Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Government of Canada, Doctoral Fellowship, 2016-2019** (C\$20,000/year).

**James Lougheed Award of Distinction, 2016 & 2017** (C\$20,000/year). This award recognizes academic excellence in Alberta students undertaking graduate study at institutions outside of Alberta.

**Departmental Studentship Award 2015** (C\$36,000), Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, September 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016.

**Commonwealth Scholarship, 1990-91** (C\$30,000), U.K. The one-year award covered full funding for the M.Sc. at the London School of Economics.

**“Peace Train” Fellowship for Russian Language Study, 1990** (\$8000), the Peace Train Foundation, Ottawa, Canada. Funded one student per year for the Dalhousie University/University of Alberta joint Russian Studies program to promote better understanding of East-West cultures and systems.

**UBC Robert Lorne Stanfield Prize, 1989**, UBC Political Science Department.  
Awarded for a student in the graduating class with an outstanding record of achievement.

**UBC Mack Eastman United Nations Prize, 1989**, UBC Political Science Department.  
Awarded for the best essay on a problem related to international peace and security.

**UBC H.G. Munroe Scholarship in Political Science, 1988-89**, Faculty of Arts, UBC.  
Awarded on recommendation of the department to the top 3rd Year Student in Political Science.

**Perry Barr Hall Award, 1988-89**, University of British Columbia.  
This award is granted for placing in the top 3% of third year arts and on recommendation of the Dean of Arts.

**Mildred Brock Memorial Scholarship, 1987-88**  
Awarded for academic merit to women students who have completed at least one year at UBC.

**University of BC Scholarships** (varied amounts), 1986-87 & 1987-88.

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

International Studies Association (ISA), member since 2016

Canadian International Council (CIC), member since 2016

Canadian Evaluation Society (CES), member since 2017

## LANGUAGES

English (native speaker)

Russian (advanced speaking and reading level, intermediate written)

Spanish (advanced speaking and reading level, intermediate written)

French (basic reading and speaking level)

## PRESENTATIONS, WORKSHOPS, CONFERENCES

### **International Studies Association Annual Convention, March 27-30, 2019, Toronto, Canada**

Paper presentation: “*Weakening the Ties that Bind: How International Aid to Civil Society Impacts Legitimacy, Resistance and Violence.*”

Paper presentation: “*The Power of the Big Picture: How Systems Analysis Strengthens Peacebuilding Coordination,*” (with Hrach Gregorian, American University).

Co-organized panel: “*Complexity-Informed Theories, Approaches and Methods for Peacebuilding*”

Co-organized roundtable: “*20 Years since the Kosovo Intervention: Legacies in Kosovo, Legacies in IR*” (with Dana Landau, Swisspeace)

Co-hosted: Complexity in Peace and Conflict Studies Exploratory Meeting (with Peace Studies chair)

### **International Studies Association Annual Convention, April 4-7, 2018, San Francisco, USA**

Paper presentation: “*Peace Operations in Kosovo as a Complex Adaptive System,*” (w/Hrach Gregorian)

Paper presentation: “*Local Civil Society and Intra-Community Violence Restraint in Kosovo’s Protracted Conflict.*”

**Presentation**: “**Improving Peacebuilding Coordination and Impact through Soft Systems Mapping**”, Alliance for Peacebuilding, Washington, D.C., April 11 & 12, 2013. (*Co-host and lead presenter*)

**Presentation**: “**Challenges of International Peacebuilding**”, Project Ploughshares, Feb. 17, 2010. Calgary

**Workshop**: “**Georgia-South Ossetia People to People Dialogue Process**”, School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, 2008-2009. (*Expert resource person*)

**Workshop**: “**Assessing Integrated Approaches in Afghanistan - Expert Workshop**”, Institute of World Affairs, Washington, D.C., December 15, 2008. (*Co-host, presenter and co-facilitator*)

**Conference**: “**Coordinated Approaches to Security, Development and Peacemaking**”, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies (CMSS), University of Calgary, March 30-31, 2007. (*Co-host, presenter, facilitator*)

## ACADEMIC REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

Olson, Lara and Andrea Charron, “NGO Myths, Realities and Advocacy on the International Strategy in Afghanistan.” Chapter 5 in, The Afghanistan Challenge: Hard Realities and Strategic Choices. Edited by Hans-Georg Ehrhart and Charles Pentland. McGill Queens University Press: 2009 (*lead author*)

Olson, Lara and Hrach Gregorian, guest editors. Civil-Military Coordination: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan and Beyond. Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies, Vol. 3, 2008. Series Editor: Dr. John Ferris. University of Calgary: 2008. (*Lead editor, co-author of introduction and conclusion*)

Olson, Lara. “Fighting for Humanitarian Space: NGOs in Afghanistan.” In Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies: Canada in Kandahar; Vol. 1, 2007, edited by Dr. John Ferris and Dr. James Keeley, 45-64. University of Calgary: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 2007. (*Sole author*)

Chayes, Antonia Handler, Abram Chayes, Alexei Arbatov, and Lara Olson, eds. Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997. (*Lead editor of 6 chapters that consisted of case studies of ethnic conflicts by Russian academics*)

Chayes, Abram, Lara Olson, and George Raach. "The Development of US Policy towards the Former Soviet Union." In Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives, edited by Antonia Handler Chayes, Abram Chayes, Alexei Arbatov, and Lara Olson, 493-536. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997. (*Contributing author*)

## **POLICY & PRACTICE PUBLICATIONS**

Olson Lara and Anja de Beer. "NGO Views of NATO strategy in Afghanistan," NATO at 60: Still on the Right Course? Security and Peace (Sicherheit und Frieden). Special Issue. January 2009. (*Lead author*)

Olson, Lara and Hrach Gregorian. "Side by Side or Together? Working for Security, Development and Peace in Liberia and Afghanistan," Peacebuilding, Development and Security Program, University of Calgary, Workshop Report, October 2007. (*Lead author*)

Olson, Lara and Hrach Gregorian. "Beyond Information Sharing & False Coherence: Interagency Coordination in International Peace Missions", Peacebuilding, Development and Security Program, University of Calgary, Policy Brief, October 2007. (*Lead author*)

Anderson, Mary B. and Lara Olson. Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners. Cambridge, MA: Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, Collaborative for Development Action, Inc., 2003. (*co-author*)

## **VOLUNTEER AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES**

**Member, Peace Studies Consortium & Informal Liaison with the Center for Military & Strategic Studies**, University of Calgary, Jan. 2007 – Sept. 2014, Calgary, Alberta.

**Chair, School Grounds Renewal Committee, King George School Parent Council**, Sept. 2008 – June 2011, Calgary.

**Hastings Park Conservancy Member**, April 2003 – August 2004. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.