The purpose of this seminar is to give an introduction to the International Politics of South Asia a dynamic and volatile region, that contains two of the world’s nuclear states (India and Pakistan) and a rising great power (India), and where some of the world’s most protracted conflicts (Kashmir, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka to name but a few) are taking place. Besides a general presentation of International Relations theory, the first part of the course is dedicated to the domestic sources of foreign policy dealing with questions like; How have history and ideology affected foreign policy and the international outlook of South Asian countries after independence? Or why, for decades, have the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (or Panchasheela) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) defined the role South Asian countries played in international affairs?

The second part of the course will focus on inter-state relations. Firstly, due to the pivotal role India is playing in the region all intra-regional relationships discussed will be centred on India. These will include first of all India-Pakistan relations, then the other “smaller neighbours” are taken into account (India-Nepali, India-Bangladeshi and India-Sri Lankan relations) and finally the attempts for multilateral cooperation and governance via SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and other regional initiatives will be discussed. Thereby policies that states pursue in their foreign relations like security and terrorism, border demarcation, trade, water and energy supply and migration, are taken into account. In a next step, interventions by extra-regional great powers and their impact on the distribution of power within South Asia will take centre-stage in the seminar. Mainly China’s and the United States’ relationship with the subcontinent will be considered but also the European Union, Russian and Japanese policies are taken into consideration. By the end of the course, students will be familiar with different aspects of the international relations of South Asian countries.

Selected Bibliography:


Kanti P Bajpai and Harsh V Pant, India’s Foreign Policy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Mitra, Subrata K. ‘War and Peace in South Asia: a revisionist view of India-Pakistan relations’, Contemporary South Asia, 10 (3), 2001, 361-379

