

Séverine Autesserre, Professor and Chair of Political Science at Barnard College, Columbia University

Séverine Autesserre is an award winning peacebuilder, researcher, and author. She is now Professor and Chair of Political Science at Barnard College, Columbia University. She is additionally the author of three books: *The Trouble with the Congo*, *Peaceland*, and her newest release, *The Frontlines of Peace*. In this interview, Autesserre describes her educational background and trajectory to becoming a prevalent researcher in the field of international aid.

Autesserre was interested in politics, which brought her to Sciences Po for its reputation within international relations and world affairs. Autesserre loved her coursework at Sciences Po. “I felt privileged that I could study these topics that I was passionate about... I was in awe about everything.” One of her favorite classes about geopolitics was *Grandes Lignes de Partage du Monde Contemporain*, taught by Bernard Manin. “I absolutely loved it. I think it is what made me want to do the work I do now, and complete my Ph.D.” She also deepened her English skills while at Sciences Po, which she now uses in her professional career to partake in conferences and debates.

Autesserre graduated from Sciences Po in 1999, with a Masters of Political and Social Sciences, and a specialization in International Relations. After her time at Sciences Po, she was sent to a prestigious exchange with Columbia University, while on a Fulbright Scholarship. She received a Masters of International Affairs from Columbia University in 2000. During her studies, she completed multiple internships. While working with Voice of Soweto (a community radio station) in South Africa, she witnessed the destruction of an illegal township in the outskirts of Johannesburg. The objectivity of reporting on this destruction bothered Autesserre—so she decided in that moment to become directly involved in the world.

She shifted gears to humanitarian aid and peacebuilding, working around the globe. She spent time in Kosovo with [Doctors of the World](#), and then worked in the Democratic Republic of Congo with [Doctors without Borders](#) in 2001, at the height of the Second Congo War. As she describes in *The Frontlines of Peace*, it was in Congo that Autesserre first witnessed holes within the aid industry, which is a theme she continued to see in various aid organizations in Afghanistan and other conflict situations.

Autesserre continued to work part-time with aid organizations as she completed her Ph.D. dissertation about post-conflict settlement in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the problems with peace-building. She received her Ph.D. from NYU in Political Science in 2006, and decided her best avenue for supporting humanitarian aid was to continue producing research and publications. She is now teaching about the issues of top-down peacekeeping and international aid as a Professor and Department Chair of [Political Science at Barnard College, Columbia University](#).

Autesserre credits Sciences Po with the foundations she needed to understand the issues in the world she now addresses with her research. “I needed to understand economics, international relations, how to speak English properly, public speaking... At Sciences Po I learned that I could do it. I had professors who noticed me and believed in me. I had ideas and skills that mattered, and that gave me the confidence to keep going,” she says.

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