

PS390: German Foreign Policy and National Security Decision-Making

Seminar Leader: Aaron Allen
Email: a.allen@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description

This multidisciplinary course explores the structural evolution of the Federal Republic of Germany's role in the world since the end of World War II to the current *Zeitenwende*. Through an interactive approach, students will be able to contextualize contemporary German foreign policy challenges from their geographic, material, and ideational roots. Furthermore, course activities and assignments are tailored to assist students in becoming foreign policy practitioners fully capable of applying national security decision theories. The curriculum threads together historical cases, international relations scholarship, and security studies in order to provide a holistic understanding of all the constituent parts influencing Germany's external posture. Why is contemporary Germany often referred to as a reluctant leader? What are the unique attributes of German-style foreign policy that are currently undergoing reconsideration by the incumbent coalition government? A critical appraisal of topics such as the institutions shaping elite policy-making, the legacy of the Cold War and reunification, relations with the European Union, and the triangulation between the great powers of the United States, Russia and China offers students the necessary tools to answer these core questions. The complementary emphasis on professional development will allow participants to garner practical skills through simulations, seminar debates, and presentations.

Requirements

Readings:

1. Course reader available at the library.
2. Ash, Timothy Garton. 1994. *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. (978-0679755579)
3. Zelikow, Philip D. and Rice, Condoleezza. 1997. *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*. Harvard University Press. (978-0674353251)

Class Preparation:

For each class, please read the assigned texts thoroughly and come prepared to discuss:

- The main arguments put forth by the author(s);
- The role of individual actors, domestic considerations, and other similar factors needed to comprehend evolving trends in German foreign policy;
- And how each reading relates to the larger themes of elite decision-making, and contemporary challenges.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Please know that there will be a sign-in sheet for each session. Up to two absences will not affect one's grade or require documentation. Every additional absence without approved leave will result in the subtraction of one point from the overall final grade. If you need a Leave of Absence, please contact the instructor as soon as possible to make the appropriate arrangements.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credits for any course if a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. Students facing a long-term, serious medical or personal emergency (generally lasting more than two weeks) may request a Leave of Absence, to be approved by the Dean, Associate Dean, Head of Student Life, or Director of Academic Services. The 30% rule applies even in these cases. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook in Section 2.8.

Academic Integrity:

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Policy on Late Submission of Assignments:

Assignments that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). The instructor will not accept any papers that are more than 24 hours late.

Assignments, Grade Breakdowns and Deadlines:

Written:

German National Security Strategy and Presentation	40%
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Students are required to draft a National Security Strategy for the current German coalition government. This document should identify Germany's core security priorities, outline the primary threats it faces, and present a comprehensive plan for how Germany will employ its political, military, economic, and diplomatic instruments to safeguard national interests. The strategy must recommend concrete, actionable policies and be narrowly tailored, well-organized, and written in a clear and concise style. The National Security Strategy must include an executive summary, an assessment of Germany's interests and the current security environment, functional and regional strategies, and proposed structural reforms or updates to Germany's national security institutions and processes.

National Security Strategy Length and Formatting Requirements: *word length between 4000- 6000 words, single-spaced, 1-inch margins, and Chicago style endnotes (no work cited page required). All drafts of the course paper must be submitted in the same Google Document, with the instructor added as an editor.*

Assignment Deadlines:

- German Inaugural National Security Strategy Assessment: **Submit your response to the prompt via Google Classroom by February 27, 2026, at 23:59 CEST.** (5% of the total grade)
- National Security Strategy Outline: Submit a 4–6 page outline of your national security strategy via Google Classroom. **Due March 13, 2026 at 23:59 CEST.** (5% of total grade)
- First Draft: Submit the first draft of your national security strategy via Google Classroom. **Due April 10, 2026 at 11:59 CEST.** (10% of total grade)
- Final Draft: **Submit final draft of the national security strategy via Google Classroom on May 10, 2026 at 23:59 CEST.** (15% of total grade)
- Presentation: You will deliver a 10–15 minute presentation on your national security strategy during completion week on **May 11, 2026** at our regular class time. (5% of total grade)

Oral:

Class Participation	30%
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This seminar involves thoughtful and active participation in class discussions, reflections on current affairs, and working groups. The classroom is a protected space and you should feel free to voice your arguments and comments. Your class participation grade will be based on: (1) engagement in course discussions; (2) current affairs updates; (3) simulations; (4) and working groups.

Group Presentation	10%
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Each student will be assigned to a group and will be responsible for preparing a presentation on the bilateral relationship between Germany and the group's selected country. Presentations will take place on March 9, 2026. Each group will deliver a 30-minute presentation, followed by facilitating a class discussion of up to 15 minutes. Additional details and guidelines will be provided in class.

Exams:

Midterm Exam	20%
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Students will take an in-class midterm exam on **March 23, 2026**. More detailed information will be provided in class

Weekly Schedule

Week 1	Course Overview and Introduction to German Politics and National Security Institutions
January 26, 2026	Reading(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> German Basic Law Eberwein and Kaise, "Germany's New Foreign Policy: Decision-Making in an Interdependent World, Ch. 2 and 3"
Week 2	Westpolitik
February 2, 2026	Reading(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Haftendorn, "Coming of Age: German Foreign Policy Since 1945 (Ch. 1, 2 and 3)"
Week 3	Ostpolitik
February 9, 2026	Reading(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ash, "In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent (Pgs.1-311)"
Week 4	Germany's Nuclear Strategies
February 16, 2026	Reading(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heuser, "NATO, Britain, France and the FRG: Nuclear Strategies and Forces for Europe, 1949-2000, Ch. 1 and 5" Haftendorn, "Coming of Age: German Foreign Policy Since 1945 (Ch. 7)" Davis and Jasper, "Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons as a 'Trojan Horse': Explaining Germany's Ambivalent Attitude"
Week 5	Case Study: German Reunification
February 23, 2026	Reading(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zelikow and Rice, "Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft (All)"
Week 6	National Security Simulation
March 2, 2026	Reading(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hofmann, "Beyond Culture and Power: The Role of Party Ideologies in German Foreign Policy and Security Policy" Eberwein and Kaise, "Germany's New Foreign Policy: Decision-Making in an Interdependent World, Ch. 4 and 10"
Week 7	Group Presentations
March 9, 2026	More detailed information will be provided in class.
Week 8	German-European Union Relations
March 16, 2026	Reading(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beichelt and Bulmer "Germany: A German Europe or a Europeanized Germany?" Erb, "Uniting Europe: Germany and Integration, 1985-2002." Eberwein and Kaise, "Germany's New Foreign Policy: Decision-Making in an Interdependent World, Ch. 6"

Week 9	Midterm Exam
March 23, 2026	More detailed information will be provided in class.
Spring Break: March 30— April 6, 2026	
Week 10	Security Challenges Case Studies: The Balkans War, NATO Mission to Afghanistan and the Iraq War
April 13, 2026	Reading(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Baumann and Hellmann, “Germany and the Use of Military Force: ‘Total War,’ The Culture of Restraint and the Quest for Normality.” ▪ Erb, “Security and Conflict After the Cold War: From Iraq to Macedonia” ▪ Erb, “Terrorism and German Foreign Policy at the Turn of the Century”
Week 11	Navigating the Modern Great Power Relationship Triangle: The United States, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China
April 20, 2026	Reading(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Helwig, "Out of Order? The US Alliance in Germany's Foreign and Security Policy" ▪ Yoder, "From Amity to Enmity: German-Russian Relations in the Post Cold War Period" ▪ Ohle, Cook, and Han, “Unpacking Germany's Contemporary Relationship with China: The Political and Economic Factors Driving the Hedge.”
Week 12	***Course Site Visit to Auswärtiges Amt and Bundestag***
April 27, 2026	More detailed information will be provided in class.
Week 13	Zeitenwende
May 4, 2026	Site Visit: German Council on Foreign Relations Reading (s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scholz, “Zeitenwende Speech” ▪ "Assessing the Zeitenwende: Implications for Germany, the United States, and Transatlantic Security States, and Transatlantic Security (Chapter 1,4,5,7,8, and 9)" ▪ "Responsibility for Germany: The New Coalition Treaty of CDU/CSU and SPD (Responsible foreign policy, united Europe, secure Germany)"
Week 14	Final German National Security Strategy Presentations
May 11, 2026	More detailed information will be provided in class.