

Grand Strategy and the Multipolar World (K001222)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 6.0

Study time 180 h

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

crdts

offering

Teaching languages

English, Dutch

Keywords

history of contemporary society – international politics – political history – conflict
– world order – strategy

Position of the course

We are living in a multipolar world. There are several great powers, i.e. states (or unions of states) whose decisions have global impact, but none of them has sufficient power to dominate world politics by itself. Those great powers cooperate, but they are competing with each other at the same time: for influence, resources, partners and prestige. This interaction determines world politics. This is about war or peace.

In this context, understanding the Grand Strategies of the great powers is crucial: what are their objectives, which instruments are they deploying to pursue them, what is their resource base, who are their partners? Strategic thinking in general is essential in order to produce quality decision-making.

Relation to the educational competences: M.1.1, M.1.2, M.1.3, M.1.7, M.2.1, M.2.4, M.3.1, M.3.2, M.3.3, M.5.1, M.6.2

Contents

This course starts looks at the concept of Grand Strategy by way of 10 characteristics and, at the same time, analyses the Grand Strategies of the US, China, Russia, and the EU. Each of the 10 characteristics is illustrated, moreover, with historical examples, and the strategic history of the current great powers is outlined.

Academic guest speakers and senior diplomats and/or military officers will bring their specific expertise to the course. An annual excursion to the Royal Military Academy in Brussels, where lectures on military strategy will be offered, is an integral part of the course. Additional excursions can be arranged.

Aim of the course: to understand current world politics through the Grand Strategies of the great powers, in their historical context.

Initial competences

Solid historical background knowledge is advisable. To have successfully completed the educational components 'The History of World Politics (1815-today)' and 'Theories of International Relations' is recommended.

Final competences

1 To acquire academic knowledge of, and insight into, the evolution of

international relations in the 21st century.

- 2 To be able to explain the interaction between economic, political, military and ideological trends in contemporary international politics.
- 3 To be able to define the relation between internal and external strategy of states.
- 4 To be able to recognize (semi-)constant mechanisms in the articulation of (international) society.
- 5 To be able to articulate one's own position, orally and in writing, in a policy-oriented setting.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

Students are invited to actively participate during the course, offer their opinion and engage in discussion. They will also be presented with topics for discussion.

Study material

Type: Handbook

Name: This is not a new world order - Europe rediscovers geopolitics, from Ukraine to Taiwan

Indicative price: € 23

Optional: yes

Language : English

Author : Sven Biscop

ISBN : 978-9-46494-642-0

Number of Pages : 152

Oldest Usable Edition : 2024

Type: Handbook

Name: Grand Strategy in 10 Words - A Guide to Great Power Politics in the 21st Century

Indicative price: € 30

Optional: no

Language : English

Author : Sven Biscop

ISBN : 978-1-52921-751-3

Number of Pages : 262

Oldest Usable Edition : 2021

Online Available : No

Available in the Library : Yes

Available through Student Association : Yes

Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : intensive

References

Sven Biscop, *Grand Strategy in 10 Words - A Guide to Great Power Politics in the 21st Century* (Bristol University Press, 2021) (price: £21.99 for the paperback).
A book will be assigned for the seminar discussions (estimated price: €25 to 40).

Course content-related study coaching

Department-related support: NN.

Assessment moments

end-of-term assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Oral assessment, Assignment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Oral assessment, Assignment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible in modified form

Extra information on the examination methods

Oral exam with brief preparation time.

Students should write a paper and actively participate in a group discussion about it.

The paper (a "policy paper") will be assessed on substance as well as language and style.

Calculation of the examination mark

Periodic assessment (80 %); paper (20%)

Facilities for Working Students

The course can be studied on the basis of the book, but the classes by the guest speakers and the excursion to the RMA are essential. Participation in the seminar is compulsory.