



Boston University Study Abroad London

Crises and Readjustments in Post-War British Foreign Policy, 1945-1990 **CAS IR 392 HI 243 (Elective B)**

Course Description

How did Britain go from 'Big Three' summits at the end of the Second World War to being a peripheral and awkward member of the European Community by the time of German reunification in 1990? Former US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, offered an interim assessment in 1962 which still resonates, especially in the wake of the Brexit referendum of 2016: 'Great Britain has lost an Empire and has not yet found a role'. In this course, you will study seven defining moments – international crises, small wars and policy readjustments – in post-1945 British foreign policy, weaving together history and political science, primary source Cabinet documents, and field trips to Whitehall and the Imperial War Museum, to reflect upon one of the most significant questions in the international relations of the 20th century. In evaluating from a British policymaking perspective the interrelated processes of end of empire, the Cold War, and European integration, you will be assessed in four main ways: a class presentation based on a commentary of a Cabinet document of your own choice; a 2,000-word paper which develops cogent and critical arguments drawing upon the scholarship of history and political science, as well as your own research in cabinet documents; class participation throughout; and an end-of-course exam aimed at testing the acquisition of knowledge and understanding in an intellectually flexible and comprehensive way. As the West increasingly experiences 'relative decline' in the 21st century, this course will challenge you to reflect on the wider lessons of the politics and diplomacy of Britain's retreat from power between 1945 and 1990.

Hub-aligned Course Objectives

These Course Objectives fulfil the academic requirements for the following Hub capacities:

- *Philosophical, Aesthetic, and Historical Interpretation*: 'Historical Consciousness' [HC]
- *Scientific and Social Inquiry*: 'Social Inquiry 1' [SI1]
- *Intellectual Toolkit*: 'Research and Information Literacy' [RIL]

They are ordered below in terms of a hierarchy of learning, beginning with remembering and understanding key events, progressing on to an application of this learning in analytical assignments and followed by a further deepening via the research and evaluation of primary source materials.

1. You will demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of Britain's retreat from international power between 1945 and 1990, paying special attention to how Cold

War politics, decolonisation, and European integration interconnected. [HC LO1, HC LO3; SI1 LO1]

2. You will identify and apply concepts of power (as debated in political science), paying particular attention to 'intangible' elements e.g. national unity, prestige, the perceived quality of leadership and associated governing institutions, as well as the more 'tangible' elements of military might and economic strength. [SI1 LO1]
3. You will reflect on how policy-making structures, processes, and individuals respond under pressure in crisis situations. [SI1 LO1]
4. You will deploy a range of theoretical approaches for understanding foreign policy-making and crisis management, as well as have a historical understanding of the conditions of why some crises have led to wars. [SI1 LO1, HC LO1, HC LO3]
5. You will locate Britain's retreat from power in the context of broader changes in the international system. [SI1 LO1]
6. In the seminar section of each session, you will learn the historian's skill of 'source-criticism' via the 'commentary' approach of explicating a passage of text from primary source Cabinet papers. [HC LO2, RIL LO2]
7. You will learn how Cabinet papers were generated and formulate meaningful research questions based on a critical use of these primary source materials. [RIL LO2; HC LO2]
8. You will demonstrate an ability to search for, select, and critically deploy Cabinet papers, and be able to illuminate in class discussion, in a class presentation, and in your 2,000-word research paper why particular actions were taken. [RIL LO1; HC LO2]
9. You will demonstrate in class discussion an ability to interpret the Churchill War Rooms and the Imperial War Museum as public spaces which have helped shape British national identity, a key background influence on Britain's external policies. [HC LO2]

Additional Course Objectives

10. To encourage you to reflect more broadly on the nature of 'relative decline', and to appreciate possibilities as well as pitfalls in this process.
11. To encourage your civic mindedness based on a deeper understanding of how government works.