
A-level

History

2R The Cold War, c1945–1991
Report on the Examination

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Introduction

As with last year, it was pleasing to see a large number of students get to grips with both the compulsory question and their choice of essay questions. As a depth study, questions on this paper focus on specific events and developments within a short time period, and there were some excellent responses showing an in-depth level of knowledge and understanding. There was also little indication that students were pressed for time to complete their answers.

Of the essay questions, question 2 was the most popular. The comments which follow are indicative of some of the strengths and weaknesses commonly seen in students' answers in this session.

Question 1

There are two main elements to this question: an evaluation of provenance, tone and emphasis, and an evaluation of content and argument (both requiring application of own knowledge). Comparison is not a requirement at A-level. The best responses took the sources one at a time and treated them completely separately, perhaps with a short conclusion weighing up the value of that source in relation to the question, before moving on to the next source.

The three sources for question 1 focused on US motivations for intervening in the Caribbean and Central America in the years 1982–84. Although some students lacked specific knowledge of events in the Caribbean and in Nicaragua, most were able to effectively use their understanding of Reagan's attitude towards communism and the Reagan Doctrine as well as US fears of Cuba, and US actions in places such as Chile and Vietnam to help them evaluate the provenance and the content of the sources. The best answers used this knowledge to highlight limitations of Sources A and B in terms of revealing genuine US motives. There was also some excellent evaluation of the purpose of Reagan's speech given his need to justify US policy in election year. Source C was the least well done as many students assumed that newspaper articles all set out to exaggerate and sensationalise events in order to sell copies of papers; many ignored the reference to Aregood's prize for good editorial writing and assumed that this source lacked value because Aregood was not an 'insider' in the White House. It is perhaps a sign of the times that some students are unaware of the role of investigative journalism as well as the difference between news articles and editorials.

Many students dealt with the provenance of each source first before moving on to an evaluation of the content. This approach worked well, as long as the students had fully read and understood the content of the source before starting to write. This is necessary to fully appreciate the context of the source and to so avoid making generalised, stock comments on the provenance which have no relation to the source's specific origin and purpose.

Overall, most students were able to demonstrate 'some understanding' of provenance and content and some awareness of the historical content which is required for level 3. However, there were some who focused too much on content at the expense of provenance or vice versa, and there were some whose lack of contextual knowledge kept them down. At the top end there was some very good understanding of the provenance and content in context, which resulted in very high marks. However, it is important that contextual knowledge is clearly linked to the source and to the question. The answer must be driven by the sources.

Finally it was important for students to address the question. Some students failed to refer to value of the sources for examining US motives for intervening in the Caribbean and Central America in the years 1982–84 despite that clearly being the focus of the question.

Question 2

This question generated a wide range of essays, including some excellent, well-argued responses.

At the top end, students were able to write a balanced answer with focus on the actions of each power with regard to Germany after 1945 in order to highlight the reasons for its division. Weaker answers tended to either adopt a narrative approach to events in Germany, starting with Yalta, or indeed to focus mainly on the origins of the Cold War generally with only tenuous links to Germany. While events in Europe as a whole were certainly relevant, as the growing tension between the superpowers made a division almost inevitable by 1948, this tension did need to be linked to how it impacted on events in Germany.

Some students were confused between the state of Germany in 1958 when there was a clear economic divide between East and West which resulted in the mass exodus of people to the West, to that of 1948. However, there were many focused answers with clear judgement showing a strong understanding of both the US' and Stalin's aims and actions with regard to Germany. Such answers also included analysis of how these actions impacted on growing tensions within the country.

Question 3

This question focused on the impact of Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence in reducing superpower tensions, from 1956 to 1961.

At the weaker end, some students confused deStalinisation with peaceful coexistence and thus ended up spending too much time writing about events in the Soviet Union and Hungary. While Hungary can certainly be used as an example to show that Peaceful Co-existence did not mean Khrushchev relaxing his hold on his sphere of influence, the attempt to link Eisenhower's actions to Peaceful Coexistence was less convincing, and narratives of the Hungarian Uprising were irrelevant to the question.

The best answers focused on direct relations between the USA and the USSR through summits and the Geneva Conference (for reducing tensions) and the ongoing competition regarding the arms race, space race and Germany. Many students also highlighted Khrushchev's behaviour which often undermined his policy and some showed an excellent understanding of the contradictions in this policy which were bound to lead to increased tensions.

Question 4

The question focused on summit diplomacy between 1985 and 1988.

Most students had a sound understanding of Gorbachev's contributions to the success of summit diplomacy in terms of his personality and policies which made the West more willing to do business with him. The best answers also were able to show a detailed knowledge of Gorbachev's contributions to discussions at the various summits which resulted in the signing of the INF. For balance, students examined the role of Reagan and some also argued that Gorbachev was in fact forced into negotiation by the rapidly deteriorating economic and political events inside the USSR. As with all of the essays, high level answers used precise and detailed evidence to support arguments and reach an overall judgement based on this evidence.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.