
A-level History

7042/2R The Cold War, c1945–1991
Report on the Examination

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General

As the first year of this new specification it was pleasing to see a large number of students get to grips with both the compulsory question (Q01) 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.

Of the essay questions Q02 proved the most popular, but there was, nevertheless, a range of good and weaker answers to all questions, and there was little indication that students were pressed for time to complete their answers. The comments which follow are indicative of some of the strengths and weaknesses commonly seen in students' answers in this session.

Section A

01

In contrast to AS Level, there were two main elements to this question: an evaluation of provenance, tone and emphasis and an evaluation of content and argument (both requiring some 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.

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. So for Source A, the more able students were able to go beyond a general discussion of the value and limitations of radio broadcasts to use their knowledge of the date, nature of Kim Il Sung's regime and his motivations to fully evaluate the origin and purpose of this radio broadcast; the tone and language was key here also to understanding the purpose and the fact that this was a propaganda announcement. Source B was perhaps done the best of all the three sources, with students using their knowledge of Truman's motivations re containing Communism, the domestic pressures he faced, and also the situation with the UN which had allowed the UN forces to be mobilised, to fully evaluate Truman's announcement. With Source C, there were some very good observations on the value of memoirs and the context within which these were written; however, some students were less aware of the negotiations that had taken place between Stalin, Kim Il Sung and Khrushchev in the lead up to the invasion of the South and this limited their evaluation of Khrushchev's claims.

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 three. 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. It was surprising how many students failed to refer to value despite that clearly being the focus of the question.

02

This question generated a wide range of essays, including some excellent, well-argued responses. Most of the key events and crises of these years could be used either in support or against the idea that the nuclear arms race restrained aggression. Many students used Cuba as a case study which could be used on both sides of the argument, but there was also excellent discussion on how the nuclear arms race influenced the development of peaceful co-existence, the space race, the outcome of the Suez crisis, Eisenhower's reluctance to intervene in Hungary, Khrushchev's actions in Berlin, the development of proxy wars such as in Vietnam. Less able students tended to become too narrative about events in these years, but more able students had clearly planned their answer before writing and were able to analyse these events to provide balance, and a clear focus on the question leading to an overall judgement.

03

Vietnam is now a key part of the new cold war specification and students need to have an in-depth understanding of the key events and developments of this conflict.

The Tet Offensive is commonly considered to be a turning point in how America conducted the war and the best answers examined the impact of Tet on the domestic situation inside America and how this led to a change of focus – Vietnamisation and peace talks. For balance, there was some good discussion on Nixon's tactics and how these did not necessarily mark a break with what had gone before. 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.

Less able students tended to describe the events of Tet and/or US tactics in Vietnam with limited links to the concept of Tet as a 'turning point'. Some students tried to present alternative turning points such as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution as being more significant, which was not the question; others presented Nixon's policies as being more important than Tet without an understanding of the link between these and the Tet Offensive.

04

This question was on the causes of the second cold war. Students were expected to show some understanding (at least one paragraph) of the impact of weak leadership in the USSR in hindering negotiations with the US and in increasing tension e.g. in the handling of the shooting down of KAL 007. There was then a wide range of other factors that they could bring in for balance including Reagan's rhetoric, his arms build-up and SDI, the Reagan Doctrine, as well as longer term factors such as the war in Afghanistan and actions of Carter. Many students had an excellent understanding of this period and were able to analyse the impact of US actions 82 – 85 e.g. in Central America and Afghanistan in raising tensions. Other students used the arrival of Gorbachev and improved relations to help prove that leadership in the USSR did play a key role in determining the degree of tension.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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