

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H105

For first teaching in 2015

Y253/01 Summer 2024 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper Y253/01 series overview

Y253 is one of five non-British Period Study units for Paper 2 for the AS Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests a period of study of about 50 years through a traditional essay and an essay based on evaluating an interpretation.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first two questions, in Section A, are traditional essay questions and the candidate is required to answer one of them. The third question, in Section B, is the compulsory interpretation question.

To do well on Section A, candidates needed to address the issue in the question, using detailed supporting knowledge. In order to reach the higher levels candidates will need to assess the issues they discuss and reach a supported judgement at least in the conclusion.

To do well in Section B, candidates needed to focus on evaluating the strengths and limitations of the given interpretation.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> discussed at least two issues in depth in answering the essay question used supporting detail which was both accurate and relevant to the question set, not just the topic reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question avoided listing factors in essays and instead evaluated their comparative importance to the given question made a series of interim judgements about the issues discussed in relation to the question in answering the interpretation question demonstrated knowledge of the historical context and the wider historical debate and used this to analyse the interpretation and evaluated its strengths and weaknesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> were unable to use their knowledge to address the issue in the question showed a poor understanding of the major issues relevant to the essay were unable to support their answer with relevant or accurate material did not focus on the precise wording of the question made unsupported comments about issues which were no more than assertions considered only strengths or limitations on the interpretation question Considered the interpretation loosely or wrote a general essay question on the topic.

Section A overview

Two essays are set, each from a different key topic. Here the candidates were asked to assess the causes of wartime tension in the Grand Alliance during WW2 or to examine whether the coup of 1991 was the most important factor in ending the Cold War in the period 1984-89. The questions set require candidates to analyse causes and consequences of major historical issues.

Question 1*

1* Assess the causes of wartime tensions in the Grand Alliance in the period from 1941 to 1945. **[30]**

This was the more popular of the two essay questions and was, in the main, well-answered. Candidates who did well on this question were able to comparatively evaluate a range of factors examining whether these tensions were rooted in a clash of political ideology or whether the reasons were more immediate. For ideological clashes candidates successfully wrote about long-term political differences, clashes between the different leaders, and the allied reaction to Soviet expansionism. For tensions caused by more immediate concerns candidates included the delays to the opening of the second front, the huge Soviet losses incurred in fighting the Nazis, the development and use of nuclear weapons by the USA, Soviet actions in Poland and disagreements over the terms of the wartime conferences.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should ensure that they pay careful attention to the dates in the question. Contextual knowledge on post-war Germany was frequently seen, whereas the question asked for the causes of wartime tensions 1941-45.

Exemplar 1

1		There were many causes of wartime tensions in the Grand Alliance in the years 1941 to 1945. Some of these being the delay of the second front, war leaders at the Potsdam conference in 1945 and the USSR finding out about the atomic bomb of USA.
		The first reason for cause for wartime tensions was the delay of the second front at the Tehran Conference in 1943. Stalin wanted a second front to be opened up as quick as possible, but due to Britain being wounded from fighting in Africa and defeat in France, they could not provide this so fast. The USA were fighting against Japan and therefore had an insufficient enough army size to be able to open a second front. As a result, it was agreed to open it in May 1944 in France. This did however cause tension due to Stalin not being able to get what he wanted from his allies straight away. This means that Stalin was angry with the western powers, therefore causing a rise in tensions. Also, at Tehran the Polish borders were discussed and agreed to be moved westwards & towards the Oder-Neisse River, however Churchill was not pleased as Britain had gone to war for Polish independence in 1939, proving that tensions were showing that this was quite a significant cause for

tensions in the years 1941-1945. ~~Also~~ Finally, a last cause for tensions was Churchill wanting to open the second front through the Balkans, however, due to high pressure, had to agree to go through France. This caused tensions due to there being disagreements between the Grand Alliance, showing poor communication and poor co-ordination between the Big Three. Issues at Tehran ~~was~~ ^{were} a significant cause for tensions between the Grand Alliance, because they had made Stalin believe they'd wait until the Nazis and Soviets kill each other off completely, showing mistrust ~~and~~ and a cause for rising tensions.

A second reason for ~~causing~~ ^{causing} tensions was ~~the~~ the problems over Germany ~~is~~ at the Yalta Conference in 1945. Problems over Germany included zones of control, reparations. ~~and~~ The issue over control was that Stalin did not want France to have a say in occupied Germany, which proved further that he wanted Germany to be weak and demilitarised. This is an important cause of tensions because it illustrates the power that Stalin was gaining, and the west were a bit more concerned that he was gaining so much power. This further shows that Germany was an important cause for tensions in the Grand Alliance in the years 1941-1945 because it shows their inability to

agree with one another. Furthermore, I know that Churchill insisted on France having a zone as he was fearful that USA would withdraw after the war had finished, leaving Great Britain to face the USSR by themselves. This can show causes of tensions not only between the east & west, but internally between the west as it proves some form of mistrust between all of the leaders. Furthermore, I know that at Yalta, discussions about the United Nations were brought up, and these were a further cause for tensions because Stalin thought that the ~~the~~ UN would turn anti-communist. This shows how events at Yalta were important for ~~an increase in~~ tensions between the Grand Alliance in 1941-1945 because it shows further weakening of trust between the Grand Alliance, therefore causing tensions.

Finally, the most important factor for causing tensions, was the negative events at Potsdam. Firstly, there was the new leaders; president Harry S. Truman and prime minister Clement ~~Attlee~~ Attlee. Also, the ~~the~~ British foreign minister, Ernest Bevin, was not as nice on the East anymore. Both Truman ~~and~~ and Attlee had not trusted Stalin & been much more anti-communist. Also, due to Stalin not having ~~the~~ rapport with the new leaders, he did not trust them too. This was a significant cause of

tensions as it ~~had~~ proved that Stalin was extremely untrusting. However, it also signifies the new leaders' reluctance to keep good relations with the Soviets, causing a significant rise in tensions. In addition to this, Stalin had arrested 16 London Poles who went back in hopes of partaking in free elections, and he set up a Provisional Coalition Government which had the Lublin pro-Soviet Committee involved in it; Stalin believed they were the true representatives of Poland. This was a highly important factor for causing tensions due to the fact that it showed Stalin ~~not~~ going against his Yalta agreement on free elections, therefore being a highly significant cause of tensions. Finally, Stalin had found ~~about~~ out about the American atom bomb. This had caused tensions as it could have meant an end to the USSR, which scared Stalin, and caused more tensions as now he could not ~~trust~~ trust the Americans at all (specifically after Hiroshima & Nagasaki).

In conclusion, the ~~not~~ most important cause of tensions was the events at the Potsdam conference, however you must take into account that they no longer had a common enemy in 1945, and so their ideological differences were an underlying problem which would come out. The other two conferences between the years 1941-1945 also

		caused considerable problems, yet not as significant
		as issues at Potsdam which caused the most
		tensions.

The chosen exemplar demonstrates a good Level 4 response which offers a range of factors which are well-supported but without the comparative evaluation and judgement required for the top level.

Question 2*

- 2* 'The failure of the coup of 1991 was the most important factor in the ending of the Cold War in the period from 1984 to 1995.'

How far do you agree?

[30]

This was the less popular of the two essay questions and was answered by relatively few candidates. Those who did well on this question were able to assess how far the coup of 1991 was decisive, by examining how Gorbachev was replaced by the reformist Yeltsin, rather than a more hardline Kryuchov, and were able to show that its failure prevented the restoration of more authoritarian rule. The very best responses were able to expand on this by demonstrating that this then led to the disbanding of the Central Committee by Gorbachev, and the end of the Communist Party by Yeltsin. Alternatively, many candidates chose to examine the alternative view that in fact the Cold War was ended by a range of factors including Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union and how perestroika and glasnost undermined communist regimes in the Soviet bloc. This was linked to the impact of widespread disenchantment with communism in Soviet satellite states before the coup of 1991 (e.g. Solidarity). Economic instability caused by the impact of the high costs of war with Afghanistan as well as expenditure on the arms race caused by Reagan's diplomacy and the use of SDI were also noted in many responses.

Section B overview

In this section candidates were asked to consider a short interpretation that stated whether the prospects for a democratic, socialist Europe were brighter than those for a communist one in 1945.

To do well candidates needed to evaluate the strengths and limitations of the given interpretation while making references to other interpretations. Other interpretations that are considered as part of evaluation and analysis do not need to be attributed to specific named historians, but they must be recognisable historical interpretations, rather than the candidate's own viewpoint.

Question 3

3 Read the interpretation and answer the question that follows.

'The prospects for a socialist Europe, more democratic than communist, were very bright in 1945.'

M. McCauley, *The Origins of the Cold War: 1941–1949*, published in 1995.

Evaluate the strengths and limitations of this interpretation, making reference to other interpretations that you have studied.

[20]

This question elicited a wide range of responses with the best responses focusing on the specific wording of the interpretation. Many candidates ignored the use of the word socialist and tended to produce a partial analysis of the interpretation comparing democracy and communism in their answers, leading to a partial response. The best responses were able to examine the debate on whether there was a realistic opportunity of creating a socialist Europe in 1945, or by implication whether the prospects of a more authoritarian, communist Europe was more likely. The best responses considered both strengths and limitations of the interpretation, although as the chosen exemplar shows, there were some candidates who only examined strengths or limitations, limiting their response to Level 3 and below.

In examining strengths, candidates tended to focus on the strength of democratic movements and parties in Western Europe in 1945 and the language of democracy used by the USA in this period in support. They also examined the terms of the wartime conferences and the agreements on free and fair elections as evidence for supporting the interpretation.

Limitations were generally handled in a stronger fashion by candidates who were able to discuss the expansionist aims of the Soviet Union and the role of the Red Army in Europe by 1945. They were also able to demonstrate Stalin's interference in Eastern Europe, including his actions in Poland as evidence of the limitations of the interpretation. Allied aims for Germany and the divisions that emerged also featured strongly here.

The best responses set the answer in a longer-term framework by demonstrating that divisions that were already present in Europe pre-war returned and that there was no long-term prospect for socialist democracies to emerge.

Exemplar 2

3		There is some argument to be made in support of the interpretation that "The prospects for a Socialist Europe, more democratic than Communist, were very bright in 1945." For example the steer toward the left caused by the devastation of War and in a way a more positive perception of the USSR by many because of their part in winning the war.
		Primarily, the British Labour government can serve as evidence of a prospective Socialist Europe. Most notably through the establishing of the National Health Service (as a part of the umbrella welfare state) under Nye Bevan. Despite

Britain in fact being a democracy, it was evidently seen to be not only open to but entirely in favour of the implementation of socialist policies.

Similarly, the devastation of many European countries as a result of the war meant a strong sense of communalism was present. This was likely to push many countries further left politically, and more open to accepting left wing policies. This can be further reinforced by the changing perception of the USSR by many, spurred on predominantly by their hand in the defeat of Nazi Germany.

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