

Examiners' report

AS LEVEL

HISTORY A

**OCR Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE
in History A**

H105

For first teaching in 2015

Y253/01 Summer 2025 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 responses 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. 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:
- 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.	- 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.

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Section A overview

Two essays are set, each from a different key topic. Here the candidates were asked how important atomic weapons were to the development of the Cold War from 1946-55 or to examine whether economic problems in the USSR and Eastern Europe were the main reason for the end of the Cold War. The questions set require candidates to analyse causes and consequences of major historical issues.

Question 1*

- 1* How important were atomic weapons in the development of the Cold War during the period from 1946 to 1955? [30]

This was the more popular of the essay questions with most candidates able to discuss a range of reasons for the development of the Cold War, offsetting the importance of the development of atomic weapons against a range of other reasons including ideological differences, Soviet expansion, events in Germany, Marshall Aid and the influence of Truman's more hardline stance against the Soviet Union. Better responses were able to comparatively evaluate the significance of these factors rather than produce a list of reasons. Candidates tended to have a better understanding of the other features with the aspect of atomic weapons less assured.

Exemplar 1

		A final factor that is important to consider in the development of the Cold War is the establishment of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The North Atlantic Treaty was signed by countries such as the USA, Great Britain, Canada, France etc. It promised continuous and effective mutual aid to members and defensive support if an attack on one of its members were to occur. By 1955, West Germany and FRG were allowed entry into the organisation and created a united and armed bloc against Russia and its allies. Stalin soon retaliated when he created his own organisation following FRG's entry into NATO, he recognised his aim of a united and weakened Germany under central control and no longer an option thus the Warsaw Pact was signed between the USSR and its satellite states. While it too offered the same kind of support ^{to its members} as the members of NATO, it was more of a political agreement of sham by agreement to happen if something such as Germany's reunification were to occur. The signing of NATO/Warsaw Pact were very significant in the development of the Cold War as two ^{opposing} armed blocs were created and was made increasingly significant as both sides' destructive capacity increased. Highlighted the sides of the ^{ongoing} Cold War that now continue to oppose each other in the future.
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Exemplar 1 comes from a L4 response and demonstrates a well-argued paragraph which is analytical but without the comparative evaluation of factors that is necessary to reach L5.

Misconception



While the danger of nuclear weapons was well-known and restrained leaders from using them, the actual term 'Mutually assured destruction' wasn't coined until after the dates in the question.

Question 2*

2* 'Economic problems in the USSR and Eastern Europe were the main reason for the end of the Cold War.'

How far do you agree?

[30]

This question elicited a range of responses with many candidates able to discuss the role of economic issues in the end of the Cold War and compare these to impact of domestic issues in the Soviet Union, the impact of the invasion of Afghanistan, the effects of the arms race, Gorbachev's 'new thinking' and the role of Reagan. Candidates tended to focus on longer term reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union, with short term factors including the rise of separatist movements in the USSR, events in Warsaw Pact countries or the coup of 1991 only seen in the best responses.

Section B overview

In this section candidates were asked to consider a short interpretation that stated that the reasons for the deterioration in relations between the West and Russia in the period 1941-45 were based on misunderstandings and suspicions on both sides.

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.

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Evaluate the strengths and limitations of this interpretation of the origins of the Cold War during the period from 1941 to 1945, making reference to other interpretations 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 dates in the question and produced only a partial analysis of the interpretation with irrelevant material contained from outside the scope of the question. The best responses were able to examine the debate on whether deteriorating relations were caused by misunderstanding and suspicion or whether the breakdown was more deliberate and in some ways a natural result of the removal of a joint enemy in Hitler. Better responses focused on the dates in the question and considered whether suspicions and misunderstandings were caused by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the issue of the Second Front, the expansion of communism into Eastern Europe or the results of Soviet suspicions on the development and use of the atomic bomb. In contrast limitations examined the good relations between the 'Big three' and the positive working relationship that existed during the war including the expansion of lend-lease support to Russia as evidence that the deteriorating relationship was perhaps more deliberate in 1945. Stronger responses examined the precise wording of the interpretation and looked at the idea that both sides fully understood each other and therefore tensions were not based on suspicion or misunderstanding.

Misconception



When examining limitations, candidates should look at the precise wording of the interpretation and look to provide a counter argument, rather than just refer to alternative interpretations as a limitation of the interpretation.

Exemplar 2

		However, a limitation to the interpretation is shown during the ^{Yalta conference} conferences as it highlights some improvements in relations between the west and Russia and any disagreements were over territorial issues and not "misunderstandings and suspicions on both sides". The Yalta conference began in February 1945 and aimed to make agreements regarding Europe after the war. They agreed on many things such as the creation of the United Nations, German war criminals, elections to be held in Europe and Soviet help in the Japan. The disagreement included the positioning of the Polish border on the Oder-Neisse River. This demonstrates how the deterioration in relations was not due to "misunderstandings and suspicions" but instead it was due to the desire for more territory and power from the USSR. This shows a limitation in the interpretation as it proves how relations deteriorated due to other reasons.
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This is highlighted in the Exemplar 2, where the candidate looks at the limitations of the precise wording of the interpretation rather than examining alternative interpretations and was given a mark of 16 in L4 overall.

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