



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2R Paper 2 The Cold War c. 1945-1991
Report on the Examination

7042/2R
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General

In general, there was a high quality of responses to this exam with a clear, in-depth knowledge of the topics examined. Students have clearly developed their ability to assess sources for their individual value in relation to a question and are able to respond to a choice of essay questions with substantiated and sustained judgements. There were very few issues with time management and most students were able to answer all three questions in adequate time. Poor communication affected an extremely small number of responses. Out of the three essay questions, question 02 was the least popular and 03 was the most popular.

Question 01

For the compulsory question, students were required to assess three sources for their individual value in relation to the Cuban Missile Crisis. The three sources were at varying stages within the crisis – Source A being a warning before the crisis began, Source B being a response to US actions and Source C being a reflection after the crisis has concluded. The best responses to this question evaluated each source separately, considering content, argument and provenance with relevant and focused contextual own knowledge that was directly relevant to the differing stages of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In general, there was good analysis from most students regarding each source. There was a clear understanding that Source A was a warning in the initial stages of the crisis from the USA, and was linked to precise knowledge about Soviet placement of missiles on Cuba.

The better answers also linked their knowledge about US missiles in Turkey to challenge the value of the source – commenting that it was a justification from the US to take action against the Soviet Union. Furthermore, many students were able to identify appropriate knowledge to assess the value of Source B, evaluating the actions taken by the US before the Cuban Missile Crisis that could be construed as imperialistic and aggressive, such as the Bay of Pigs.

Many students were able to discuss the importance of this source being a confidential message sent to Castro at the height of the crisis. Lastly, the stronger responses for Source C were able to assess the impact of the crisis on relations between the US and USSR and mentioned key developments post-crisis such as the Test Ban Treaty and the Moscow-Washington hotline.

Weaker responses to the compulsory question tended to use general knowledge about the Cuban Missile Crisis that wasn't directly relevant to each individual source. This meant they were sometimes unable to assess the value of each source in relation to their contextual knowledge. In terms of provenance, there were some misunderstandings of the origin of Source B with some students commenting that Kennedy had sent this message warning of immediate aggression. There were also some issues with students making generalised comments about provenance which did not offer convincing evaluation of value – eg Source B was confidential so reveals true thoughts, or Source A was from the US so will be biased towards the US.

There were a number of responses that failed to assess the value of the sources in direct relation to the issue in the question – merely making comments on whether the information provided was accurate or not, which is possibly a skill taken from Paper 1. It is crucial that students make clear judgements on the value of the sources rather than simply describing source content/provenance and using some own knowledge to 'fact-check' the sources.

Question 02

Question 02 required students to assess whether the war in Korea weakened the USA's international position after 1953. This was the least popular of the essay questions by far, with only a minority of students completing it.

There were some strong responses to this question, where students were able to assess the position of the US before and after the Korean War. The better responses focused on the failures of US policy in Korea and how this affected their status post-1953 – discussing issues such as Sino-American relations, the Sino-Soviet alliance being strengthened and the move away from a European focus to a Southeast Asian focus in foreign policy. Crucially, responses that were able to provide a strong argument discussed how these factors damaged the USA's international position and reputation, rather than just discussing post-Korean War developments. Furthermore, the stronger responses were able to comment on the strength of US alliance systems after Korea such as SEATO and involvement in Taiwan.

The weaker responses however, focused on a narrative of US involvement in the Korean War. Some responses simply described the build-up to conflict in Korea and included much information from pre-1953 that was not relevant. Those who were focusing on the correct time-frame did not fully link their knowledge of post-1953 developments to the international standing of the USA. Some responses were unable to make a judgement regarding whether the USA's international position had been weakened; instead focusing on whether or not the US had failed in Korea.

Question 03

This question was by far the most popular essay and required students to comment on the reasons for the lack of a military victory for the USA by 1968. The quality of these responses was generally very good and demonstrated in-depth knowledge of tactics in Vietnam.

There were many strong responses to this question, focusing mainly on US tactics in Vietnam. There was well developed comment on how the lack of clear direction from Johnson led to an inability to cope with the Vietnamese terrain and a complete loss of the 'hearts and minds' of the civilian South Vietnamese people. It is clear that students have an in-depth knowledge of the different tactics of the USA in this period such as the use of napalm, Operation Rolling Thunder and chemical weapons – however the main strength was being able to link these tactics to the USA not being able to achieve a decisive victory. There was a wide range of alternative factors provided to answer the precise question; such as unstable leadership in South Vietnam, a lack of direction from the USA, superior knowledge and tactics of the Vietcong.

The weaker responses placed too much focus on describing US or Vietcong tactics and not linking it to the precise question – some responses mentioned the Tet Offensive or Gulf of Tonkin Resolution but did not fully explain how these events failed to help the USA achieve a decisive victory. Furthermore, some responses focused heavily on Diem and his leadership of South Vietnam without explaining how this impacted the USA's position in the conflict. A minority of responses focused on post-1968 developments such as Nixon's policy of Vietnamisation and the extension of the war into Laos and Cambodia, which was out of the stated time-frame.

Question 04

This question was relatively popular and required students to assess whether the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 signalled the deterioration of relations between the USA and USSR. Students have an excellent understanding of the concept of détente and the idea of a ‘Second Cold War.’

The stronger responses to this question were able to identify the specific responses to the invasion of Afghanistan such as the Carter Doctrine, and explain how this led to a deterioration of relations. There was an excellent range of other factors provided such as new personalities like Reagan and Thatcher, issues in areas such as Grenada and Nicaragua, issues over nuclear weapons. The best answers were able to suggest that the invasion of Afghanistan set off a chain of events that would lead to the full deterioration of relations in this period.

The weaker responses focused too much on the events of the invasion and did not fully link it to the deterioration of relations – students were more focused on producing a narrative of events. There were some examples of students discussing issues out of the given time frame such as the conflict in Angola which was not fully relevant. Furthermore, some responses gave an alternative judgement of whether there were good relations between the USA and USSR before 1979 which was not the specific question given.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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