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## Revision

# The Cold War

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**This resource explains how you might tackle exam questions on the Cold War.**

There are a number of possible topic areas on which questions can be set and it is important you have a good understanding of your examination board's specification. For instance, are you studying just the Cold War in Europe, or the Cold War in Asia, or both? When does the period you are studying start and end? These will all have a significant impact on the questions that you may have to answer.

With some specifications it is important to remember that there might be source questions or short answer questions as well.

## Possible topics

The major topic areas to consider are:

- The origins of the Cold War
- The conflict over Germany
- The development of the Cold War in Europe
- The spread of communism in Asia
- Korea and Vietnam
- Détente
- The new Cold War and the collapse of communism

## The origins of the Cold War

With all questions it is important to look at the dates, but particularly with this topic. Does the question require you to show knowledge and understanding of events during the Second World War? How much are you expected to know about wartime tensions? When does the question end? Is it with the Potsdam Conference in 1945, the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan of 1947 or the Berlin Blockade of 1948? Do look carefully and ensure you focus on the whole period the question and do not go beyond the end date.

You might also be asked questions about who was to blame for the outbreak of the Cold War. If this question is asked it is most likely to ask whether it was the USA or the USSR, but be careful if they ask about the Western powers — in what ways could either Britain or France as well as the USA be seen as responsible?

### Possible questions

- Assess the reasons for the breakdown of the wartime alliance by 1947.
- How important was ideology as a cause of the Cold War?
- To what extent was the USA responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War to 1947?
- How important were disagreements over Germany in bringing about the Cold War to 1949?

## The conflict over Germany

Questions on the importance of Germany in the development of the Cold War are likely to focus on the relative importance of events in Germany in the development of the Cold War, as seen in the last question above. With that type of question you would need to weigh up developments in Germany against other issues, such as developments in eastern Europe or the development of the atom bomb.

The other type of question would require you to simply focus on events in Germany, for example:

- 'The policies of the Soviet Union were the most important cause of the division of Germany.' How far do you agree?
- 'The most important reason Stalin opposed the creation of West Germany was because of security.' How far do you agree?

You could also be asked why Germany was so important in the development of the Cold War. In this question you will obviously need some context of Cold War developments, but the focus will still be on Germany.

## The development of the Cold War in Europe

As with the advice in the first section, do pay attention to dates. Is the question looking at the early period and the establishment of Communist states in eastern Europe? Is it focusing on particular flashpoints such as Hungary or Czechoslovakia, or is it looking at themes such as unrest?

Some questions might require an in-depth knowledge of particular events, for example:

- How similar were the causes of unrest in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968?

Other questions might require you to see these events in the context of the development of the Cold War:

- To what extent did events in Poland and Hungary in 1956 have an impact on the development of the Cold War in the period from 1956 to 1984?

In this question you would need to weigh up the impact of events in Poland and Hungary against other factors that had an impact on the development of the Cold War, such as developments in Germany, the arms race, the Czech crisis.

Questions will also often ask you to consider how serious a threat the unrest was to the Soviet Union or how effectively, as opposed to successfully, they dealt with it.

### Possible questions

- How serious a threat to the Soviet Union's control of Eastern Europe was unrest within its eastern bloc states?
- How serious a threat to the Soviet union's control of Eastern Europe were events in Czechoslovakia in 1968?

The first question would require you to consider a range of events, whereas the second question would require you to focus on just Czechoslovakia. Similar questions could be set on effectiveness, either asking you to consider how effective they were at dealing with unrest in the period from 1956 to 1984 or how effective they were in dealing with the Hungarian rising in 1956.

## The spread of communism in Asia

Questions on the spread of communism in Asia could, like questions on the Cold War in Europe, focus on specific developments in one country, such as Japan, China, Korea or Vietnam, or it could consider the broader issue of why it was such a concern to the USA and examine their policy of containment. Similarly, you need to pay attention to the dates in the question, and again this is where you need to be aware of how the topic is broken down in the specification you are studying.

Questions might be set on specific developments, such as:

- How successful was US policy in Japan in the period from 1945 to 1952?
- To what extent did US policy in Japan increase Cold War tensions in the period 1945 to 1952?

In this last question however you would need to weigh up US policy in Japan as a cause of increasing tensions against other factors.

On the other hand, you might be asked more general questions about US policy:

- How successful were US policies in containing communism in southeast Asia in the period 1945 to 1963?

With this question you would need to consider a range of events including Japan, China, Philippines, Korea and Indo-China.

## Korea and Vietnam

Questions may also be set on either of the two major conflicts in southeast Asia: Korea and Vietnam. Typical questions might examine the causes of the conflicts or ask who was to blame. They might look at why the conflicts escalated or the impact of the conflicts on Cold War tensions. With Vietnam, given the length of the conflict questions might also focus on the policies of the different administrations and this would allow questions that take in the war in Cambodia to be set.

In preparing for this part of the specification on Vietnam it would be worth thinking about:

- Why the USA became involved.
- Why their involvement escalated.
- How far did the policies of the various presidents differ.
- Why the USA was unable to win.

## Détente

This term is usually used to describe the period from 1963 with the Test Ban Treaty to 1975 with Helsinki. As such, questions may require you to bring in knowledge from other parts of your specification, such as the Czech crisis or Vietnam. Once again questions might focus on specific elements or themes within the period:

- How successful were attempts to control the development of nuclear weapons?
- How successful was Brandt's policy of Ostpolitik?

Questions might look at reasons why détente developed or came to an end, which would require you to look at more than the theme of nuclear weapons and include events such as Cuba, China, the attitudes of Western states, the Brezhnev Doctrine.

These might include questions such as:

- Assess the reasons for the breakdown of détente.
- How important was the Cuban missile crisis in the improvement in relations between the USA and the USSR in the period from 1963 to 1975?

## The new Cold War and the collapse of communism

The new Cold War is the term used by some historians to describe events from 1979 to 1985, starting with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and concluding with the appointment of Gorbachev as party leader in the USSR. In order to answer questions on this you will need knowledge of events in Poland and the Solidarity crisis, the occupation by Soviet troops of Afghanistan and the deployment of SS-20 and cruise missiles in Europe.

Questions could be set on the impact of this new Cold War on the nature of these developments:

- To what extent can the period from 1979-1985 be described as a 'New Cold War'?

Questions could be set on the impact of these developments on the Cold War:

- How serious were the tensions between the USA and the USSR in the period from 1979 to 1985?

The collapse of communism is also a large topic and you should be aware of the wide range of reasons that played roles and be able to weigh up their relative importance. This should include the economic and social problems in the USSR and eastern Europe, Gorbachev's reforms, the impact of the war in Afghanistan, the events of 1989 in eastern Europe, the 1991 coup and the reunification of Germany. Many questions will ask you to weigh up the various causes:

- Assess the reasons for the end of the Cold War.
- 'The most important reason for the end of the Cold War were the economic problems of the USSR and eastern Europe.' How far do you agree?

Some specifications go on beyond 1991 and the ending of the USSR and require you to know about the impact of the ending of the Cold War, for example the reunification of Germany and the break-up of Yugoslavia. It might be helpful to think of the political, social and economic impact of the ending of the Cold War and the break-up of the USSR

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