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Activity

**Superpower relations:
historiography**

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You can use this activity alongside Andrew Mitchell's article, 'The Cold War: the role of the leaders', on p. 12 of this issue of the magazine to improve your understanding of this topic.

Task 1

The article on p. 12 outlines a series of possible causes for the breakdown of the Grand Alliance (between Britain, the USA and the Soviet Union) and the outbreak of the Cold War. Print out (or copy) the following three tables and note down evidence, from the article and your own knowledge, to support and challenge each of the key interpretations.

Roosevelt's naïvety	
Support	Challenge

Truman's diplomacy	
Support	Challenge

Stalin's paranoia	
Support	Challenge

Task 2

Below are three sources. Each source presents an interpretation of the causes of the breakdown of the Grand Alliance and the outbreak of the Cold War. Summarise the interpretation of each source, and use your own knowledge, in combination with your work for Task 1, to write a paragraph explaining the extent to which you agree with each interpretation.

Source 1

[At Yalta] neither [Roosevelt nor Stalin] made their concerns fully explicit. There was no discussion or clear understanding as to how, in actual expectation, they would resolve their problems. Stalin [for example] said virtually nothing about his specific intentions in Eastern Europe. Neither challenged the other or probed sufficiently with a view to creating some basis for mutual anticipation in the short term or trust in the longer run. At this level, Yalta was an unsuccessful negotiation that left too many loose ends.

Fraser J. Harbutt (2010) *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads*

Source 2

Truman lacked confidence in dealing with the USSR and, worried that previous US policy had been too 'soft' on Stalin, resorted to a more hard-line approach. Truman's advisers, growing suspicious of Soviet intentions in Eastern Europe, urged him to adopt a firmer stance. 'Unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language, another war is in the making,' Truman observed in 1946. This change in approach to the USSR was an important factor in the development of the Cold War.

Steve Phillips (2001) *The Cold War: Conflict in Europe and Asia*

Source 3

Would there have been a Cold War without Stalin? Perhaps. Nobody in history is indispensable. But Stalin had certain characteristics that set him off from all others in authority at the time the Cold War began. He alone pursued personal security by depriving everyone else of it: no Western leader relied on terror to the extent that he did. He alone had transformed his country into an extension of himself: no Western leader could have succeeded at such a feat, and none attempted it. He alone saw war and revolution as acceptable means with which to pursue ultimate ends: no Western leader associated violence with progress to the extent that he did.

Did Stalin therefore seek a Cold War? The question is a little like asking: 'does a fish seek water?' Suspicion, distrust, and an abiding cynicism were not only his preferred but his necessary environment; he could not function apart from it.

John Lewis Gaddis (1997) *We Now Know: Rethinking the Cold War*

Task 3

Using your work from Tasks 1 and 2, plan an answer to the following question:

How far do you agree with the view that the development of the Cold War in the period 1945–1953 was primarily due to Stalin's paranoia?