

GCSE

History B

91451/4 International Relations: Conflict and Peace in the 20th Century
Report on the Examination

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General comments

Most students were prepared for the 'strengthened' specification with the slight changes to the length of some topics and the additional material to study. The new rubric which means that students have to answer questions from three consecutive topics caused few problems. However, there were some rubric infringements on account of this and there were also a few blank answers to Questions 01 and 13 which were 'describe' questions that included new areas of study. These gaps were more common on the Short Course than the Full Course.

The 'describe' questions usually gave students a good start but there is still the problem of students writing too much and wasting valuable time. All that is needed is three accurate, relevant points for full marks. Answers to the source questions were often very good at using knowledge, but when tackling provenance, there were a lot of rehearsed, generic answers which did not get beyond Level 2. A number of students repeated phrases about provenance and purpose which had obviously been taught but which were not linked to the specific source. There was an absence of comment on the idea of a source trying to influence public opinion in any way.

Answers to the ten mark questions continue to improve with students realising that explanation rather than description of each bullet point will bring satisfactory marks, with assessment of their contribution to the focus of the question and a judgement based on supporting knowledge obtaining the higher marks. Some answers contained lengthy preambles describing the bullet points before answering the question and then recapping the information in a conclusion that just repeated what had already been written. Both are a waste of time and sometimes lead to students not completing the paper.

Questions

Topics 3 and 2 had the most answers then 4 and 1 which were similar, followed by 5 and then 6. This was slightly different on the Short Course, with the most popular option being Topic 2, followed by Topic 1, Topic 4, Topic 3 and Topic 5 with no attempts at the questions in Topic 6. The comparative questions in each option performed very similarly.

Topic 1: The Origins of the First World War, c1890–1914**Question 01**

Full marks could be obtained for this question by simply showing awareness of the alliances made by France, Russia and Britain and the geographical position of these countries in relation to Germany. The Entente was well known, but the Franco-Russian Alliance, an addition to the specification, less well known. There was a surprising amount of irrelevance in answers with some writing about the causes of the alliances, their development after 1907 and giving details of the alliances made by Germany during this period – clearly a misreading of the question.

Question 02

This question was well-answered: students used the Schlieffen Plan and the Treaty of London to agree with the statement while others challenged it by reference to the growing hostility felt in Britain towards Germany on account of the naval rivalry and their activities in the Agadir Crisis. When commenting on the provenance, many went beyond the superficial 'trying to make the Germans look bad' and placed the cartoon in the context of August 1914 explaining how Britain wanted to point out the brutal aggression of Germany to explain to the public their reasons for entering the war and thus gain support for the war.

Question 03

Students found it difficult to unravel the bullet points in this question and there was considerable overlap in answers. Predictably, there were long descriptions of the assassination and its subsequent events with little attempt to analyse the contribution of the two bullet points. In contrast, many made good use of their knowledge of the Bosnian Crisis to explain the aims and actions of Serbia and the Black Hand in the Balkans but found it difficult to assess its contribution to the outbreak of war. Those who did reach assessment normally did by reference to Serbia's unwillingness to fight so soon after the Balkan Wars. On Austria-Hungary, most referred to the nature of the Dual Monarchy and the purpose of the ultimatum to explain and assess their aims in 1914.

Topic 2: Peacemaking, 1918–1919 and the League of Nations**Question 04**

Some students misunderstood this question. What was required in the answer was how the League was intended to keep peace and a brief answer mentioning moral, economic and military sanctions obtained full marks. Some answers named the member states of the League presuming that ‘peacekeeping powers’ meant the ‘Powers who kept the peace’, others wrote about the organisation of the League while several, prompted by the word ‘peacekeeping’, wrote about the aims of the peacemakers and the Treaty of Versailles. Answers such as these were credited if any part was related to keeping peace.

Question 05

Most students were able to make sensible inferences on Source B, explaining the meaning of ‘face saving outfit’ and the action of Japan, and were awarded at Level 2. There was much information in answers about the Manchurian Crisis, some of it irrelevant explanations of why and how Japan invaded, but many had difficulty focusing their answers on Britain’s attitude to the Crisis and tended to write general accounts of the weaknesses of the League. Very few understood the implied criticism of Britain’s role in the cartoon and tended to limit their comments on provenance to simple, erroneous ones such as ‘British so supporting the League’.

Question 06

The terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the aims of the peacemakers were well known, though explanation was better of the aims of Clemenceau than Wilson, with comments such as ‘he wanted to get back Alsace and Lorraine and they were returned at the Treaty’. On Wilson the aim most commonly achieved in the eyes of students was the League of Nations, but there were too many general comments such as ‘the terms of the Treaty were too harsh for Wilson’ with general rather than specific reference to the Treaty. The main problem was judging the relative level of satisfaction for the two leaders by linking their aims to the terms of the Treaty and making a judgement on whether they achieved their aims or not. It was disappointing if students wrote in detail about the aims and then didn’t write about whether they had succeeded in achieving them. When judging the level of satisfaction, many answers claimed that Clemenceau was completely successful, but the best answers were able to explain that Clemenceau was also disappointed because the Treaty left Germany as a united country with the capacity to recover whereas he had wanted more of a division. On Wilson, the best answers knew the Fourteen Points and were able to relate them to the Treaty, most commonly pointing out that he was satisfied with the setting up of the League, but dissatisfied with the lack of self-determination in the territorial settlement of the Treaty with examples.

Topic 3: Hitler's Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Second World War

Question 07

This was well-answered with many obtaining full marks. The only problem for some was understanding the expression 'foreign policy' as they wrote at length about Hitler's aims within Germany.

Question 08

Most reached Level 2 for recognising that this referred to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement and the crisis over the Sudetenland. Better answers showed awareness of what happened to Czechoslovakia after Munich or commented on other possible results such as Chamberlain's attitude to rearmament. Many were able to reach the top level by showing some understanding of the seriousness of the situation before Munich and how the source was reassuring the British public that peace had been achieved. Others saw the source as an attempt to promote Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement, sometimes mistakenly relating it to an election. A common error was to explain the reasons for appeasement instead of the results of the Munich Agreement.

Question 09

There was some good explanation of both these bullet points. The remilitarisation of the Rhineland was much better answered than the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The Rhineland tended to focus on the effect it had on Hitler's future policies, giving him confidence to carry out his aims as there was no opposition, though many answers failed factually to link these to the outbreak of war (the focus of the question) which was needed for assessment. The Nazi-Soviet Pact was less well covered, with some students clearly not being aware of it. Many were able to explain the Poland connection but there were fewer who were able to link this to the British guarantee and therefore to the outbreak of war in order to achieve assessment.

Topic 4: The Origins of the Cold War, 1945–1960**Question 10**

This was well-answered, although a common error was to say that MacArthur led the US army rather than UN troops. There were many lengthy answers, some of which went into detail of the causes of the war rather than MacArthur's part in it, others which described the war with little reference to MacArthur. The most common relevant points in answers centred on the landing at Inchon, the invasion of North Korea, MacArthur's suggestion of using the atom bomb and his dismissal by Truman.

Question 11

It was relatively straightforward to reach Level 2 in this question by making inferences on the cartoon, though few appeared to understand the irony of it. A significant number of students thought that the cartoon portrayed the initial occupation of Hungary giving reasons such as wanting to spread communism or start a buffer zone. Those who achieved Level 3 displayed good knowledge of Nagy's reforms and his desire to leave the Warsaw Pact, explaining why this prompted the Soviet invasion. Evaluation of provenance proved to be more difficult. The most common way to reach Level 3 was by explaining how the source was a British source depicting Khrushchev's aggression to the public during the Cold War, ridiculing his idea of peaceful coexistence.

Question 12

The main problem with answers to this question was that students were unable to relate the bullet points to the focus of the question, the start of the Cold War. There were some very good explanations of both commenting on the disagreements at Potsdam and the effect on Stalin of the secrecy behind the dropping of the atomic bomb. Students found it easier to link the atomic bomb to the start of the Cold War so assessment of the effect of this bullet point proved to be more common than that of Potsdam, with students pointing out how it started the arms race and the sense of competition between Soviet Russia and the USA which became a feature of the Cold War. Other good answers were able to show how the use of the atomic bomb not only alarmed Stalin, but also deprived the USSR of a role in the defeat of Japan which led to hostility between the two superpowers.

Topic 5: Crises of the Cold War and Détente, 1960–1980**Question 13**

This topic was an addition to the specification under the ‘strengthened’ agenda and it was clear that some students had not studied it in any depth. Many knew what Détente meant but could not support it with any detail of the events during this period. There was confusion with peaceful coexistence and with the improved relations of the 1960s after the Cuban Missile Crisis. In contrast, better answers were able to mention SALT, the Helsinki Agreement, ping pong diplomacy and the reciprocal visits of the leaders.

Question 14

The cartoon was understood by most and many were aware of the symbolism of the dove, though there was some confusion as to whether the U2 had hit the dove or whether the dove had been sent by Khrushchev and had brought the U2 down! The details of the U2 incident itself were well-known and most students knew that it led to the breakdown of the Paris Summit. Fewer were able to relate this information to the focus of the question, the end of peaceful coexistence, though some were able to suggest other reasons for the end of peaceful coexistence. Evaluation of provenance proved difficult, but it was particularly pleasing to note that a good number of students picked up the provenance ‘contradiction’ of the cartoon and pointed out it was a Western cartoon critical of the USA.

Question 15

There was the by now regular confusion between Stalin and Khrushchev, the Wall and the Blockade, but perhaps not as much as previously. Most students were able to explain the success of the Wall in stopping the brain drain; fewer were able to give the opposite view by reference to the negative propaganda, fuelled by the West, of the Wall. The Cuba bullet point was less well-done and often contained too much narrative frequently going back to the Bay of Pigs. Many referred to the withdrawal of missiles from Turkey to prove Khrushchev’s success, but fewer answers were able to show the limits of his success and often concluded that this was his greater success of the two. Those who did limit his success usually pointed out how it reflected well for Khrushchev but also led to his removal.

Topic 6: The Collapse of Communism and the Post Cold War World, 1980–2000**Question 16**

This question was very well-answered. There were some answers in general terms, but in contrast there were some very detailed answers displaying awareness of the various UN resolutions, Desert Storm, Desert Shield and Desert Sabre.

Question 17

There was a very mixed response to this question with some who appeared to know very little about Kosovo and others who had good knowledge of the actions of the UN and NATO, some of whom differentiated between the actions of the two. Some students were able to identify the purpose of the source justifying British involvement by commenting on their need to justify the fact that it contributed to the 'illegal' NATO action.

Question 18

This question produced many descriptive answers: students were able to describe Solidarity and link success in Poland to the collapse of Communism in other countries, but seemed to struggle to identify Walesa's particular contribution. Similarly, there was often good knowledge of Reagan's policies, students mentioning spending on arms and support in Afghanistan, but then there was no final link to the collapse of communism which was the focus of the question. All this meant that the answers finished at explanation level. Some wanted to write about other factors, especially Gorbachev's reforms, without linking these to either Walesa or Reagan.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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