



A-level HISTORY 7042/2R

Component 2R The Cold War, c1945–1991

Mark scheme

June 2025

Version: 1.0 Final



Mark schemes are prepared by the Lead Assessment Writer and considered, together with the relevant questions, by a panel of subject teachers. This mark scheme includes any amendments made at the standardisation events which all associates participate in and is the scheme which was used by them in this examination. The standardisation process ensures that the mark scheme covers the students' responses to questions and that every associate understands and applies it in the same correct way. As preparation for standardisation each associate analyses a number of students' scripts. Alternative answers not already covered by the mark scheme are discussed and legislated for. If, after the standardisation process, associates encounter unusual answers which have not been raised they are required to refer these to the Lead Examiner.

It must be stressed that a mark scheme is a working document, in many cases further developed and expanded on the basis of students' reactions to a particular paper. Assumptions about future mark schemes on the basis of one year's document should be avoided; whilst the guiding principles of assessment remain constant, details will change, depending on the content of a particular examination paper.

No student should be disadvantaged on the basis of their gender identity and/or how they refer to the gender identity of others in their exam responses.

A consistent use of 'they/them' as a singular and pronouns beyond 'she/her' or 'he/him' will be credited in exam responses in line with existing mark scheme criteria.

Further copies of this mark scheme are available from aqa.org.uk

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Supporting Marking Guidance

A separate Supporting Marking Guidance document has been created for use in this series and any future series.

It has been written by the senior examining team. It applies to all A-level History options. The purpose of the guidance is to clarify key aspects of the mark scheme and further ensure consistency of approach across all options. The guidance does not reflect a change in the standard applied, but clarification and amplification of the standard. We hope that the guidance document will aid you in your understanding of how the standard should be applied and deepen your understanding of how the key aspects of the mark scheme work. The Supporting Marking Guidance should always be used in conjunction with the mark scheme, and any relevant examiner standardising and teacher training material.

Examiners can find the Supporting Marking Guidance on the associate extranet.

Teachers can find the Supporting Marking Guidance alongside the current mark scheme on Centre Services on results day. It will also be published with any future assessment materials on the public website.

Level of response marking instructions

Level of response mark schemes are broken down into levels, each of which has a descriptor. The descriptor for the level shows the average performance for the level. There are marks in each level.

Before you apply the mark scheme to a student's answer read through the answer and annotate it (as instructed) to show the qualities that are being looked for. You can then apply the mark scheme.

Step 1 Determine a level

Start at the lowest level of the mark scheme and use it as a ladder to see whether the answer meets the descriptor for that level. The descriptor for the level indicates the different qualities that might be seen in the student's answer for that level. If it meets the lowest level then go to the next one and decide if it meets this level, and so on, until you have a match between the level descriptor and the answer. With practice and familiarity, you will find that for better answers you will be able to quickly skip through the lower levels of the mark scheme.

When assigning a level, you should look at the overall quality of the answer and not look to pick holes in small and specific parts of the answer where the student has not performed quite as well as the rest. If the answer covers different aspects of different levels of the mark scheme you should use a best fit approach for defining the level and then use the variability of the response to help decide the mark within the level, ie if the response is predominantly Level 3 with a small amount of Level 4 material it would be placed in Level 3 but be awarded a mark near the top of the level because of the Level 4 content.

Step 2 Determine a mark

Once you have assigned a level you need to decide on the mark. The descriptors on how to allocate marks can help with this. The exemplar materials used during standardisation will help. There will be an answer in the standardising materials which will correspond with each level of the mark scheme. This answer will have been awarded a mark by the Lead Examiner. You can compare the student's answer with the example to determine if it is the same standard, better or worse than the example. You can then use this to allocate a mark for the answer based on the Lead Examiner's mark on the example.

You may well need to read back through the answer as you apply the mark scheme to clarify points and assure yourself that the level and the mark are appropriate.

Indicative content in the mark scheme is provided as a guide for examiners. It is not intended to be exhaustive and you must credit other valid points. Students do not have to cover all of the points mentioned in the Indicative content to reach the highest level of the mark scheme.

An answer which contains nothing of relevance to the question must be awarded no marks.

Section A

- 0 1** With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these three sources to an historian studying relations between the USA and USSR in the years 1945/46.

[30 marks]*Target: AO2*

Analyse and evaluate appropriate source material, primary and/or contemporary to the period, within the historical context.

Generic Mark Scheme

- L5:** Shows a very good understanding of all three sources in relation to both content and provenance and combines this with a strong awareness of the historical context to present a balanced argument on their value for the particular purpose given in the question. The answer will convey a substantiated judgement. The response demonstrates a very good understanding of context. **25–30**
- L4:** Shows a good understanding of all three sources in relation to both content and provenance and combines this with an awareness of the historical context to provide a balanced argument on their value for the particular purpose given in the question. Judgements may, however, be partial or limited in substantiation. The response demonstrates a good understanding of context. **19–24**
- L3:** Shows some understanding of all three sources in relation to both content and provenance together with some awareness of the historical context. There may, however, be some imbalance in the degree of breadth and depth of comment offered on all three sources and the analysis may not be fully convincing. The answer will make some attempt to consider the value of the sources for the particular purpose given in the question. The response demonstrates an understanding of context. **13–18**
- L2:** The answer will be partial. It may, for example, provide some comment on the value of the sources for the particular purpose given in the question but only address one or two of the sources, or focus exclusively on content (or provenance), or it may consider all three sources but fail to address the value of the sources for the particular purpose given in the question. The response demonstrates some understanding of context. **7–12**
- L1:** The answer will offer some comment on the value of at least one source in relation to the purpose given in the question but the response will be limited and may be partially inaccurate. Comments are likely to be unsupported, vague or generalist. The response demonstrates limited understanding of context. **1–6**
- Nothing worthy of credit. **0**

Indicative content

Note: This content is not prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.

Students must deploy knowledge of the historical context to show an understanding of the relationship between the sources and the issues raised in the question, when assessing the significance of provenance, the arguments deployed in the sources and the tone and emphasis of the sources. Descriptive answers which fail to do this should be awarded no more than Level 2 at best. Answers should address both the value and the limitations of the sources for the particular question and purpose given.

Source A: in assessing the value of this source, students may refer to the following:

Provenance, tone and emphasis

- this is a speech made by the President to the US Congress and is therefore of significant value to explain relations between the USA and USSR in 1945, as it demonstrates Roosevelt's official, public attitude towards the other Allied powers which he wants to communicate to the public
- Roosevelt's aim is to make the public aware of the positive steps the Grand Alliance has made towards a post-war agreement at the Yalta Conference, which possibly limits the value as he wants to present a united front with no issues
- the emphasis of the source is on unity against Hitler and a hopeful outlook for the future; the war is still ongoing and therefore there is an element of propaganda here to present a certain outlook to the public, perhaps making the source less valuable
- Roosevelt's tone is extremely positive and forward-thinking, as he suggests it was the hope of Germany and other Axis powers that the Grand Alliance would fail and no post-war agreement would be reached. Instead, Roosevelt is keen to communicate that a successful relationship has been formed and therefore the source is valuable to show how the USA and USSR worked together at the Yalta Conference.

Content and argument

- Roosevelt is suggesting that at the Yalta Conference, unanimous agreement was reached on every issue discussed. This is true because a decision was made to divide Germany into 4 zones along with Berlin; and both the Declaration on Liberated Europe and the United Nations were set up. Therefore, his optimism is valuable to study relations between the USA and USSR in this period
- the source also argues that there was future hope for the cohesion of the Grand Alliance, with a unity that would be long-lasting. However, Roosevelt had a certain sense of naivety towards Stalin's beliefs and this is demonstrated straight after Yalta when relations started to break down over post-war Europe
- Roosevelt also suggests that the Allies had created a lasting peace – this is valuable in terms of the United Nations being created; as Roosevelt had high hopes along with Churchill for a future free of war. However, it only took a few months for the Alliance to deteriorate, so perhaps Roosevelt's statements are naïve
- Roosevelt argues that the Allies were fully united in their peace aims – he was convinced that Stalin had the same views of a post-war world free from communism and tension, but this would be proven wrong by developments before and after Potsdam.

Source B: in assessing the value of this source, students may refer to the following:

Provenance, tone and emphasis

- this is a report written by Clark Clifford in order to comment on US foreign policy towards the Soviet Union by late 1946. This is valuable because it reflects official US attitudes towards the USSR and the tone of advice that the President was receiving at this time
- Clifford is making the case for further US action towards the USSR and make the President aware of repeated failures to follow agreements made at the post-war conferences. This was not a public report but with Clifford working so closely to the President, it would have directly influenced Truman's foreign policy at this time
- as this is late 1946, the US government has already indicated that a change in attitude towards the USSR is necessary, as evidenced by Kennan's Long Telegram in February 1946. Therefore, Clifford emphasises the aggression of the Soviet Union and how it can only be combatted by both force and financial/political aid
- Clifford's tone is extremely forthright and presents Soviet failure to honour agreements as far back as the Tehran Conference in 1943. He is clearly advising the President of a tougher response to the USSR and is aiming to push US policy in this direction

Content and argument

- Clifford is arguing that the Soviet Union appears to be continuing with an aggressive policy in Europe solely aimed at its own imperialism. This could be valuable because in 1946 alone, communist-led governments had won 'free elections' in Poland, Bulgaria and Romania, and Stalin was well on his way to breaking the Yalta/Potsdam agreements on liberated Europe
- Clifford also argues that the USA has been making agreements with the USSR since 1943 and that they seem uninterested in upholding these agreements. While the Yalta and Potsdam agreements did cause some further tensions, this could be less valuable as the USA's use of the atomic bomb in Japan ended Stalin's trust in the Allies and meant he was focused on his own security from then on
- he also focuses on the idea that the USA should use military might and financial/political aid to prevent the USSR from expanding further. Despite this source being written in 1946, it could be seen as a prelude to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan where the USA decided to fund post-war economies to prevent them falling to communism
- Clifford suggests that the USSR's current policies are not in line with cooperation and friendship; and instead are in direct conflict with American ideals. Truman's attitude towards the USSR by this point was very suspicious and believed the Soviet Union was a clear enemy of Western democratic values and the USA's security. Therefore, this source is valuable to understand relations between the USA and USSR.

Source C: in assessing the value of this source, students may refer to the following:

Provenance, tone and emphasis

- this is a telegram from the Soviet Ambassador to the USSR's leadership and therefore demonstrates Soviet opinion of US-Soviet relations from someone closely involved in foreign affairs and the post-war negotiations. This is valuable to show how relations have deteriorated so quickly just one year after the success of the Yalta Conference
- the date of the telegram is significant – it is sent in the same year as Kennan's Long Telegram and Churchill's Iron Curtain speech; and while it was a private telegram it indicates the wider context of the USA and USSR becoming more suspicious of each other, therefore making the source valuable to understand the distrust between the USA and USSR
- the emphasis here is on the USA's mistakes and how this is not the Soviet's responsibility – therefore the source could be less valuable as it is not accepting any imperialistic moves made by the Soviet Union. The source merely focuses on how Soviet policy should be hardened towards the USA, but demonstrates how the Soviet attitude towards the USA had deteriorated
- Novikov's tone is very negative and accusatory – he is emphasising the actions the USA have taken to weaken the Grand Alliance and wants to communicate that responsibility to the Soviet leadership. This could be less valuable as clearly Novikov is attempting to pass the blame.

Content and argument

- Novikov is firstly suggesting that the USA have desired world domination since the end of the Second World War. This could be down to Roosevelt and Truman attempting to force Stalin into accepting the Yalta agreements to not establish pro-Soviet governments in Eastern Europe; and also the use of the atomic bomb just before Potsdam. Therefore, the source is valuable to show why the USSR felt unable to cooperate with the USA
- Novikov also argues that the unity of the Big Three has been undermined by the USA, perhaps referring to Truman's hard-line attitude towards Stalin and refusal to accept the percentages agreement between Churchill and Stalin in 1944. This makes the source valuable to demonstrate that after Roosevelt's death, relations between the two powers deteriorated
- Novikov mentions that the USA is purposely trying to prevent the USSR from expanding into nearby territories. By 1946, Stalin had already made clear steps to establish pro-Soviet governments in some Eastern European countries such as Albania and Romania. He had begun to rely on his own interpretation of the Declaration on Liberated Europe, demonstrating why relations were getting worse
- Novikov argues that the USA is also using its policies towards Germany to further damage the US-Soviet relationship. It had been clear from Yalta that the USA and Britain preferred a united Germany and wanted to exclude the USSR from their zone, making the source valuable to show how the problem of Germany affected relations between the USA and USSR.

Section B

- 0 2** 'There was a significant thaw in tensions between the USA and the USSR in the years 1955 to 1961.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Target: AO1

Demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate the key features related to the periods studied, making substantiated judgements and exploring concepts, as relevant, of cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance.

Generic Mark Scheme

- L5:** Answers will display a very good understanding of the full demands of the question. They will be well-organised and effectively delivered. The supporting information will be well-selected, specific and precise. It will show a very good understanding of key features, issues and concepts. The answer will be fully analytical with a balanced argument and well-substantiated judgement. **21–25**
- L4:** Answers will display a good understanding of the demands of the question. It will be well-organised and effectively communicated. There will be a range of clear and specific supporting information showing a good understanding of key features and issues, together with some conceptual awareness. The answer will be analytical in style with a range of direct comment relating to the question. The answer will be well-balanced with some judgement, which may, however, be only partially substantiated. **16–20**
- L3:** Answers will show an understanding of the question and will supply a range of largely accurate information, which will show an awareness of some of the key issues and features, but may, however, be unspecific or lack precision of detail. The answer will be effectively organised and show adequate communication skills. There will be a good deal of comment in relation to the question and the answer will display some balance, but a number of statements may be inadequately supported and generalist. **11–15**
- L2:** The answer is descriptive or partial, showing some awareness of the question but a failure to grasp its full demands. There will be some attempt to convey material in an organised way, although communication skills may be limited. There will be some appropriate information showing understanding of some key features and/or issues, but the answer may be very limited in scope and/or contain inaccuracy and irrelevance. There will be some, but limited, comment in relation to the question and statements will, for the most part, be unsupported and generalist. **6–10**
- L1:** The question has not been properly understood and the response shows limited organisational and communication skills. The information conveyed is irrelevant or extremely limited. There may be some unsupported, vague or generalist comment. **1–5**
- Nothing worthy of credit. **0**

Indicative content

Note: This content is not prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.

Arguments supporting the view that there was a significant thaw in tensions between the USA and the USSR in the years 1955 to 1961 might include:

- the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955 removed a potential future issue for US-Soviet relations and helped to significantly thaw tensions. It was agreed that Austria would be a neutral state, all occupying powers would be removed and it would be protected against any threat of Soviet expansion; therefore preventing it from becoming 'another Germany'
- the Camp David talks of September 1959 clearly demonstrated that both the USA and USSR were committed to thawing tensions; as disarmament and the future of Berlin were discussed, and an agreement was made to settle any future international issues through diplomacy not force. Therefore, relations seemed positive at this point
- the Geneva Summit of September 1955 marked the beginning of a productive dialogue between the superpowers, with an intention to lay the foundations of peaceful coexistence. This is evident in the agreement over the potential of free elections in Germany, which satisfied the USSR's desire for an independent Germany
- Khrushchev's visit to Tito in Yugoslavia in 1955 where he discussed different approaches to communism, demonstrated to the USA that perhaps the USSR would allow some change to communist regimes and there would be less tension.

Arguments challenging the view that there was a significant thaw in tensions between the USA and the USSR in the years 1955 to 1961 might include:

- issues over Berlin continued to dominate this period of the Cold War and made a thaw in tensions nigh impossible – the issuing of a 6-month ultimatum by the USSR in 1959 to create a 'free city' of Berlin and the USA's swift rejection of this demonstrated that issues over Germany were still unresolved. This was confirmed with the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961
- the Open Skies proposal presented by Eisenhower at the 1955 Geneva Summit was swiftly rejected by Khrushchev, meaning inspection of each other's nuclear arsenals to reduce the threat of nuclear war would not be possible. This demonstrates a continuance in tensions between the USA and the USSR
- the Geneva Summit also produced no concrete agreements over the future of Germany. Both the USA and USSR disagreed on reunification, demilitarisation and independence and reached no reasonable solutions, perhaps leaving further tensions over Berlin in 1961 inevitable
- the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 by the USA demonstrated that Kennedy's administration was intent on preventing communist influence in Cuba and that they were willing to commit real resources to overthrowing a Soviet ally, therefore any real thaw in US-Soviet relations was overshadowed by this aggression
- developments such as the Soviet Union threatening and using military intervention to deal with the uprisings in Hungary and Poland in 1956; and the shooting down of a U2 spy plane in 1960 led the USA to conclude that peaceful coexistence was over and any mutual cooperation from the last few years was futile.

Students should aim to assess the term ‘significance’ in relation to this question and therefore may come to the conclusion that on the surface, it appeared that there was a quite a significant thaw in US-Soviet relations. This was due to the increase in summit diplomacy and the spirit of cooperation surrounding agreements such as the Austrian State Treaty. However, it could also be argued that this progress on thawing relations was merely superficial and was overshadowed by developments in Germany and Cuba which threatened the future of US-Soviet relations – meaning the term significant is perhaps over-emphasising the thaw in tensions. However, it should be noted that any relevant argument should be rewarded.

- 0 3** How important was Cuban intervention in Angola and Ethiopia in bringing about the deterioration of relations between the USA and USSR in the years 1973 to 1979?

[25 marks]

Target: AO1

Demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate the key features related to the periods studied, making substantiated judgements and exploring concepts, as relevant, of cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance.

Generic Mark Scheme

- L5:** Answers will display a very good understanding of the full demands of the question. They will be well-organised and effectively delivered. The supporting information will be well-selected, specific and precise. It will show a very good understanding of key features, issues and concepts. The answer will be fully analytical with a balanced argument and well-substantiated judgement. **21–25**
- L4:** Answers will display a good understanding of the demands of the question. It will be well-organised and effectively communicated. There will be a range of clear and specific supporting information showing a good understanding of key features and issues, together with some conceptual awareness. The answer will be analytical in style with a range of direct comment relating to the question. The answer will be well-balanced with some judgement, which may, however, be only partially substantiated. **16–20**
- L3:** Answers will show an understanding of the question and will supply a range of largely accurate information, which will show an awareness of some of the key issues and features, but may, however, be unspecific or lack precision of detail. The answer will be effectively organised and show adequate communication skills. There will be a good deal of comment in relation to the question and the answer will display some balance, but a number of statements may be inadequately supported and generalist. **11–15**
- L2:** The answer is descriptive or partial, showing some awareness of the question but a failure to grasp its full demands. There will be some attempt to convey material in an organised way, although communication skills may be limited. There will be some appropriate information showing understanding of some key features and/or issues, but the answer may be very limited in scope and/or contain inaccuracy and irrelevance. There will be some, but limited, comment in relation to the question and statements will, for the most part, be unsupported and generalist. **6–10**
- L1:** The question has not been properly understood and the response shows limited organisational and communication skills. The information conveyed is irrelevant or extremely limited. There may be some unsupported, vague or generalist comment. **1–5**
- Nothing worthy of credit. **0**

Indicative content

Note: This content is not prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.

Arguments supporting the view that Cuban intervention in Angola and Ethiopia was important in bringing about the deterioration of relations between the USA and USSR in the years 1973 to 1979 might include:

- the USSR sent military advisors and \$1 billion in aid for Angola on behalf of Cuba to support the MPLA. As the USA was supporting the FNLA on the opposing side; this meant that relations deteriorated over 'proxy wars' and would cause further issues down the line in Latin America and the Caribbean
- the USA dedicated \$300 million in aid to the FNLA in Angola, along with the Chinese sending 120 military advisors. This was viewed by the USSR as Sino-American cooperation which they felt extremely threatened by and caused a further deterioration of relations in this period
- the USSR re-signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship with Cuba in 1975 due to their involvement in Africa, reunifying their relationship and pushing the USA further away. This also opened up further possibilities of the USSR cooperating with Cuba and supporting them in their revolutionary strategy
- Brezhnev publicly applauded Cuba's intervention into Ethiopia and declared they were simply assisting socialist Ethiopia in their destiny. The USA then accused the USSR of using Cuba as a proxy and further damaged relations between the two powers.

Arguments challenging the view that Cuban intervention in Angola and Ethiopia was important in bringing about the deterioration of relations between the USA and USSR in the years 1973 to 1979 might include:

- the USA's support for the FNLA in Angola was not long-lasting; they had to withdraw their covert support due to links with the South African government at a time when apartheid was being internationally condemned. Therefore, Cuban intervention in Angola did not significantly deteriorate relations – clearly, the USA valued their reputation over this
- another reason for the deterioration of relations was the relationship between Carter and Brezhnev – they fundamentally disagreed over arms reduction, including the USSR's refusal to end deployment of SS-20 missiles and reduce stocks of heavy missiles. Carter had decided upon his election that a hard-line policy was necessary and unveiled harsher arms reduction proposals in 1977
- the USA and China made significant progress in 'normalising' relations in the late 1970s, including the USA officially recognising Taiwan and using 'ping-pong diplomacy'. This made the USSR feel threatened, even more so due to Chinese support in Angola, and led to relations deteriorating even further
- the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was officially condemned by Carter, who declared it to be a 'flagrant breach of international protocol', leading to the dismantling of further SALT agreements and an official 'end' to this period of détente.

Students could come to the conclusion that Cuba's intervention in Angola and Ethiopia was important in bringing about the deterioration of relations in this period, as it disrupted an already shaky period of détente, emphasised improving Sino-American relations and also re-affirmed the relationship between the USSR and Cuba in a proxy war. However, it could be argued that Cuba's intervention in Africa was a smaller issue in the wider picture of deteriorating relations in this period – the impact of clashing personalities, normalising Sino-American relations and an arguably more threatening proxy conflict in Afghanistan sealed the end of détente between the two powers. However, any valid arguments may be credited to explain the importance of Angola and Ethiopia in bringing about the deterioration of relations.

0 4 'Gorbachev was responsible for the ending of the Cold War.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Target: AO1

Demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate the key features related to the periods studied, making substantiated judgements and exploring concepts, as relevant, of cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance.

Generic Mark Scheme

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- L1:** The question has not been properly understood and the response shows limited organisational and communication skills. The information conveyed is irrelevant or extremely limited. There may be some unsupported, vague or generalist comment. **1–5**
- Nothing worthy of credit. **0**

Indicative content

Note: This content is not prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels scheme.

Arguments supporting the view that Gorbachev was responsible for the ending of the Cold War might include:

- Gorbachev's introduction of glasnost, meaning openness, not only encouraged a thorough re-examination of Soviet history and government actions, but allowed open criticism of the communist system which ultimately led to the end of the Cold War – a communist system was no longer attractive or viable
- a further policy of Gorbachev's – perestroika – meaning economic restructure, meant that the outdated Soviet economic system was overhauled and Gorbachev was able to open the USSR to foreign markets and investment. This improved the relationship with the West and helped to end the divide in economic systems that had existed since 1945
- the military coup of 1991 that removed Gorbachev from power was due to perception from communist hardliners and apparatchiks that his reformist policies had failed. This led to his resignation in August 1991, and the creation of the Russian Federation by Yeltsin. Gorbachev had directly led to the breakdown of the communist system in the USSR and therefore the tensions that had created the Cold War
- the ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine meant that individual populations in the USSR's satellite states no longer had to fear the influx of troops from Moscow or Warsaw Pact states if they dared to challenge the communist system – Gorbachev had all but abandoned the USSR's commitment to this from 1985
- due to the permitted criticism of the government, Gorbachev was under pressure to transform the communist system and develop a system of elections. These vast political changes initiated by Gorbachev meant the current system could not hold and signalled the end of the Cold War.

Arguments challenging the view that Gorbachev was responsible for the ending of the Cold War might include:

- as the financial and military power of the USSR diminished, nationalist sentiment across the satellite states began to flourish and led to areas such as Azerbaijan and the Baltic states demanding economic and political sovereignty from the Soviet Union. The USSR's grip on its satellite states had ended and therefore the ending of the Cold War was the responsibility of the satellite states, not Gorbachev himself
- the arrival of new personalities led to the end of the Cold War rather than Gorbachev alone. For example, Bush facilitated a closer economic relationship between the USA and USSR at the Malta Summit; and also pushed for agreements on disarmament, nuclear technology and the independence of Eastern European states. His change in approach from Reagan allowed Cold War tensions to dissipate
- the use of summit diplomacy in the late 1980s was extremely productive and allowed the USA and USSR to reach decisions on long-standing issues. For example, the INF Treaty was signed at the Washington Summit in 1987, removing a whole class of nuclear weapons and effectively ending the arms race
- individual satellite states fell from communism in different ways and therefore were responsible for the end of the Cold War and Soviet control – for example, Poland's transition to a democracy through the rise of the Solidarity movement, Hungary's economic partnership with the West and the closer alignment of East and West Germany through Ostpolitik. Therefore, the ending of the Cold War was not Gorbachev's responsibility – it was the individual states that pursued anti-communist policies.

Students may conclude that it was indeed Gorbachev's actions and his reformist ideas that brought about the end of the Cold War. Without the increased openness and economic restructuring, the citizens of the USSR and its satellite states may not have felt as able to challenge and abandon the communist system. However, students may also conclude that other underlying factors hastened the end of the Cold War, such as the emergence of new personalities, the increase in summit diplomacy and the emergence of nationalist movements in USSR satellite states.