**Cambridge IGCSE Core Content Option B:**

**The 20th Century: International Relations since 1919**

**Part 4: Who was to blame for the Cold War?**

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**Introduction**

In 1941 the US joined WW2 and an alliance was formed between Britain, Russia and the USA against the axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. However, this alliance barley lasted beyond the defeat of Germany in May 1945.

By the end of 1949 Europe was divided into two blocs (groups of countries joined by military alliances and/or political ideologies).- on one side countries under Soviet control and on the other those with close links to the USA. Many of the latter were also members of NATO – an armed alliance of states.

The division of Europe was symbolised by the fate of Germany after WW2. It was initially separated into four zones of occupation, with Berlin, within the Soviet zone similarly divided. The failure of Stalin’s plan to create united, Soviet-controlled Berlin led to the unification of the three western zones and the formal creation of West and East Germany.

Both sides blamed each other for the breakdown in relations. The US believed the Soviet Union, under the dictatorial rule of Stalin, was intent on spreading communism as far as it could across Europe and probably beyond. Stalin insisted he was acting to guarantee Russia’s security after suffering so badly in WW2.

Stalin in turn accused the US of intending to build a global economic empire and claimed his actions were merely efforts to defend against this.

**Why did the US-USSR alliance begin to break down in 1945?**

**Ideological differences**

America was a democracy with free, multi-party elections. The US economy was capitalist – where most of the economy was privately owned – and people were largely free to hold any religious or political belief. Freedom of speech was an important feature of American life. The rights of ordinary Americans were laid out and protected by a written constitution.

The Soviet political system was based on communism – where the economy is controlled by the state and private ownership doesn’t exist – with one-party rule and no political opposition allowed. Soviet citizens had few rights. Millions of innocent people were persecuted during the 1930s and religious beliefs were not tolerated.

After the communists had come to power in Russia in October 1917 several western powers, including the US and Britain, intervened against the Communists in the Russian Civil War. This contributed to Soviet fears about future attacks from capitalist countries. During the 1930s Stalin believed Britain and France were happy for Hitler to expand in the east. This had contributed to his decision to make the Nazi-Soviet Pact with Germany in August 1939.

Western leaders were suspicious of Russia because:

* They feared the Communists shared the ambitions of the Tsars who had wanted to expand into central Europe and the eastern Mediterranean
* Senior Communists had talked about the need for a worldwide revolution, increasing the likelihood of a future conflict between communist and capitalist forces

**Wartime disagreements**

After the USSR was invaded by Germany in June 1941 the public was presented with a very positive image of relations between the USA, USSR and Great Britain. These emphasised the common goal of defeating Nazism and the terrible conditions endured by the Russian people on the Eastern Front.

The allies cooperated extensively during the war. British merchant ships braved the horrors of the Baltic to supply Russia with much needed materials and the US agreed to the Lend-Lease programme, providing military equipment to Russia.

Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill met for the first time at Tehran in November 1943, where they agreed a date for the invasion of France. Military officials and politicians regularly met to agree details of organising the war.

However, beneath the surface, there were always tensions:

* Stalin’s obsessive secrecy prevented him from sharing his battle plans with Britain or the US.
* Churchill would not share his knowledge of the Enigma codes with Russia.
* British and American pilots who flew to Russia often complained that the Russians didn’t trust them.
* The sailors who brought supplies to Russia were not allowed to move freely around Russian ports.
* Politicians and diplomats in Whitehall, Washington and Moscow voiced suspicions about the conduct of their allies

**Attitudes towards Germany and the post-war world**

By the end of 1944 it was obvious both that the Allies were going to win the war and that Russia was going to play a much greater role in world affairs than she had done before the war. In October 1944 Churchill met Stalin to discuss post-war ‘spheres of influence’. Leaders of the three major Allies met at two very important conferences in 1945:

1. **Yalta, February 1945 – Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill**

This meeting took place within Russia and a number of points were agreed:

* Only the unconditional surrender of Germany would be acceptable
* Germany and its capital Berlin would both be temporarily divided into four zones of occupation
* Germany’s eastern border would be moved westwards
* Reparations would be payments in kind totalling £20 billion taken from Germany, with half going to Russia
* A United Nations Organisation would be established, at first consisting of all nations at war with Germany, with the first meeting to convene in San Francisco in June 1945
* Stalin agreed to help in the war against Japan once Germany was defeated
* Russia was given territory lost to Japan in the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War and Outer Mongolia and Manchuria would become Soviet ‘spheres of influence’.
* A provisional government would be set up in Poland consisting of pro-Soviets and exiled ‘London’ Poles, with free and fair elections to be held as soon as possible
1. **Potsdam, July 1945 – Stalin, Truman, Churchill/Attlee**

Following the defeat of Germany this meeting took place within Germany. FDR had died was replaced by Harry S Truman. During the conference elections in Britain saw Churchill replaced as Prime Minster, and therefore at the conference, by Clement Attlee.

Truman was inexperienced in dealing with international affairs. He believed Stalin should be made to keep to the agreements from Yalta.

Since Yalta Russia had liberated eastern Europe and was starting to install sympathetic governments and to target political opponents in these areas. No free elections had taken place in these areas.

On the eve of the conference Truman informed Stalin that the US had successfully tested an atomic weapon. The US and Britain had kept their plans to develop an atom bomb secret – although Soviet agents had actually provided Stalin with plenty of information about it.

Stalin remained determined to look after Russian interests. His top priorities were getting reparations out of Germany and making sure Russia would not be invaded through eastern Europe.

At the Potsdam Conference there were significant failures to reach agreement:

* The Allies failed to agree over the future government of Poland and the Soviet-controlled government at Lublin continued to run the country
* They disagreed over the future of Germany – Stalin wanted to weaken Germany and prevent it developing its own industry
* Russia failed to get the others to agree to access to Germany’s industrial heartland in the Ruhr
* Truman rejected Stalin’s demand for a foothold in Japan

However, there were also some agreements reached:

* The Polish/German border was to be settled at the Oder-Neisse Line
* Germany would be denazified and war crimes trials were to be held in Germany and Japan
* Germany would be governed by an Allied Control Council in Berlin where each decision required a unanimous verdict and the country would be treated as a single economic unit
* Each country was allowed to take reparations from its own zone of occupation. Russia could also take some equipment from the industrialised western zones
* The Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) would be set up to deal with the defeated European countries

In summary, the Potsdam Conference clearly illustrated the differing views of Russia and the western powers over the future of Germany and Poland. It also put off some very important decisions by passing them on to the CFM and Allied Control Council.

**After Potsdam**

With Germany defeated, occupied and in ruins, attention turned to the process of reconstruction. As the four occupying powers (USA, Britain, France and Russia) began to turn the principles agreed at Potsdam into action, competing visions of Germany’s future began to emerge.

In the eastern zone Russia prioritised collection of reparations in kind as a contribution to her own immense rebuilding programme. However, Britain and the US believed production from the factories in their zones should be traded for agricultural produce in the Russian zone. However, the Russians disagreed so Americans had to pay for food imports into Germany and Britain introduced bread rationing at home in 1946 so they could export wheat to Germany.

In May 1946, the commander of the American zone, General Clay, stopped the delivery of reparations to the Soviets. In July 1946 the American and British zones were merged into a single economic unit called ‘Bizonia’.

Divisions also emerged in how the four occupying powers approached the political structure of their zones. The Russians merged the Social Democratic and Communist parties into the Socialist Unity Party. In the western zones a multi-party system emerged, representing the political traditions of the US, France and Britain.

**Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe and American reactions to it**

Stalin had long intended to create ‘spheres of influence’ in eastern and central Europe. His dealings with Churchill and Roosevelt had convinced him that this would be acceptable to the western powers. By the end of 1948 Soviet control stretched, as Churchill said in his ‘iron curtain’ speech, ‘from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic’. Western observers also considered Stalin to have ambitions to extend his influence into the Mediterranean and beyond.

Stalin had used a variety of methods to assert his influence in each of the different countries:

* **Poland**: Soviet troops remained after liberation; the new government dominated by ‘Lublin’ Poles was formed in June 194; opposition leaders were arrested and murdered. Rigged elections of 1947 gave the communists 80% of the vote and Soviet control was complete
* **Romania (a former German ally)**: Soviet troops remained after liberation; a coalition government, with communists in key positions was set up in 1945; the communists gradually took over the police and security services; rigged elections in 1946 gave the communists and their allies 90% of the vote; the main opposition leader was put on ‘show trial’ in October 1947; King Michael was forced to abdicate in December 1947 and Soviet control was complete
* **Bulgaria (a former German ally)**: Soviet troops remained after liberation; a coalition called the Fatherland Front was formed; non-communists were purged from the Fatherland Front; the monarchy was abolished in 1946; a new constitution in 1947 effectively destroyed parliamentary democracy, opposition parties were disbanded and Soviet control was complete by 1947
* **Hungary (a former German ally)**: Soviet troops remained after liberation; communists won only 17% of the vote in elections in November 1945 but they were given control of the Ministry of the Interior. Secret police were used to discredit and persecute rival politicians. Rigged elections in 1947 gave communists control of a coalition government. Soviet control was completed in 1948 when the Social Democratic Party and Communist Party were merged.
* **Czechoslovakia**: Soviet troops left after the war; post-war elections gave communists leadership of a balanced, coalition government. They gradually assumed control of key government ministries. Political opponents were arrested. The popular, non-communist, Foreign Minister Jans Masaryk was murdered in May 1947. In February 1948 Soviet control was completed when non-communists resigned from the government and their places were filled by communists

Elsewhere, Stalin was prepared to grant neighbouring or nearby countries more freedom. Although the USSR retained control of Finland’s foreign policy, it gave up control over domestic policy to the Finnish government.

In Yugoslavia, where the partisans had liberated the country without Soviet assistance, Tito established a communist state with close ties to, but not controlled by, the Soviet Union.

Stalin did not get everything he wanted. He put pressure on the Turkish government to give Russia a naval base on the Dardanelles Strait. However, he backed down when he saw that Truman was prepared to support the Turkish government’s opposition to this.

Although the US had no real interest in the area taken over by the USSR, they soon started to compare Stalin’s actions to Nazi aggression.

**The Long Telegram, February 1946**

At first Truman was uncertain whether to try to build bridges with the USSR or approach with firmness and hostility. His approach became influenced by ‘The Long Telegram’ sent by George Kennan, a US diplomat and expert on Soviet affairs based in Washington. It said:

* Russia was hostile and that this hostility arose from an age-old fear the Russian government about what might happen if the Russian people found out about the outside world
* Communist ideology fitted with this theory as Marxism teaches that conflicts cannot be solved peacefully
* Attempts such as those made by Roosevelt to bring Russia into long-term partnership were futile
* The way to defeat the Soviets was by ‘a policy of firm **containment**’ – the USSR would try to fill any space it could, but they wouldn’t push if they found immovable resistance
* Soviet rule would collapse one day with an internal struggle which would transform the USSR ‘overnight from one of the strongest to one of the weakest and most pitiable of national societies’ – so the US only had to contain the USSR when and where it was aggressive and wait for it to collapse

**The Iron Curtain speech, March 1946**

The following month Truman listened to former British PM Winston Churchill make a powerful case for greater US intervention in Europe’s affairs, delivered at Fulton, Missouri. It highlighted the extent of Russian control in eastern Europe and the threat to the rest of Europe:

***‘A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by Allied victory. Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its Communist international organisation intends to do in the immediate future***

***From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Belgrade, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow.***

***The Communist parties, which were very small in all these Eastern States of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy’.***

**The Truman Doctrine**

In March 1947 Britain announced it could no longer afford to support the Greek government in the civil war between royalists and Yugoslav-backed communists that had been going on since the liberation of Greece in 1944. If the US wanted to stop Greece, and possibly Turkey, becoming communist it needed to act quickly.

There were further fears that communist parties in France and Italy, supported by Moscow, would come to power. Both countries were experiencing terrible economic problems after the war, made worse by a poor harvest 1946-47 and the failure of coalition governments to deal with the problems.

Truman introduced a policy of **containment**, with two main elements. In March 1947 he persuaded Congress to provide $400m in economic and military aid for Greece. He described the world as divided between the free and oppressors, his ‘doctrine’ was an open-ended commitment to defend free countries threatened by aggressive neighbours throughout the world.

**The Marshall Plan**

Truman’s second element of containment was the European Recovery Programme, more commonly known as ‘Marshall Aid’ or the ‘Marshall Plan’. This was announced in June 1947 by US Secretary of State George Marshall. The aims of the plan were to stabilise the economies of Europe and prevent the growth of communism in European democracies.

Sixteen countries accepted Marshall Aid. It was also applied to the western zones in Germany – in breach of the Potsdam agreement. The Marshall Plan lasted for four years and provided $13.3 billion for European recovery.

By providing loans to other countries, Marshall was hoping to create stronger markets for US exports.

Stalin denounced the Plan as economic imperialism and an act of ideological warfare as it would require participants to bring their economic policies into line with American interests. He also saw it as a threat to his control of eastern Europe. He refused to allow Soviet Bloc states to participate.

In September 1947 Stalin convened a conference of Communist Party leaders. This conference established the Communist Information Bureau – or COMINFORM. The essential purpose of COMINFORM was to ensure the communist parties of eastern and western Europe followed the Soviet model – i.e. to tighten Moscow’s control.

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The Marshall Plan was a short-term measure but the doctrine of containment remained in place throughout the Cold War, influencing successive US presidents until the collapse of communism in 1991.

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**The occupation of Germany and the Berlin Blockade**

The following points had previously been agreed with regard to the difficulty of deciding the future of Germany:

* Germany would be temporarily divided into four zones and the country’s permanent fate would be decided in a future conference
* Berlin, in the Soviet zone, would also be temporarily divided into four zones
* The Soviet Union was allowed to take reparations from Germany
* The Polish border would be pushed westward and established on the Oder-Neisse Line
* Germany would be denazified, demilitarised and democratised
* A Control Council with representatives of all four occupying powers (Britain, France, US and USSR) would decide matters affecting the whole of Germany

However, between the Potsdam Conference and the end of 1947, divisions over the future of Germany started to push the former allies further apart:

* In 1945 the US refused to give the USSR a loan to cover the cost of occupying the eastern zone of Germany
* Whilst western powers were wanting to help Germany rebuild, Stalin was using German resources to rebuild the USSR
* In January 1947 Britain and the US created a single economic unit out of their zones called Bizonia. It became Trizonia when combined with the French zone in 1948. Stalin felt threatened and feared the western powers were trying to force him out of Berlin
* In March 1947 Britain, France and the US secretly agreed to unite their zones politically as well. Stalin knew about this through Soviet agents
* The US decided to make Marshall Aid available to the western zones
* Russia reacted by inspecting all freight shipments into West Berlin
* In June 1948 the western powers created a new currency for use in all four zones but the Soviets refused to allow it to be introduced in their zone

**The Blockade**

Stalin’s response to the introduction of a new currency was to blockade West Berlin. He blocked all road, rail and canal traffic moving west to east. He increased the pressure on the city by turning off all gas and electricity supplies. He hoped to force the other three powers out of Berlin and remove an awkward symbol of western life from his zone.

Declassified CIA documents reveal that Truman was fully aware of Soviet plans to remove the western powers from Berlin. Even so, the question of how to respond to this threat was a difficult one to answer. If he allowed the blockade to succeed, he would have demonstrated his ‘doctrine’ of 1947 to be an empty threat. However, if he directly challenged the blockade by driving armed convoys through the Soviet zone it would be highly provocative.

Britain, America and France quickly decided not to back down. They pledged to supply the people of West Berlin through a huge airlift.

Operation Vittles – as the airlift was known – lasted from June 1948 to May 1949. It involved nearly 300,000 flights and brought over two million tons of cargo in. Coal, food, petrol, medicines and other resources were transported by air from three bases in the western sectors of Germany. At its peak planes were landing in West Berlin every two minutes.

Although the Soviets did not fire directly on the incoming aircraft, they used obstruction tactics including jamming radios and shining searchlights to temporarily blind pilots.

Stalin lifted the blockade in May 1949. He had failed in his goal of uniting the city under Soviet control. The effort of the British and US air forces and the remarkable determination of the 2m inhabitants of West Berlin ensured the three western powers kept control of the city. 65 German, British and US lives had been lost.

**Consequences**

In many ways the crisis completed the breakdown in relations between the superpowers and established a political, economic and territorial division of Europe which was to last 40 years:

**NATO**

In April 1949 the US pledged to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. This was the first time in US history that it had committed itself to a military alliance in peacetime. It wouldn’t even require an attack on the US to involve it in possible military action. Eleven other countries joined NATO in 1949: Britain, Canada, France, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxemburg.

**East and West Germany**

In June 1947 Ernest Reuter, a former communist turned strong critic of the USSR was elected mayor for Berlin. The creation of a new German constitution started in 1948. In May 1949 the formal political unification of the western zones took place with the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). The first national elections took place in August 1949 and Konrad Adenauer, leader of the right-wing Christian Democrats, became the first Chancellor of West Germany. He controlled domestic policy , but the occupying powers controlled West Germany’s foreign policy until 1951 when the West German Foreign Office was created.

British, French and US forces remained in West Berlin to defend it from future attack from the east.

In October 1949 the Soviets created the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). It was democratic in name only, with all positions in the new state in the hands of the communist Socialist Unity Party. East Berlin became the capital of East Germany, whilst Bonn became the capital of West Germany.

Although the Berlin Blockade had highlighted the West’s vulnerability to Soviet aggression in East Berlin, the conclusion of the crisis could be seen to have stabilised Germany’s position in Europe.

**COMECON**

After the creation of NATO the USSR tightened its control over its satellite states. In addition to COMINFORM (created in 1947), the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was created in January 1949 to direct the national economies of the Soviet bloc.

**The Warsaw Pact**

After the successful testing of an atomic weapon by the USSR in August 1949, the superpower cooperation which had successfully defeated the Axis powers had turned into the Cold War.

This Cold War became even more definite in May 1955 when West Germany joined NATO (one the condition that it possessed no biological, chemical or nuclear weapons). This did allow West Germany to re-arm in other ways.

In response, on 14th May 1955 eight communist countries agreed in Warsaw, Poland to unify their armed forces under a central command. These were: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. They pledged to support each if required in event of any country being attacked.

Although a joint command structure for the Warsaw Pact armed forces was established, the Soviet Union was completely dominant: the Commander-in-Chief, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, the Chief of Staff and the Commanders-in-Chief for the three army, navy and air force were always Soviet army officers based in Moscow.

The Warsaw Pact allowed the Soviet Union to both strengthen its forces across eastern Europe and to keep the eastern bloc countries in line.

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**Analysis: Who was to blame for starting the Cold War?**

Arguments over who was responsible for the start of the Cold War have divided historians since the late 1940s. Most historians originally placed the blame on Stalin. However, a new group of historians in the 1960s provoked a rethink over the US’s role in starting the conflict. The collapse of communism from 1991 and the subsequent release of previously classified documents led to a further shift in opinion.

**In what ways was Stalin to blame?**

Firstly, some historians argue that communist ideology was expansionist and universal – i.e. the Soviet Union could not co-exist with capitalism, so intended to impose its own system of government throughout the world. Supporting evidence:

* Stalin didn’t keep to agreements made at Yalta and Potsdam – he installed communist governments in Poland, Romania and throughout eastern Europe after WW2. Political opposition was banned and opponents were often jailed or murdered.
* The creation of COMECON ensured each country followed the Soviet model of economic policy
* He used ideological language when condemning the West and justifying his own actions
* The establishment of COMINFORM was a clear sign he intended to undermine capitalist society through national communist parties

Other historians have argued that personalities were the most significant factors in the origins of the Cold War. John Lewis Gaddis suggested that without Stalin it is unlikely the Cold War would ever have taken place. Stalin was the one constant from the pre-war era up to the division of Europe in 1949. He maintained a firm grip on Soviet foreign policy, dictating a more confrontational approach to relations with the West than that advised by several Soviet diplomats.

**In what ways can Stalin’s role be defended?**

Revisionist historians defend Stalin’s actions during the Cold War. They argue that Soviet security concerns at the end of the war were the biggest influence on its policy towards eastern Europe and its former wartime allies.

These concerns stemmed from historical fears about e

**In what ways was the US to blame?**

**In what ways can the US be defended?**

**The National Archives**

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/coldwar/>

**The Cold War Museum**

<http://coldwar.org/>

**The Truman Library**

<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/index.php>

**Profile of Stalin by Simon Sebag Montefiore**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/coldwar/stalin_01.shtml>

**Detailed description of the Cold War**

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/cold_war.htm>

**British Pathé film on the Yalta Conference**

<http://www.britishpathe.com/programmes/day-that-shook-the-world/episode/asc/playlist/23>