

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2011

GCE

Government and Politics 6GP04 4D
Global Political Issues

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General Comments:

The small entries for this unit in January means that comments on the responses are in danger of reflecting trends in particular centres as opposed to general trends that all centres should be aware of. The comments below should be understood in this light.

Question 1

Some less strong responses to this question focused, unhelpfully, not on neo-colonialism but on the longer-term implications of colonialism for countries in the developing world. The strongest responses nevertheless recognised that neo-colonialism is a specifically economic and non-political phenomenon, with good responses explaining how it has widened global inequality by, for instance, creating divisions between core, peripheral and semi-peripheral countries or areas.

Question 2

Very few candidates attempted, as part of their answers to this question, to define humanitarian intervention. This was important because some less strong responses confused humanitarian intervention with the provision of international aid, while others looked at examples that are not 'classic' cases of humanitarian intervention, notably the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That said, strong responses were sometimes able to explain a number of criticisms of humanitarian intervention, showing analytical depth and some theoretical sophistication.

Question 3

A number of responses to this question failed to demonstrate a reliable understanding of the term the 'tragedy of the commons', in which case they struggled to explain its implications for global environmental policy. Stronger responses, to a greater or lesser extent, recognised that the tragedy of the commons highlights the mismatch between state self-interest and the common good, although only a small number of answers were able to explain that such thinking implies that voluntary collective action to deal with environmental issues is very difficult, and perhaps impossible, to bring about.

Question 4

Some responses to this question merely provided a historical account of the birth of the nuclear age and the proliferation of weapons during the Cold War period, with little examination of the reasons behind these developments. Strong responses recognised that in addition to enduring motivations, such as national prestige, other reasons for nuclear proliferation have emerged during the post-Cold War period. Good use was sometimes made of the easier availability of nuclear technology and materials, and particularly of the pressure on certain states to acquire nuclear weapons in order to prevent external intervention, particularly from the USA. Deterrence theory was not always well enough understood or explained.

Question 5

Only the strongest responses to this question distinguished clearly between strategies to reduce climate change and strategies to adapt to climate change, usually by highlighting differences between 'mitigation' and 'adaptation'. Where this was done the costs and perhaps unfeasibility of mitigation tended to be stressed. On the other hand, weak responses sometimes provided little more than a generalised account of international efforts to address the issue of climate change, saying little or nothing about the different strategies that have been proposed or adopted.

Question 6

Strong responses to this question evaluated the impact of the IMF and the World Bank on global poverty in terms of the use of structural adjustment programmes, based on the ideas of the Washington consensus. In the best cases, these accounts were also up-to-date in the sense that they also recognised how SAPs have more recently been modified in the light of criticism. An important discriminator, however, was the extent to which responses evaluated the respective arguments on the basis of empirical evidence. In such a question, candidates certainly do not need comprehensive or detailed knowledge of data, but it is helpful for them to be aware of general trends in global poverty and to be able to illustrate these.

Question 7

There were some very impressive answers to this question that demonstrated a thorough and effective ability to evaluate the various ways in which human rights are protected in the modern world. In such answers, good use was often made of the implications of state sovereignty, the effectiveness of international courts and the difficulty of forcing major states, such as China, Russia and the USA to comply with human rights standards, with particular attention sometimes being given to the 'war on terror'. However, although weaker responses understood the nature of human rights, they often failed to show an adequate understanding of how, and how effectively, human rights are protected.

Question 8

This was a popular question, soundly answered by a good proportion of candidates. Some strong responses demonstrated a thorough and detailed understanding of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis and were able to evaluate its significance, often by reference to either or both the 'war on terror' (and the supposed clash between Islam and the West) or to growing rivalry between the USA and China. Strong responses were also able to highlight the limitations of the 'civilisational' interpretation of such developments. On the other hand, weaker responses were sometimes over-dependent on descriptive accounts of the 'war on terror', seemingly assuming that these shed lights on the notion of a 'clash of civilisations' without explaining how or why they might do so.

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