



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level in History (WHI04/1D)
Paper 4: International Study with
Historical Interpretations
Option 1D: The Cold War and Hot War in
Asia, 1945–90

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Introduction

As with previous series, the candidates for the 2025 series were well-prepared and were able to deploy often extensive knowledge of the period and area of historical interpretation being studied. For detailed feedback on some of the general areas of strength and weakness, it is recommended that centres refer back to the Examiner reports for June 2024 and January 2025. Most of the comments made in these series still apply.

For WHI04 units, the assessment model in Section A asks candidates to evaluate a view in relation to two extracts provided from historians/authors of history and to reach a judgement as to how far they agree with the views presented in the extracts (AO3/AO1). AO3 skills focus on the extract content and the AO1 historical context should be used to validate or challenge the views in the extracts. For Section B, candidates are asked to choose one question from two alternatives and to use their AO1 knowledge and understanding to address the focus of the question in relation to the second-order concept(s) being assessed (causation, consequence, similarity, difference, change, continuity and significance). Both require candidates to write a controlled extended response with an organised argument.

Key areas of note for this series are:

1) There continues to be an increase in the number of candidates who understand how to approach the Section A Interpretation question. Almost all candidates now understand the requirement to discuss the extracts in relation to the view. However, there are some candidates who still use the extracts as evidence for a Section B style response and so fail to discuss the merits of the views in the extracts. The relative value of the AOs for this question are 20 marks for AO3 skills and 5 marks for AO1 skills.

2) It is clear that candidates who plan their answers are able to organise their argument and deploy knowledge that is more precisely selected to substantiate their argument. Candidates do not need to write a response for the whole hour available to them. Those that do, often end up producing very long, sometimes contradictory and less coherent answers than those who can select and deploy sufficient knowledge to further their argument and come to an evaluated judgement. There is no need for candidates to write about everything they know about the focus of the question but to select and deploy with precision. Level 5 for both Sections refers to '*sufficient knowledge... precisely selected*' and in Section B to the argument being '*logical and coherent throughout...communicated with clarity and precision*'.

3) As noted in the two previous series, there are fewer candidates who are using the indicative content as model scaffolds for answering questions. There are still some candidates, however, who are defining every word in the question and using phrases in the generic mark scheme rather than developing an argument from the outset. However, formulaic introductions to Section A are now few and far between and some excellent discussion of extracts for their own value is being seen.

4) Some responses still dismiss the given factor and write about all the other possible factors without evaluating them in relation to the given factor. It is often difficult with these responses to tell what the original question was and leads to conclusions that do not determine relative significance or come to a judgement about the actual wording of the question. Along the same lines, other responses identify an alternative given factor as being more important or more significant but do not develop valid criteria to explain why this is the case. These responses again often ignore the specific wording of the question in the conclusion and it is difficult to determine what the original question was.

5) Centres are to be commended for the amount of content covered with candidates. Some of the best responses are detailed and interesting in the knowledge deployed. However, the deployment of knowledge often has weaknesses. Many candidates spend a great deal of time explaining the context of the period being assessed rather than directly analysing the key issues and features of the time being assessed. Some context may of course be valuable, but the questions are focused on the content in the specification. Also, there continues to be a significant number of responses that are chronologically and factually confused leading to arguments that lack logic, coherence and precision. Referring to point 2 above, this is often in responses where the candidate is attempting to write about 'everything they know'. This does seem to be particularly the case for many WHI04 1C candidates, who continue to confuse the different eras of the Cold War and particularly the different leaders involved at different times.

Please note: that it is recommended that centres look at a selection of Principal Examiner Reports from across the different options within WHI04 1A-1D and previous series to get an overall sense of examiner feedback, centre approaches and candidate achievement. It is also highly recommended that centres read the general Introduction and Section A and B introductions in the Principal Examiner Reports for June 2017. These generic introductions outline the assessment requirements for WHI04 and give an indication of the skills required.

Centres may wish to refer to the *Getting Started* guide that is to be found on the IAL History Pearson Edexcel website. It is also useful to take note of the indicative content in the mark schemes.

Further resources that may be of use are the *Applying Criteria* and *Developing Student's Understanding of Historical Interpretations* documents to be found on the Pearson Edexcel History GCE website along with the Principal Examiner Reports for Paper 1 of the Pearson Edexcel History GCE. The *Applying Criteria* document gives guidance with regard to the application of criteria for the different AOs tested at A level. The GCE Paper 1 Reports will be particularly useful for exemplification of AO3 interpretations skills (but please be aware that there are slight differences within the general Level descriptors and that AO1 is assessed for IAL). Exemplification documents are also available on the Pearson Edexcel History IAL website.

Section A

See above for general comments but it was very pleasing to see some excellent Interpretation responses.

It is worth reminding centres that although candidates are evaluating the extent to which the author's views in the Extracts are convincing, this is not a source evaluation exercise. There is no requirement in the specification for candidates to know any historiography surrounding the debate and candidates are not expected to know about the views of specific historians. In some responses, candidates evaluate the provenance of the Extracts. This is not required and can lead to time wasting in writing about the speculated origins of the books and the author's themselves, for example, making assumptions about nationality and bias. It is very helpful if centres clearly distinguish between AO2 source evaluation in Papers 2 and 3 and the AO3 evaluation of interpretations in Paper 4. One way to do this is to always refer to sources as Sources and interpretations as Extracts or referring to the names of the authors of the Extracts.

Also, candidates do have time to read the Extracts carefully and all the way through. Sometimes candidates only read partial phrases or statements and in doing so infer/suggest views that are actually contradictory to the overall view being presented. As mentioned above, it is not necessary to write for the whole hour available for this Section. Careful reading and planning can lead to a more focused and well organised response.

Question 1

Question 1 required candidates to analyse and evaluate the two Extracts provided while deploying knowledge related to the issues raised in the Extracts to determine whether President Truman dismissed General MacArthur primarily due to political reasons. The author of Extract 1, S. Weintraub, put forward the view that MacArthur undermined President Truman's ability to implement his foreign policy, raising questions with UN allies whether Truman was politically in control of his own government. The author suggests that MacArthur was wilfully disobeying orders about public interference in the running of the Korean War to position himself as a political figure both internationally and domestically. The author of Extract 2, R. Whelan, suggested that it was the Joint Chiefs of Staff who had military reasons for replacing MacArthur and came to a unanimous decision to replace him. The Extract suggests that the JCS did not trust MacArthur, particularly in light of fear of imminent offensive from the Chinese, to respond in a sensible manner, and his clear desire to bomb China. There were fewer candidates this series developing a third strand of the argument and so were able to focus clearly on the two different points of view being developed in the extracts. However, as in previous series taking time to read Extract 2 might have resulted in a more direct discussion of the points of view put forward by Whelan.

Candidates were well prepared for discussion of major themes raised by the Key Topic controversy. There was some excellent knowledge of the tension between Truman and MacArthur in the build-up to MacArthur's dismissal. Most candidates were able to explain the historical context of the viewpoints in the interpretations, and were able to show clear understanding of the basis of the views being outlined in the Extracts. For Extract 1, responses referred to MacArthur's links to the Republican party being perceived to be in contradiction to that of Truman's Democrat position, which was often spoken of in tandem with MacArthur's extreme anti-Communist stance. In addition, many candidates made reference to MacArthur's failure to salute Truman on Wake Island and the

importance of his letter to the House. For Extract 2, responses referred to MacArthur's desire to attack China recklessly, specifically the fear of him using nuclear weapons in such an endeavour. The fact that he was replaced with Ridgeway, seen as a safer option, who had experience on the ground, was also addressed, with many candidates recognising it was a combination of both the JCS's fear and Truman's anger which led to the dismissal of MacArthur. Many candidates were able to contrast the viewpoints in the Extracts well in coming to a judgement as to whether MacArthur was dismissed for political reasons.

Section B

In section B, Q2 was more popular than Q3.

Question 2

Candidates were required to determine whether the impact of the Japanese occupation was the most significant cause of the outbreak of the First Vietnam War in 1946. Many candidates had a very good grasp of the knowledge required to answer the question effectively and mainly used developments outlined in the specification, including the nature of the Japanese occupation growth of Vietnamese nationalism. The most common links to Japanese occupation being the main cause discussed was how they reunited Vietnamese nationalism, thus feeding into the development of the Viet Minh. The most perceptive responses recognised the power vacuum left by the Japanese ousting of the French, which allowed for Ho Chi Minh to declare independence and proclaim the DRV. The best responses focused on the interplay of the emergence of the Viet Minh with the resentment created by French Imperialism, particularly France's attempt to re-establish control post-Second World War. Most of the candidates spoke about the correct time period, however there were several who talked about the First Vietnam War itself, such as Dien Bien Phu and the outcome, rather than remaining focused on the key concept of causation raised in the question.

Question 3

Candidates were required to determine whether US direct intervention in Vietnam under President Johnson in the years 1965-68 was a complete failure. The common themes addressed tended to include the impact of Operation Rolling Thunder and the Tet Offensive. Some students were able to utilise some good knowledge regarding the details of various interventions of the US in Vietnam, focusing on the military aspects, such as Operation Steel Tiger and the failure to destroy the Ho Chi Minh trail. The better responses considered not just the military, but the political and social impact of direct US intervention, to address the question in a more thematic style, which proved more successful. Stronger students were able to appreciate the ambiguous nature of actions, such as the response to the Tet Offensive, with weaker responses simply stating it was a disaster for Johnson and Westmoreland, fuelling more anti-Vietnam protests in the US, whilst more perceptive candidates realised the US army's thwarting of the gains made by the Viet Minh, finished the Viet Minh off as a fighting force. The most common problem with this question was the drift outside the given timeframe and a notable proportion referenced the US intervention under Nixon, the policy of Vietnamisation, and the

eventual withdrawal in 1973.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Section A (AO3/AO1)

- Candidates should aim to interpret both extracts by analysing the issues raised and showing an understanding of the arguments presented by both authors. It is important to show awareness that it is historian's points of view that are the basis of a discussion; referring to the author by name helps this understanding (where there is more than one author, candidates can write the first name with et al after it.)
- Interpretations do not need to be evaluated in the same way as Sources. It is the views in the Extracts themselves that create the basis of the discussion. All the Extracts are 'secondary sources' and this does not need to be explained.
- Candidates should use their own knowledge of the specification content to validate and discuss the interpretations being presented.
- Candidates should come to an overall judgement with regard to the view stated in the question; it is not sufficient just to summarise the views presented in the extracts.

Section B (AO1)

- Read the wording of the questions carefully, particularly if the time period of the question is stated; responses that refer to the wrong time period deploy irrelevant and inaccurate knowledge that does not directly address or only implicitly addresses the question.
- Candidates should provide more precise contextual knowledge as supporting evidence. Use knowledge to provide evidence to support a sustained evaluation in relation to the conceptual focus of the question. Secure chronological knowledge enables candidates to produce a logical and coherent answer.
- Introductions do not need to reflect a large amount of contextual detail; use introductions to establish the foundations of the argument you are about to present and to show that you understand the focus of the question.
- Use conclusions to state the judgement reached clearly and to show the relative significance of or the inter-relationship between key issues discussed in the main body of the essay; leave the examiner in no doubt as to what your judgement is and why.

