

Year 5 History Weighted Assessment 2 – Suggested Approach

How far do Sources A – E support the view that the United States was responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War?

The hypothesis suggests that it was US' aggressive actions which threatened Soviet sphere of influence that caused the outbreak of the Cold War. Sources A and B support this stand. On the other hand, sources that challenge this stand would argue that it was not the USA that was responsible. Rather, it was the USSR's aggressive policy or both superpower's actions that resulted in the Cold War. Sources C, D would align with challenge views and E providing a balanced perspective.

Support

Sources A and B are similar in supporting the hypothesis that US was responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War as the Marshall Plan had heightened Soviet concerns about US aggression, escalating tensions that led to the Cold War. **[Inference of Source B]** In Source B, the Marshall Plan was likened to a bat symbolising the US dollar, bludgeoning the fence of tariff barriers to infringe upon the sovereignty of Western Europe. This reveals Soviet concerns that US was using economic means to expand into Western Europe and undermine Soviet sphere of influence. **[corroboration/cross-reference with Source A]** Source A emphasises the continuity of Soviet concerns about the Marshall Plan in Source B. **[Inference of Source A]** Source A highlights that while the initial reaction by the Soviet Foreign Minister, Molotov, to the Marshall Plan was positive, it did end up raising suspicions from Stalin that it was not intended to aid the Soviet Union but was “a ploy by Truman” to “infiltrate European countries”. Stalin's paranoia that the US was using the Marshall Plan to expand their influence is illustrated in Source B.

Evaluation Paragraph

Upon closer examination, both sources provide a valid support to the hypothesis. **[Contextual knowledge for B]** In Source B, the Soviet Union viewed the Marshall Plan as an extension of the Truman Doctrine to counteract the communist threat and create an informal American empire in Europe (neo-imperialism). With the subsequent Soviet rejection of Marshall Plan and its implementation in Western Europe on April 1948, Soviet concerns about US expansion into Western Europe was confirmed. This had compelled Soviet to implement COMECON as a response to the Marshall Plan to stimulate economic recovery in Eastern Europe in January 1949. **[Purpose]** As such, it was likely that the Soviet newspaper was attempting to discredit the Marshall Plan in the Soviet Union and garner more popular support for COMECON. With this in mind, Source B's utility in highlighting US responsibility might be limited. **[Evaluation for A: cross-reference to enhance B's utility]** Furthermore, given that Source A is an interview with a Senior Official in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, he would be privy to the genuine concerns that the Soviet Union had towards the Marshall Plan and would be able to provide firsthand account of these concerns as the Cold War had ended. Thus, Source A is useful in revealing Soviet motivations in rejecting the Marshall Plan and enhances the validity of Source B's negative portrayal of the Marshall Plan. **[Link back to hypothesis]** As such,

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both sources are useful in showing that US was responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War in heightening Soviet fears about US aggression as confirmed by the Soviet sources.

Challenge

Both Source C and D challenge the hypothesis in showing that the US was not responsible for the Cold War as it was responding to Soviet aggression in expanding its influence in Europe. USSR was the one instigating the US in the Cold War. **[Inference of Source C]** Source C highlights that due to Soviet “misinterpretation of the Yalta decisions”, USSR was expanding with “overwhelming influence in the Balkans” where these territories were subjected to “Russian power” and their “power to maintain very large armies”. This aggressive expansion heightens Soviet threat towards the Western powers. **[corroboration/cross-reference with Source D]** Source D emphasises the continuity of Soviet provocation in Source C and how it directly shaped Kennan’s response to the Soviet Union. **[Inference of Source D]** This is shown in D where Kennan assessed that the Soviet Union did not believe in a “permanent way of existing” with the US (i.e., war with capitalism is inevitable) and “has an elaborate and far-flung apparatus for exertion of its influence in other countries” by resorting to “underhanded methods” (Sovietisation and Salami Tactics).

Evaluation Paragraph

Upon closer examination, both sources provide a valid challenge to the hypothesis. **[Contextual knowledge for C]** Churchill’s telegram to Truman was made in the context of growing Soviet influence in Eastern Europe like in Poland where the Soviet Red Army installed a pro-Soviet provisional government in January 1945. This was deemed to be in violation of the Yalta agreement where free and fair elections were promised. **[Purpose]** As such, Churchill may be trying to forewarn Truman about the growing Soviet presence and highlight the urgency of a coordinated response among the Western powers to retaliate against the Soviet expansion. This shows that rather than US, it was USSR that was to blame for the Cold War. **[Evaluation for D: Link to C as context for D]** In addition, the growing concerns about the Soviet Union revealed in Source C serves as a basis to complement Kennan’s views about the inherent Soviet aggressive tendencies that compels US to react and affirm that “the problem is within our power to solve”. **[Purpose]** As such, it was likely that the intent of Kennan’s telegram was to provide an understanding of the Soviet aggressive tendencies to aid the formulation of US policy to contain Soviet expansionism, emphasising that it was USSR that first provoked the US in the outbreak of the Cold War. **[Link back to hypothesis]** Overall, Source C and D are useful in revealing that the Soviet Union was the one that provoked confrontation in the outbreak of the Cold War as perceived by Churchill and Kennan.

Balance source

Source E is a balanced source where both US and USSR were responsible for the Cold War. On one hand, E challenges the hypothesis by highlighting that US was merely reacting to the perceived Soviet provocation in Eastern Europe “as the first step toward

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Western Europe” and the US then had to respond by “asserting their interest in the zone the Russians deemed vital to their security”. **[corroboration/cross reference to strengthen challenge stand]** US actions stated in E is clarified by Churchill’s view in Source C where Soviet Union was seen to go against the Yalta agreement to subject Eastern Europe to a “combination of Russian power” and “the Communist technique” by maintaining large armies in the region. Similarly, Source D emphasises this by showing that the USSR was resorting to “underhanded methods” and “an elaborate and far-flung apparatus” to exert their influence. **[link to hypothesis]** As such Source E provides an insight, with the help of Source C and D, to why the USA was not purely responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War.

On the other hand, E also supports the hypothesis by highlighting that with US intervening in its sphere of influence, USSR had viewed it as “capitalist encirclement” in “purposefully laying the foundation for anti-Soviet regimes”. **[corroboration/cross reference to strengthen support stand]** Soviet concerns about the US are corroborated by Source A which argues that the Marshall Plan was “a ploy by Truman” to “infiltrate European countries”. Soviet concerns are further emphasized in Source B which portrays the Marshall Plan as a bludgeon to break down tariff barriers and infringe on the sovereignty of Western Europe. Source E thus concludes that nevertheless, the USA cannot be fully absolved of blame since Soviet interests were also perceived to be threatened by US policy.

Conclusion

Overall, a deeper evaluation of the sources has emphasised the validity of both the support and challenge sources as corroborated by Source E with the propensity to view the issue objectively as a journal article published in 1987 where the height of the Cold War rivalry had waned in the context of détente. Source A and B support the hypothesis that US was responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War as the Marshall Plan heightened Soviet concerns about US aggression. However, the Marshall Plan was nonetheless implemented in view of the Soviet Union’s aggressive expansion in Europe in the first place. This is reinforced by firsthand observations from Churchill (Source C) and Kennan (Source D). On the whole, the evaluation of sources would require a modification of hypothesis as supported by Source E as a balanced source in acknowledging both sides. Rather than US bearing sole responsibility for the outbreak of the Cold War, both US and USSR were responsible for misunderstanding each other’s actions as aggressive as emphasised in E where “each felt compelled to undertake defensive measures”, leading to escalation of tensions and confrontation in the Cold War.