



Approaches to part (b) question

A step by step guide to part (b)

1. Read the title of the SBQ first
2. Read the question/hypothesis
3. A quick scan of the sources and **group them into support/challenge sources**. (Highlight impt evidence that shows support/challenge)
4. **Critically evaluate** the sources **as a set**.

A lot of students forget this and go straight to the sources reading it blind, without relating back to the question.

*Note that there may be sources that are **balanced** – has evidence that **both supports and challenges** the hypothesis OR sources that are neutral, neither explicit supports nor challenges the hypothesis (these may be data tables/graphs).

How to group sources “as a set”

- Most obvious way is by looking at the support/challenge of the hypothesis
- Next look for sources that have similar arguments or sources that have completely opposing arguments.
- Look out for sources that have the same provenance (i.e. same country) but are saying different things at different timeframes. These have to be reconciled as well.

How to critically evaluate sources

What does it mean to critically evaluate – **it is to assess a source holistically to ascertain its overall credibility** in relation to the hypothesis.

Some tools: **Reliability, Credibility, Utility**

- Assessing **reliability** of sources: Reliability is essentially testing accuracy of what is being said. Two methods of testing:
 1. Cross referencing to contextual knowledge
 2. Cross referencing to another source that says the same thing or another source that says something completely opposite (provided this source has already been evaluated).
- Assessing **credibility** of sources: essentially referring to trustworthiness of the source. Look at **provenance** for this. Depending on Speaker, Audience, Date, is this trustworthy? Are there vested interests? Usually this enhances your evaluation of reliability of the source content.

*Note that a shady provenance may sometimes be saying something reliable and a trustworthy source may not always be saying something reliable.

How to critically evaluate sources

- Assessing **utility (usefulness)** of sources to the hypothesis:

A very reliable and credible source need not be very useful to the hypothesis. For e.g. it may have a very limited timeframe compared to the question.

Similarly, a biased source nonetheless may be very useful in highlighting a particular context or issue.

In sum, you need to evaluate sources holistically, weighing their **strengths and limitations** in answering the hypothesis.

*Do you need to use all 3 tools? Not necessary but some sources may lend itself nicely to all 3 tools.

An L6 conclusion

- CHOOSE ONE SET OVER THE OTHER:

Reflects the relative merits of the sources as evidence for or against the assertion. Evaluates the set of sources as a whole i.e. collective evaluation on the usefulness of sources.

OR

- MODIFICATION OF HYPOTHESIS

- This method aims to reflect what the sources are saying more accurately. The modification is based on a reasoned evaluation of sources.

We have discussed in previous tutorials how to choose one method over another

Source-Based Case Study

ORIGINS OF THE COLD WAR

(b) How far do Sources A-F support the view that the aim of the Soviet Union was to defend the sovereignty of European nations?

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**The notion of “sovereignty” encapsulates the following ideas:*

- *Independence, self-rule/governance*
- *Ability and agency to make decisions without foreign interference/pressure*

Grouping the sources...

Support	Challenge
A: Soviet government accusing Marshall Plan of compromising European nations' economic and national independence.	B: Stalin pressuring Czech leaders from attending Paris Conference → breaching their sovereignty.
B: Stalin's perception that Marshall Plan was a ploy by Truman to infiltrate Europe.	C: Marshall Plan was to provide aid to Europe. Stalin's prevention of Europe from accepting it implicitly harmed/compromised their sovereignty
F: Marshall Plan seen as infringing on European sovereignty; CMEA adopt resolutions only with consent of countries involved.	D: Marshall Plan was to benefit Europe, prevent them from a state of dependence. Stalin's opposition compromised Europe's ability to recover and gain economic sovereignty.
	E: Stalin directing Eastern European states away from Marshall Plan, unhappy that they were attracted to Marshall Plan.

Grouping the sources...

- ***Source B has elements of both support and challenge – where does it fit best?***
 - *Which source(s) does it pair/group well with? What can we use for cross-referencing later on?*
- Looking at the sources' provenance, it would be better to group A & F in the support set as both are contemporary sources from Soviet origins.
 - Will be easier to evaluate their weaknesses together as a set
 - Although Source B also comes from the Soviet official, it was produced under a different context (post-Cold War), which may belong better in the support set that comprises perspectives antithetical to the official Soviet perspective.

Grouping the sources...

Support set:

- Sources **A and F** support the assertion by presenting how the Soviet's aim was to defend Europe's economic sovereignty from possible American infiltration through the Marshall Plan.

Challenge set:

- Sources **C and D** challenge the assertion by showing how the Soviet aims of preventing Europe from receiving Marshall Aid rendered them economically weak and devastated.
[Economic aims]
- Sources **B and E** challenge the assertion by showing how Stalin aimed to keep Eastern Europe away from American influence in creating a Soviet-friendly buffer zone.
[Geopolitical/security aims]

(1) Introduction

- *Present an overview of the sources' sets. Keep it short and simple.*

Sources A and F support the assertion while Sources B, C, D and E challenges it by presenting Soviet's self-seeking national interests. Within the challenge set, Sources B and E can be paired together which portray the underlying political aims of the USSR, while Sources C and D highlight the underlying Soviet economic aims that motivated their actions in Europe.

(2) Support set

- *Face-value analysis of the sources' claims – present topic sentence and evidence from the sources*

Sources A and F support the assertion by presenting how the Soviet's aim was to defend Europe's economic sovereignty from possible American infiltration through the Marshall Plan.

- Source A states that “The Soviet Government cannot support” the Marshall Plan, because would “stand over and above the countries of Europe and interfer[e] in their internal affairs” which would cause European nations to “lose their former economic and national independence”.
- Source F similarly states that the Marshall Plan “infringes on the sovereignty of countries” and that the Soviet Union had created a similar economic plan that would adopt resolutions only with the consent of the country whose interests are involved”, highlighting the importance of Europe's sovereignty even in the process of postwar reconstruction and disbursement of aid.

(2) Support set

- Evaluation of sources' claims – reliability, credibility, utility.

The claims that Marshall Plan infringed on its European recipients' sovereignty can only be **partially validated by contextual knowledge**.

- On one hand, the Marshall Plan came with “conditionality”; recipients of US economic aid had to agree to open their markets in developing multilateralism and free trade, especially towards US goods. This would mean that European markets would be aligned to the liberal-capitalist West and antithetical to the Soviet bloc. This could be the reason why Stalin in Source B believed that the Marshall Plan was “a ploy by Truman... to infiltrate European countries” economically and how in the Marshall Plan in Source D was seen as “an opportunity to reconstruct Europe in the American image”.
- However, acceptance of the Marshall Plan was left to European leaders decision, without political pressure from the US. This was seen in the case of Eastern Europe and Soviet Union itself – when they did not take up Marshall Plan, the US did not impose their ideology on these economies in coercing them to accept it. This can also be seen in Marshall's speech in Source C that states that it would be “[in]effective for the [the US] Government to draw up unilaterally a programme” for Europe as it “should be a joint one”.

(2) Support set

- Evaluation of sources' claims – reliability, credibility, utility.

Furthermore, the credibility of both Sources are further weakened as they are **both of Soviet origins at the time of the Marshall Plan**, which have **inherent limitations**.

- Source A was produced at the Paris Meeting about the Marshall Plan which the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov had walked out of. In this statement Molotov is justifying why the Soviet Government was rejecting the Marshall Plan. The characterisation of the Marshall Plan as one which would compromise on recipients' sovereignty could have been shaped by the increasing suspicions and hostility between the US and USSR after the end of the Grand Alliance in 1945. Furthermore, with security as its primary priority, US intervention in Europe – much less aid to restore its former enemy Germany – would be interpreted as a threat to the Soviet Union which sought to dissuade other European nations from accepting it.
- Source F is an official communication meant for broadcast within the communist bloc through its newspapers. Not only does it have the motivation to legitimize the CMEA, it also aimed to discredit the West and Marshall Plan, in order to bolster support among the communist states to strengthen it against the West. This was in response to the Marshall Plan and Western Europe's acceptance of it – which was perceived by the Soviets as a compromise to its security buffer.

(2) Support set

- Evaluation of sources' claims – reliability, credibility, utility.

Nonetheless, these sources are useful in presenting the official Soviet perspective and justification of their rejection of Marshall Plan in the late-1940s.

Overall, Sources A and F are weak support sources that mostly support the assertion at face value.

(3) Challenge set

- *Face-value analysis of the sources' claims – present topic sentence and evidence from the sources*

Within the challenge set, Sources C and D challenge the assertion by showing how the Soviet aims of preventing Europe from receiving Marshall Aid rendered them economically weak and devastated.

- Source C alludes to the Soviet Union as the “government which maneuvers to block the recovery of other countries” such as Europe, keeping them in a state of “hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos.”
- Similarly, Source D highlights how the Marshall Plan would “restore [US'] major trading partners, rather than by reducing Europe to a state of dependence”. It was “Stalin’s decision to stand aside from the Marshall Plan” which inevitably kept Eastern Europe weak and prevented their recovery to full independence.

(3) Challenge set

- Evaluation of sources' claims – reliability, credibility, utility.

The claims that Soviet had intentions to keep Europe weak can be **validated by contextual knowledge**.

- Primarily, the Soviet Union wanted to keep Germany economically weak, so that it would not present itself as a security threat to the former's territorial integrity. One of the key disagreements at Potsdam was the postwar arrangement of Germany. Soviets had pressed for heavy postwar reparations from Germany and sought to prevent its re-militarization, while the West sought to strengthen it. The Soviet's aim was shaped by repeated occurrences of Germany invading Russia in both World Wars. Hence, with the end of WWII, the Soviet Union sought to prevent a repeat of such instances and thus had the motivation of keeping Germany (together with the rest of Europe) economically weak so that they would not pose a security threat to their sovereignty.

(3) Challenge set

- Evaluation of sources' claims – reliability, credibility, utility.

Although both sources are from American origin, their credibility is mixed at best.

- In Source C, George Marshall was promoting the Marshall Plan in June 1947 to Europe, with the motivation of obtaining as much participation as possible. This was because the US needed open markets for its exports, of which Europe could provide and the US could access through its conditions attached to the Marshall Plan. Hence it would present the Soviet Union as a threat to Europe's recovery and the Marshall Plan as a solution to its destruction and devastation after the war. Furthermore in 1947, with increasing tensions between the superpowers, it is not surprising that the Soviets were characterised in a negative light, so that Marshall could win over Europe in accepting Marshall Plan. Hence the credibility of Source C is weakened
- Source D is a history book published in the USA in 2005. This source presents an objective account of the developments during the Marshall Plan as it outlines both positive and negative sides to the US motivations in Europe, despite its American origins. Furthermore, it has access to declassified sources after the end of the Cold War, which further strengthens its claims and credibility. Hence Source D is a stronger challenge source.

(3) Challenge set

- Evaluation of sources' claims – reliability, credibility, utility.
- Despite the limitations of Marshall's speech, overall, when read together, C & D still present credible evidence of Soviet's other motivations to keep Europe weak.
- Moreover, Sources C and D are useful in providing an American perspective of Soviet's motivation at that time, reflecting their suspicions of Soviet's true intentions in Europe in the postwar years.

(3) Challenge set

- Face-value analysis of the sources' claims – present topic sentence and evidence from the sources

Sources B and E challenge the assertion by showing how Stalin aimed to keep Eastern Europe away from American influence in creating a Soviet-friendly buffer zone.

- In Source B, “very severe pressure was put on [the Czech Government]... so at the last moment they were prevented... [and] stayed away” from attending the Paris Conference and accepting Marshall Plan.
- Similarly in Source E, Stalin expected the Eastern European states (represented by the ladies at the end of the line) to toe the line of the Soviet’s direction in keeping away from the Marshall Plan. This was reflected how his displeasure was portrayed by the leading lady in front as he led the European states away from “Trumen Et cia” instead of into the shop that was promoting the “Marshall Plan”.

(3) Challenge set

- Evaluation of sources' claims – reliability, credibility, utility.

The claims that Stalin had ulterior motives to prevent Eastern Europe from falling under American influence **can be supported by contextual knowledge**.

- Following the end of WWII, the Soviet's main priority was to maintain its defences and prevent another invasion from its west. With increasing US economic and political influence in the region, the Soviets felt threatened and feared that a pro-US Europe would be detrimental to its political integrity.
- Hence Stalin strove to create a Soviet-friendly buffer zone in Europe through the process of Sovietisation from 1946. This could be seen in the promotion – and later, infiltration – of Soviet-backed governments throughout Eastern Europe, as Stalin sought to achieve the Soviet's sphere of influence.

(3) Challenge set

- *Evaluation of sources' claims – reliability, credibility, utility.*

However, the credibility of the sources are **mixed at best**.

- Source E was created by a British newspaper in 1948. As it did not have access to Soviet sources, its portrayal of Soviet aims were based on its interpretation of developments at that time. While it might be accurate as Stalin indeed rejected the Marshall Plan, there could also be possible motivations to tarnish the Soviet's reputation by implying that Stalin preventing Eastern European states from accepting aid and thereby access to recovery. This could be shaped by the increasing tensions and suspicions held among the Western perspective which interpreted Stalin's actions in a negative light.
- Source B, however, was an account by a senior Soviet official who was a translator in the Foreign Ministry at the time of the Marshall Plan. Not only would he be privy to information and details from the developments at that time, he would also be able to present it in an objective manner in 1997 as the Cold War had ended and he would not have any motivations to prop up the Soviet regime or its leaders. Hence this source has a stronger credibility to its claims.
- **Yet when read together, Source B can confirm the claims made in Source E** about Stalin's intentions to keep Europe from American influences.

(3) Challenge set

- Evaluation of sources' claims – reliability, credibility, utility.

Overall, the challenge sources, while having some limitations, still present relatively strong claims in response to the assertion.

(4) Conclusion

- Choose one set over the other: Reflects the relative merits of the sources as evidence for or against the assertion. Evaluates the set of sources as a whole i.e. collective evaluation on the usefulness of sources.

In conclusion, the challenge sources (B, C, D, E) are preferred. This is because these sources provide a more diverse perspective than the support sources that only reflect the official Soviet view. The challenge set not only offers the perspectives of the West as seen in Source C (USA) and Source E (British), but also Soviet perspective in Source B. Moreover, insights and analysis backed by access to declassified sources and information is presented in Source D, at the post-revisionist time period where views of the roles played by superpowers were more balanced. Furthermore, the challenge sources provide accounts from a wider time period, from 1947 to 2005, compared to the support sources that only focuses on 1947 and 1949, which lacks historical distance. Finally, in terms of **reliability and credibility of claims**, the challenge sources are stronger overall, compared to the support set. In contrast to...(summarise the weaknesses of the support set).