

ACS INDEPENDENT 2025 Y4 HISTORY P2 PRELIM

Suggested Answers

1a)	Study Source A. What is the message of this source? Explain your answer.	5m
L1	Misunderstands/paraphrase with no inference/describes source.	1m
L2	Inference unsupported. The cartoon's message is that Stalin (the USSR) is dominating Berlin in a way that ignores true four-power cooperation, treating the Western Allies as powerless or humiliated underlings rather than equal partners.	2m
L3	Inference supported and explained. Award 4m for <u>one</u> well-explained inference and 5m for an additional inference. Award 3m only for inference with evidence only. The cartoon's message is that Stalin (the USSR) is dominating Berlin in a way that ignores true four-power cooperation, treating the Western Allies (Britain, France, and the USA) as powerless or humiliated underlings rather than equal partners. Inference #1: The cartoonist suggests Stalin is treating the Western Allies as objects to be walked on, showing he is oppressing or dominating them instead of cooperating as equals. This can be seen from how Stalin is shown lounging comfortably in a chair labelled "USSR," with his feet on carpets made from the Western Allies. Inference #2: The setting is labelled "Berlin International Zone Headquarters," referencing the four-power administration agreed after WWII. Hence the cartoon implies the USSR is ignoring the joint administration deal, trying instead to rule Berlin alone for its own benefit, leading to conflict (like the Berlin Blockade that had just begun).	3-5m

b)	Study Sources B and C. Having read Source C, are you surprised by Source B? Explain your answer.	6m
L1	Mismatch	1m
L2	No BOC, Valid comparison but with no evidence/Difference in provenance only. <u>I am not surprised</u> by Source B after reading Source C because their origins explain their differences. Source B is a 1949 Soviet government news release meant as propaganda to blame the West and justify the blockade, while Source C is a 2001 British historian's analysis aiming for balanced, evidence-based explanation.	2m
L3	Surprised or Not Surprised due to difference or similarity in the content of both sources After reading Source C, <u>I am surprised</u> by the content of Source B because the two sources present different explanations for the Berlin Crisis. Source C offers a balanced and analytical perspective, explaining that the Soviet blockade was a calculated response to Western policies such as the introduction of the Deutschmark and the plan to form a separate West German state. This can be seen from "They argued that it was a defensive measure to stop the Soviet zone from being swamped with the devalued Reichsmarks, which the new Deutschmark was replacing." It shows that Stalin used the	3m

	<p>blockade as a pressure tactic, while also acknowledging the Soviet argument that it was a defensive measure against economic disruption.</p> <p>In contrast, Source B completely rejects any Western justification and instead frames the crisis as an aggressive Western plot, claiming “The crisis was planned in Washington behind a smokescreen of anti-Soviet propaganda” and accusing the West of deliberately starving West Berliners. Source B’s message is uncompromisingly accusatory and denies any Soviet responsibility, which is surprising after reading Source C’s nuanced account that acknowledges both sides’ actions and motives. The difference highlights how Source B serves as propaganda by oversimplifying the conflict and ignoring the Western rationale described in Source C.</p>	
L4	<p>As L3 + explained by cross-reference to contextual knowledge or other sources. (Award 5m for a well-explained answer)</p> <p>L3 + Having read Source C, I am further surprised by Source B as Source B is challenged by contextual knowledge. Source B claims the crisis was entirely planned by the USA to harm the USSR, ignoring key facts about Western motivations. In reality, the Western Allies introduced the Deutschmark to stabilise Germany’s economy after years of postwar chaos and hyperinflation. The blockade was the Soviet response to this move, aiming to force the West to abandon plans for a separate West German state. Furthermore, instead of being “forced to yield,” the USA and its allies successfully supplied West Berlin through the Airlift, breaking the blockade without conceding their goals. This evidence contradicts Source B’s claim that Western “war plans” failed because of Soviet strength.</p>	4-5m
L5	<p>Purpose analysis (Award 5m only if impact/ evidence lacking in purpose explanation).</p> <p>Having read Source C, I am not surprised by Source B as they come from different contexts and thus are expected to have different purposes.</p> <p><u>Source B</u> is a Soviet commentary published by TASS in 1949 during the Berlin Crisis. Its provenance as an official Soviet news agency release means it reflects the USSR’s government viewpoint at the height of Cold War tensions. The context is the Berlin Blockade, when the Soviet Union sought to challenge Western control in West Berlin. The audience includes Soviet citizens and the international community, especially those sympathetic to or undecided about the USSR’s position. The main purpose of Source B is to justify Soviet actions by portraying the West, particularly the USA, as aggressors who deliberately planned the crisis to isolate the USSR. The message condemns Western powers for causing suffering in West Berlin through the “self-blockade” and claims the Soviet Union forced the USA to back down. For example, the source states, “The crisis was planned in Washington behind a smokescreen of anti-Soviet propaganda,” and “The USA was forced to yield... their war plans had come to nothing.” The intended impact is to strengthen Soviet domestic support and international legitimacy by casting the USSR as peace-loving and victimized, while depicting the West as hostile and manipulative.</p> <p><u>Source C</u> is an excerpt from a book by a British historian published in 2001, providing a retrospective analysis of the Berlin Crisis. Its provenance as a secondary historical source written long after the events allows it to use a wide range of evidence and hindsight. The context is the post-Cold War scholarly environment, aiming to explain the causes and motivations behind the blockade. The audience is the public and academic readers interested in an objective account. The purpose of Source C is to explain that the Berlin Blockade was a reaction by the Soviets to Western political and economic moves,</p>	5-6m

	<p>specifically the introduction of the Deutschmark and efforts to create a separate West German state. The source notes that Stalin “believed that he could force the Western allies to reconsider the whole German question by applying pressure to their position in West Berlin.” It also acknowledges the Soviet justification that the blockade was “a defensive measure to stop the Soviet zone from being swamped with the devalued Reichsmarks.” The intended impact is to offer a balanced understanding that highlights the complexity of Cold War diplomacy, showing that both sides took strategic actions rather than blaming one side solely.</p> <p>Accept other possible analysis.</p>	
c)	<p>Study Source D. How useful is this source as evidence of USSR’s actions in the Berlin Crisis? Explain your answer.</p>	6m
L1	Inference unsupported/ misinterpretation/describes source only.	1m
L2	Useful/ not useful through limited analysis of provenance.	2m
L3	<p>Useful content analysis, supported with source evidence. Source D is useful in showing USSR is deliberately humiliating the Western Allies in Berlin to provoke war as seen from “The longer the Western Allies remain in Berlin as targets of constant humiliation by the Soviet power”. This is reliable: contextual knowledge confirms that in June 1948 the USSR blockaded all land routes into West Berlin, cutting supplies and aiming to pressure the Allies to withdraw. The Allies responded with the Berlin Airlift to keep the city supplied.</p>	3m
L4	<p>Useful content analysis, supported with source evidence and cross reference to CK or another reliable source/Background Information OR purpose only explained. Award 5m for a well-developed answer (1 CR) Award 4m only for purpose analysis if evidence or intended impact is lacking.</p> <p>Source D is useful in showing USSR is deliberately humiliating the Western Allies in Berlin to provoke war as seen from “The longer the Western Allies remain in Berlin as targets of constant humiliation by the Soviet power”. This is reliable: contextual knowledge confirms that in June 1948 the USSR blockaded all land routes into West Berlin, cutting supplies and aiming to pressure the Allies to withdraw. The Allies responded with the Berlin Airlift to keep the city supplied. Stalin’s strategy can reasonably be interpreted as aiming to humiliate the Allies and test their resolve.</p>	4-5m
L5	<p>L3 + (Content and) purpose analyses to explain usefulness and limitation. Award 6m only if evidence or impact lacking. L3 (usefulness) + Purpose analysis:</p> <p>Source D is limited in usefulness as it has a questionable purpose. The purpose of this American newspaper extract was to persuade its audience that co-operation with the USSR was impossible and to justify possible Western withdrawal from Berlin. Published in September 1948 at the height of the crisis, it uses emotive language like “constant humiliation” and “danger of plunging Europe into another war” to alarm readers and rally support for a hardline stance. Its provenance as an American editorial during the early Cold War means it reflects strong anti-Soviet sentiment and propaganda aims, making its interpretation of Soviet intentions highly questionable even though it describes real tensions in Berlin. Its intended impact was to gain American public’s support for a possible</p>	5-6m

	Western withdrawal from Berlin Due to this ulterior motive, Source D is unreliable and hence is not useful.	
d)	Study Source E. Is the cartoonist a supporter of Soviet policy in Berlin? Explain your answer.	5m
L1	Inference in general/misinterpretation/no purpose	1m
L2	Answer based on valid message/impact, unsupported / context. Yes, the cartoonist is a supporter of the Truman Doctrine as the cartoon shows the USA in a <u>positive way</u> .	2m
L3	Answers on valid message or valid impact, supported. Msg: The cartoonist is not a supporter of Soviet policy in Berlin, as shown by the critical content and message of the source. The cartoon depicts a huge, heavy Soviet figure with a Russian hat and coat sitting on an oversized chair that dominates Berlin, while the Western Allies (France, Britain, and the USA) are squeezed uncomfortably on the edge, struggling to balance. This imagery suggests that the USSR is selfishly imposing its weight and control on the city, leaving the Allies in a powerless, precarious position. The chaotic scene below, with falling packages and money over the crowded city, represents the disruption and hardship caused by the Soviet blockade. By exaggerating the USSR's obstructive and domineering role, the cartoon's message is clearly mocking and criticising Soviet actions in Berlin rather than supporting them. Impact: The intended impact of the cartoonist in drawing this cartoon is to criticise and ridicule the Soviet Union's actions in Berlin during the 1948 blockade, and to generate sympathy for the Western Allies and the people of Berlin. OR through satire, the cartoonist seeks to influence public opinion against the USSR and reinforce support for the Western presence in Berlin, while also drawing attention to the suffering caused by the blockade.	3m
L4	Explains message with evidence, context <u>and</u> intended impact. Award 4m only if impact/evidence/context about the time is lacking. The cartoonist is <u>not a supporter of Soviet policy in Berlin</u> , as shown by the provenance, content, and purpose of the source. Published in July 1948 in the West German satirical magazine Der Tintenfisch, the cartoon targets a West German audience during the Berlin Blockade, when Soviet forces cut off Western access. It depicts a giant, brooding Soviet figure weighing down Berlin on an oversized chair, while the French, British, and American representatives sit uncomfortably on the edge, highlighting Soviet obstruction and domination. The chaotic cityscape below with falling supplies symbolises the disruption caused by the blockade. The purpose is satirical criticism, mocking the USSR as selfish and uncooperative, revealing the cartoonist's clear opposition to Soviet policy in Berlin. The intended impact of the cartoonist in drawing this cartoon is to criticise and ridicule the Soviet Union's actions in Berlin during the 1948 blockade, and to generate sympathy for the Western Allies and the people of Berlin. OR Through satire, the cartoonist seeks to influence public opinion against the USSR and reinforce support for the Western presence in Berlin, while also drawing attention to the suffering caused by the blockade. Accept other valid answers.	4-5m

e)	Study all the sources. “Responsibility for the Berlin Blockade lies solely with the USSR.” How far do the sources support this view? Use the sources and your knowledge to explain your answer.	8m
L1	Inference unsupported or misreading of source	1m
L2	Yes or No, supported by valid source use. Students must explain the evidence provided from each source. Merely quoting evidence will result in the lowest mark in the band.	2-4m
L3	Yes and No, supported by valid source use. Award 5m for 1 yes and no and an additional mark for each subsequent valid source up to a maximum of 7m. Students must explain the evidence provided from each source. Merely quoting evidence will result in the lowest mark in the band. Sources A, C and D support the statement. Source A (American cartoon, June 29, 1948): This source strongly supports the view that responsibility lies solely with the USSR. The cartoon shows Stalin relaxing in a chair marked “USSR,” using the Western Allies as carpets beneath his feet in Berlin Headquarters, symbolising Soviet domination and bad faith in the Four-Power administration. It mocks the idea of shared rule by showing the USSR oppressing the others. The intended message is that the crisis is caused by Soviet aggression and refusal to cooperate, leaving no blame for the Western Allies. The exaggeration and satire make the Soviet Union appear entirely responsible for undermining joint governance in Berlin. Source C (British historian, 2001): Can be used to support or refute the statement This source offers a balanced view that partially supports and partially challenges the statement. It explains the Western Allies were determined to form a separate West German state and introduced the Deutschmark into Berlin on 23 June 1948—provoking Stalin. It notes the Soviets used this as their “excuse” to impose the blockade, calling it a defensive measure. While it recognises Stalin applied pressure deliberately, it also highlights Western actions (currency reform) as a real trigger. Therefore, it suggests responsibility Source D (American newspaper, 12 September 1948): This source supports the view that responsibility lies with the USSR. It accuses Moscow of trying to provoke the Western Allies into declaring war and subjecting them to “constant humiliation,” making cooperation impossible. The language is strongly anti-Soviet, portraying the USSR as the aggressor who created the crisis. It places the blame entirely on Soviet policy, with no mention of any Western contribution to tensions, clearly reinforcing the idea that the USSR alone is responsible. However, Sources B, C, E and F do not support the statement. Source B (Soviet TASS commentary, 1949): This source strongly challenges the view that the USSR alone was responsible. Instead, it blames the Western Allies, claiming the crisis was “planned in Washington behind a smokescreen of anti-Soviet propaganda” and accusing the West of creating a “self-blockade” that starved Berliners. It argues the Western powers risked war and portrays the USSR as preventing American war plans. This is clear Soviet propaganda, intended to shift blame away from the USSR and accuse the West of aggression. It offers no acknowledgement of Soviet responsibility for the blockade, directly contradicting the idea that the USSR was solely to blame. Source E (West German satirical magazine, July 1948): This cartoon supports the view that the USSR bears responsibility. It shows a massive Soviet figure sitting heavily above	5-7m

	<p>Berlin while the Western Allies cling uncomfortably to the edge of a giant chair, symbolising the Soviet Union dominating the city and making Allied administration impossible. The message is critical of Soviet policy during the blockade, mocking the USSR as an obstructive, selfish power. There is no suggestion of Western blame, reinforcing the idea that responsibility lies with the USSR.</p> <p>Source F (German-American Heritage Museum, 2024): This source challenges the view that responsibility lies solely with the USSR by recognising shared causes. It states the blockade “was not a complete surprise” due to rising tensions, especially the failed attempt at joint currency reform, which would have removed Soviet economic control and allowed Marshall Plan aid. It acknowledges that this was seen by Moscow as a provocation or threat, making the blockade the “final straw.” This suggests both sides contributed to the crisis, arguing against placing sole blame on the USSR.</p>	
	<p>For L2 and L3 award a bonus of 1m for use of contextual knowledge to question a source in relation to its reliability, sufficiency, etc.</p> <p><u>Source E is unreliable</u> as its content and purpose are openly satirical and biased. The cartoon from Der Tintenfisch, a West German satirical magazine in July 1948, exaggerates the USSR’s role by depicting a giant Soviet figure crushing Berlin while the Western Allies cling helplessly to the edge, symbolising Soviet domination and obstruction. Its purpose is not to provide a balanced or factual account but to criticise and mock Soviet policy, rallying West German opinion against the USSR during the Berlin Blockade. Contextual knowledge shows that although the Soviet Union did impose a blockade, Western actions—especially the introduction of the Deutschmark in West Berlin without Soviet agreement—also fuelled tensions. By ignoring these Western provocations and portraying the USSR as solely responsible, the cartoon simplifies and distorts the complex causes of the crisis, making it an unreliable source for understanding the full reality of events. OR</p> <p><u>Source A is unreliable</u> as its content and purpose are strongly biased and propagandistic. The American cartoon published on June 29, 1948, shows Stalin lounging in a chair labelled “USSR” with the Western Allies as carpets under his feet, mocking the idea of Four-Power cooperation and depicting the USSR as completely domineering and uncooperative. Its purpose was to persuade an American audience that the crisis was entirely the result of Soviet aggression, rallying public support for resisting Soviet pressure during the Berlin Blockade. Contextual knowledge shows that while the USSR did impose the blockade, the Western Allies had provoked tensions by introducing the new Deutschmark into West Berlin without Soviet agreement, threatening Soviet economic control. The cartoon ignores this context and simplifies the situation to blame the USSR alone, making it unreliable for understanding the more complex, shared causes of the Berlin Crisis.</p> <p>Accept other possible answers. Sources that cannot be analysed for reliability here: D</p>	+1

Essay LORMS (Levels of Response Marking Scheme)

Levels	Descriptors	Marks
L1	Identifies/Describes given or other reasons (Award 1 mark for identifying one reason, 2 marks for identifying 2 or more. Award 2 marks for describing one reason and 3 marks for describing 2 or more.)	1 – 3 marks
L2	Explains given reason OR other reasons (Award 4 marks for an explanation of given reason OR other reason, and an additional mark for additional reasons/ supporting detail, to a maximum of 5 marks.)	4 – 5 marks
L3	Explains given reason AND other reasons (Award 6 marks for an explanation of given AND other reason, and additional mark(s) for further supporting detail or reason, to a maximum of 8 marks (which include given reason).	6 – 8 marks
	Award an additional 2 marks (to a maximum of 10 marks) for a balanced conclusion based on an explicit consideration of <u>the relative importance of different reasons</u>. The total marks to be awarded for the response will be based on marks obtained at L3 + 2 bonus marks: i.e. L3/6+2; L3/7+2; L3/8+2).	
	i.e. for L3 Explains given reason AND other reasons Response can get up to 8 marks through two routes. (a) 2 explained reasons that are well-developed with depth of treatment OR (b) 3 explained reasons - with breadth of coverage but less depth of treatment Valid Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Award additional 2 marks •Total marks to be awarded: Marks obtained at L3 + 2 bonus marks 	

2. “The Lend-Lease support offered by America was the most important reason for the defeat of the Germans in World War Two.” How far do you agree?

The 1941 Lend-Lease programme provided vital aid to Britain and the Soviet Union, supporting the Allied war effort. However, key factors like the Battle of the Atlantic, British technology, and Soviet victories on the Eastern Front were also crucial. This essay argues that Lend-Lease was important but not the decisive factor in Germany's defeat.

The Lend-Lease programme was a major factor because it ensured the Allies had the resources to continue fighting. By 1941, Britain was running out of money and materials. American Lend-Lease support provided food, weapons, ships, and vehicles. For example, the UK received over \$30 billion worth of aid. The Soviet Union also received crucial supplies, including trucks, locomotives, and industrial equipment, which helped maintain production and troop mobility. Without this external support, both Britain and the USSR would have struggled to sustain their military

efforts. Lend-Lease therefore helped keep the Allied powers in the war long enough to turn the tide.

However, the Battle of the Atlantic was equally vital, as it ensured the survival of Britain and the delivery of Lend-Lease supplies. Between 1939 and 1945, German U-boats sought to cut off Britain's sea supply lines. If the Atlantic had been lost, Britain would have starved and the war effort would have collapsed. Yet, due to Allied advances in sonar, convoy systems, and code-breaking (e.g., Bletchley Park's work on the Enigma), the U-boat threat was eventually neutralised by 1943. The victory in the Atlantic made it possible for Lend-Lease aid to arrive and for Allied troops to later land in Europe. The Battle of the Atlantic contributed to Germany's defeat by keeping Britain supplied and in the war. Neutralising the U-boat threat by 1943 allowed Lend-Lease aid and troops to reach Europe, enabling Allied offensives like D-Day that ultimately crushed Germany.

British technological advantages also helped halt early German advances. The most notable example was the use of radar during the Battle of Britain in 1940, which allowed the RAF to track and intercept incoming German aircraft. This innovation enabled Britain to survive Hitler's aerial assault, preventing Operation Sea Lion (the planned German invasion of Britain). Britain's use of radar in 1940 helped prevent Germany from invading, keeping Britain in the war. This survival allowed time for U.S. Lend-Lease support and future Allied offensives, which were crucial in Germany's eventual defeat. Without British resistance in 1940, Germany might have secured dominance in Western Europe before Lend-Lease even began. Radar and local determination therefore bought time for American involvement to take effect.

Most crucially, Germany was defeated on the Eastern Front by the Soviet Union. The turning point was the Battle of Stalingrad (1942–43), where over 1 million Soviet soldiers fought fiercely to encircle and defeat the German 6th Army. This was followed by further Soviet advances in battles such as Kursk and Operation Bagration. The USSR absorbed the bulk of German military pressure, with around 80% of German casualties occurring on the Eastern Front. While Lend-Lease helped support Soviet logistics, the main credit goes to Soviet manpower, sacrifice, and strategic planning. Germany's defeat on the Eastern Front was decisive, as battles like Stalingrad and Kursk destroyed much of its army and forced a war of attrition. The Soviet advance drained German resources and manpower, leaving Germany too weak to resist Allied offensives in the West.

Conclusion:

Lend-Lease was a crucial enabling factor, especially in keeping Britain and the USSR supplied, but it was not the most decisive cause of Germany's defeat. The Battle of the Atlantic protected Britain from collapse, radar technology helped repel early invasions, and the Soviet victory in the East inflicted the most serious damage on the German war machine. In terms of scale, severity, and direct military impact, Soviet resistance on the Eastern Front remains the most important reason for the Allied victory. Lend-Lease helped the Allies fight, but it was battles like Stalingrad that helped them win.

3. “South Vietnam was unstable between 1954–1960 because of Diem’s unpopular leadership.” How far do you agree?

Between 1954 and 1960, South Vietnam became increasingly unstable due to President Ngo Dinh Diem's unpopular authoritarian rule. This instability was also fuelled by the refusal to hold elections, Cold War interference, and a growing communist insurgency backed by the North.

One major reason for instability was Diem’s unpopular leadership. Diem came to power in 1955 with U.S. backing but quickly alienated large segments of the population. His regime was marked by nepotism, as he placed family members in key government and military positions regardless of their competence. Corruption was widespread, and Diem showed little interest in addressing land inequality, a major source of discontent in rural areas. His failure to implement meaningful land reform and his oppressive tactics against critics and Buddhists led many to see his rule as self-serving and illegitimate. This alienation of the population created fertile ground for resistance and rebellion.

Diem also contributed to instability through his refusal to allow democratic processes. Under the 1954 Geneva Accords, national elections were supposed to be held in 1956 to unify Vietnam. Diem, with U.S. support, refused to participate in these elections out of fear that Ho Chi Minh would win. This decision meant that Vietnam remained divided, and Diem’s government lost legitimacy in the eyes of many Vietnamese, especially in the South. His regime was seen as a puppet of the West, deepening resentment and reducing public support.

The Viet Cong played a major role in destabilizing South Vietnam between 1954 and 1960 by launching guerrilla attacks and undermining the South Vietnamese government’s authority in rural areas. Their insurgency exploited local dissatisfaction, weakening government control and spreading fear among civilians. For example, in the strategic region of the Mekong Delta, the Viet Cong targeted government officials and village leaders through assassinations and intimidation campaigns, effectively disrupting rural administration and gaining support from the local population. Supported ideologically and logistically by North Vietnam, the Viet Cong’s growing presence fuelled violence and unrest, deepening the political crisis and contributing to widespread instability beyond just internal governance problems.

Another significant cause of instability in South Vietnam was the establishment of Force 559 by North Vietnam in 1959. This unit was tasked with developing and maintaining the supply routes that would later become the Ho Chi Minh Trail. These covert pathways ran through Laos and Cambodia and allowed the North to send weapons, manpower, and supplies to communist insurgents (the Viet Cong) operating in the South. While Diem’s unpopular leadership triggered unrest, the creation of Force 559 marked the beginning of a coordinated and sustained campaign by the North to destabilise the South. This meant that South Vietnam was not only facing domestic dissatisfaction but also a growing military threat backed by an organised external enemy. The increased violence and infiltration in rural areas contributed to the overall sense of insecurity, showing that instability was not just caused by Diem’s internal failings, but also by a larger Cold War conflict playing out through direct Northern intervention.

Conclusion:

Diem's unpopular leadership, marked by repression, corruption, and refusal to reform, was a major short-term cause of instability. However, in the long term, structural divisions between North and South Vietnam, Cold War pressures, and the growth of communist insurgency played equally or greater roles in destabilising South Vietnam. While Diem's leadership accelerated unrest, the deeper causes of instability lay in the unresolved issues of national division and ideological conflict. Therefore, the claim is only partly valid—Diem was a key factor, but not the sole or most fundamental cause.

4. Economic factors were mainly responsible for the end of the Cold War in Europe.” How far do you agree?

The Cold War in Europe ended in the late 1980s and early 1990s after decades of East–West rivalry. This essay argues that the Soviet Union's economic weakness was the main cause, as it drove internal reforms, eroded communist legitimacy, and forced retreats from Eastern Europe, while political reforms like Glasnost and external pressures played secondary roles.

Possible factors:

The primary reason for the Cold War's end was the severe economic decline in the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the USSR struggled with low productivity, outdated technology, and a bloated defence budget. Military spending consumed up to 25% of Soviet GDP, especially in response to American initiatives like the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI or "Star Wars"). Meanwhile, the Soviet command economy failed to meet basic consumer needs, leading to shortages, inflation, and falling living standards. This prolonged economic crisis created deep dissatisfaction among the Soviet public and weakened the regime's ability to project power in Europe. It also made continued confrontation with the West unsustainable, pushing leaders to seek arms reduction and diplomatic compromise. The USSR's economic decline ended the Cold War by making sustained rivalry with the West impossible. Mounting military costs and a failing economy forced Soviet leaders to pursue arms reduction and withdraw from Eastern Europe, accelerating the collapse of communist control.

Gorbachev's economic reforms, particularly Perestroika, were a direct response to these weaknesses—but ultimately failed. Launched in 1986, Perestroika (economic restructuring) aimed to introduce limited market reforms to revitalise the economy. However, the reforms were poorly planned and inconsistently applied, causing confusion and production breakdowns. Instead of improving the economy, Perestroika accelerated its decline, damaging industrial output and worsening food shortages. The failure of these reforms made it clear that the Soviet system was no longer viable, further eroding the legitimacy of the Communist Party and strengthening calls for change within and beyond the USSR. This failure highlighted the system's unsustainability, fuelling internal discontent and weakening Soviet control over Eastern Europe, contributing to the Cold War's end.

Although economic factors triggered reform, political changes also played an important supporting role. Glasnost played a crucial role in the end of the Cold War by exposing the weaknesses of the Soviet system and empowering calls for change. Introduced in the mid-1980s, it relaxed censorship, allowed open debate, and revealed the scale of government corruption, economic failure, and historical atrocities such as Stalin's purges. This transparency eroded fear of the Communist Party and encouraged popular protests across the USSR, while also inspiring pro-democracy movements in Eastern Europe, such as in Poland and East Germany. As public pressure grew, the Soviet regime found it increasingly difficult to maintain control, accelerating both internal collapse and the withdrawal from Eastern Europe.

Gorbachev's "New Thinking" in foreign policy was pivotal in ending the Cold War, as it fundamentally shifted the USSR's approach to international relations and the Eastern Bloc. Moving away from the confrontational stance of previous leaders, Gorbachev emphasised cooperation with the West, nuclear disarmament, and the abandonment of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which had justified Soviet military intervention in satellite states. By signalling that the USSR would no longer use force to maintain communist regimes, Gorbachev empowered reformers and protest movements across Eastern Europe. This led to a wave of peaceful revolutions in 1989, including the fall of the Berlin Wall, as regimes in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany collapsed without Soviet resistance. This policy not only dismantled the Soviet sphere of influence but also demonstrated a commitment to ending the East-West confrontation, accelerating the Cold War's conclusion.

External pressures also contributed to the end of the Cold War. President Reagan's policies, including "Reaganomics" and the restarting of the arms race, placed significant external pressure on the Soviet Union and contributed to the end of the Cold War. Reaganomics revitalised the U.S. economy through tax cuts, deregulation, and increased military spending, allowing the United States to sustain a massive arms buildup. The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe escalated the arms race, forcing the USSR to compete despite its faltering economy. This military and economic pressure exposed the Soviet Union's inability to match U.S. spending without crippling its domestic economy, compelling Gorbachev to seek arms reduction agreements and ultimately contributing to the Soviet retreat from Cold War confrontation.

Conclusion:

Economic factors were the foundation of the Cold War's end. The USSR's chronic economic failures and the collapse of Perestroika reforms directly led to political liberalisation, military withdrawal from Eastern Europe, and eventual Soviet dissolution. While *glasnost*, "New Thinking", and external pressures shaped the pace and nature of the Cold War's conclusion, it was the economic crisis that made reform inevitable. Therefore, economic factors were not only the main reason—but the decisive cause—behind the Cold War's end in Europe.