Cold War and Decolonization

AP World History: Modern

Setting the Stage for the Cold War

Unit 8 covers the period after 1945, and two processes run through it at once: a **global ideological rivalry** and the **end of empire**, or **decolonization** . Study their causes and effects, their interaction and the choices made by local actors; not every question requires both processes.

Hopes for greater self-government were **largely unfulfilled after World War I**. In the years following World War II, **increasing anti-imperialist sentiment** built momentum in colonised regions, contributed to independence and the restructuring of states. European powers' wartime political and economic weakening reduced their ability to maintain empires. Nationalist organisation and demands for control of resources also mattered; change was neither automatic nor uniform.

At the same time, the **technological and economic gains** made during World War II by the victorious nations **shifted the global balance of power**. This is the historical context the CED asks for: the war did not just destroy, it redistributed capability.

The Cold War

The shifted balance **rapidly evolved into the Cold War** - a power rivalry centred on the United States and Soviet Union, involving an **ideological struggle** between **capitalism** and **communism** . The United States was a democracy and the Soviet Union an authoritarian communist state; this does not mean every U.S.-supported government was democratic. The superpowers avoided an open full-scale war against one another while engaging in arms competition, intervention and support for allies.

The CED insists that this was not a world of only two options. Groups and individuals - including the **Non-Aligned Movement** - **opposed and promoted alternatives** to the existing economic, political, and social order. Leaders such as Sukarno in Indonesia and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana sought room for independent action. Non-alignment did not mean no interests, no relations with either bloc or no influence from the Cold War. Local governments and movements had their own aims; they were not merely puppets. Include non-alignment when relevant to the prompt, not as an automatic scoring bonus.

Effects of the Cold War

The rivalry produced concrete institutions and conflicts:

- **New military alliances** - **NATO** and the **Warsaw Pact** .
- **Nuclear proliferation** - the spread of nuclear weapons to more states.
- **Proxy wars** between and within states, in which the two blocs supported opposing sides in conflicts elsewhere rather than fighting each other directly.

Compare how each superpower sought influence using specific evidence. NATO and the Warsaw Pact illustrate military alliances; the U.S. Marshall Plan illustrates economic aid for postwar European recovery and influence. Alliances, aid and interventions were distinct tools, not identical programmes in every region. **Deterrence** through nuclear threats encouraged efforts to avoid direct superpower war and to limit proliferation; they did not eliminate conventional wars. Examples of proxy conflicts include the Korean War, the Angolan Civil War and the Sandinista–Contras conflict in Nicaragua. External support interacted with local aims and disputes.

MILITARY ALLIANCES	NATO and the Warsaw Pact organised military cooperation within rival blocs.
NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION	Weapons spread to more states; threats of retaliation encouraged deterrence and efforts to limit proliferation.
PROXY CONFLICTS	Rival powers supported opposing sides, including in Korea, Angola and Nicaragua. Local aims also mattered.

Non-aligned leaders sought room for independent action. States and movements were not merely passive extensions of two superpowers.

Spread of Communism After 1900

Two examinable threads run here. First, **China**: as a result of **internal tension** and **Japanese aggression** , Chinese communists seized power, and established communist rule in China in 1949. Distinguish causes of gaining power from consequences of later policies.

Second, **state control of the economy**. As in the Soviet Five Year Plans of Unit 7, the Chinese government controlled the national economy through the **Great Leap Forward** , implementing repressive policies with severe **costs to the popula-**

tion, including devastating famine. State mobilisation aimed to transform production; the aim and the population's experience must be distinguished. Comparison with Soviet planning can help explain a shared state role, but no universal exam question or identical outcome follows.

Beyond these, **movements to redistribute land and resources** developed within states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, some advocating communism or socialism and some not. Land reform is not identical to communist revolution. Land reform in Indian states such as Kerala and the White Revolution in Iran illustrate why redistribution alone does not prove a government was communist. Some postcolonial African leaders were attracted to socialism as a development strategy, a rejection of colonial capitalist exploitation or a route to outside support; motives varied by case.

Decolonization After 1900

Negotiation	Political organisation and negotiated transfer of power	India; the Gold Coast; French West Africa
Armed struggle	Anti-colonial fighting played a central role in independence	Algeria; Angola; Vietnam

Methods could overlap. Negotiated transfer did not guarantee an absence of violence.

Compare the process; neither category determines every later political or economic outcome.

Methods could overlap; compare particular processes and avoid automatic outcome claims

Nationalist leaders and parties in Asia and Africa sought varying degrees of autonomy within, or independence from, imperial rule. The examinable set of examples includes the Indian National Congress, Ho Chi Minh in French Indochina, Kwame Nkrumah in the Gold Coast, and Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt.

After World War II, **some colonies negotiated their independence** while **others achieved it through armed struggle**. India and the Gold Coast are the standard negotiated cases; Angola, Vietnam, and Algeria illustrative armed cases. Negotiation could coexist with protest, repression and violence. British India's negotiated transfer was accompanied by partition and mass violence; "negotiated" does not mean peaceful in every respect. Armed struggle could also end in negotiations; the categories are not mutually exclusive life histories.

A third strand is easily missed: **regional, religious, and ethnic movements** challenged both colonial rule and the **inherited imperial boundaries** those empires left behind. The Muslim League in British India and the Biafra secessionist movement in Nigeria illustrate disputes over national identity and territorial authority. Boundaries could contribute to conflict, but competition for power, resources and outside intervention could also matter. No single phrase explains every conflict.

Newly Independent States

The **redrawing of political boundaries** after colonial withdrawal led to the creation of new states, and in some cases to **conflict, population displacement, and resettlement**. The **partition** of British India and creation of Pakistan illustrate state formation, violence and large-scale displacement. Territorial and demographic changes should be explained together without treating all migrants as having the same experience.

Economically, governments in newly independent states **often took a strong role in guiding economic life to promote development** - examples include Nasser's development policies in Egypt and Nyerere's modernisation in Tanzania. The strong state role can be compared with earlier economic intervention, but policies, political systems and results varied; state direction alone does not establish communist rule.

There was also a reverse flow of people: the **migration of former colonial subjects to imperial metropoles** - to former colonising countries, or **metropoles** , usually to major cities - which maintained cultural and economic ties between the former colony and the former colonial power long after independence. Examples include South Asians moving to Britain and Algerians moving to France. Work, family and existing links can help explain migration; it is not automatically caused by an inherited border.

TERRITORY AND DEMOGRAPHY	Redrawn boundaries created states and could contribute to conflict, displacement and resettlement. Partition of British India is an example.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	Governments often directed economic life to promote development. Political choices and development goals shaped policy.
CONTINUING CONNECTIONS	Migration to former imperial countries maintained cultural and economic links. Work, family and prior ties could help explain movement.

Related features of decolonization require distinct explanations.
Borders did not automatically cause every policy or migration.

Global Resistance to Established Power Structures

Although conflict dominated much of the twentieth century, many individuals and groups - **including states** - opposed that trend. The CED names three distinct patterns, and they should not be blurred:

- Groups and individuals **challenged the wars** of the century, and some - **Mohandas Gandhi** , **Martin Luther King Jr.** · · , and **Nelson Mandela** - **promoted non-violence** as a method of change.
- **Militaries and militarised states** often responded to the proliferation of conflicts in ways that **further intensified** them.
- Some movements **used violence against civilians** in an effort to achieve political aims.

Methods could change over time. The syllabus lists Mandela among leaders associated with nonviolence, but he also helped establish and lead the ANC's armed wing in 1961. Do not present his whole career as exclusively nonviolent. Militarised states and movements targeting civilians are distinct categories, not a single kind of actor. Choose examples that fit the question rather than assuming every response needs all patterns.

NONVIOLENT CAMPAIGNS	Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. used organised nonviolent resistance to challenge established power.
MILITARISED STATES	Military repression and weapons buildups could intensify conflict; these were state responses, not all resistance movements.
MOVEMENTS TARGETING CIVILIANS	Some movements used violence against civilians for political aims. Distinguish their targets and methods from other categories.

Methods could change. Mandela is associated with nonviolence but also helped establish and lead the ANC's armed wing in 1961.

End of the Cold War

The CED gives a compound cause here too: advances in **United States military and technological development**, the Soviet Union's **costly and ultimately failed invasion of Afghanistan**, **public discontent** , and **economic problems** within the Soviet system.

These causes interacted. Military competition could increase pressure on a system facing economic problems and public discontent; the Afghanistan war added costs and damaged authority. The syllabus list does not assign weights, and an invasion abroad is not simply an internal event. Evaluate relative importance through evidence and mechanisms, not the number of bullets in a list.

Causation in the Age of the Cold War

An **extent** judgement assesses how far a claim is supported and qualifies its limits. It is not inherently a comparison word: use the relationship the prompt asks for. To compare Cold War effects across hemispheres, select a shared feature and explain specific examples in both. The Korean War and the Nicaragua conflict show outside support interacting with local conflicts, but their origins, actors and outcomes were not identical.

Original worked comparison. Compare one method of achieving independence in the Gold Coast and Algeria after 1945.

Worked check. In the Gold Coast, nationalist political organisation and negotiations accompanied the transfer of power from Britain. In Algeria, armed struggle against French rule was central to the process. Both sought an end to colonial control, but the relative role of prolonged anti-colonial war differed. This does not prove that negotiation guarantees stability or armed struggle determines the new state's entire political future.

Worked practice

All tasks are original. Attempt before reading the checks; these are focused skill exercises, not full essays or guaranteed mark formulas.

1. Political and economic causes. Identify one political and one economic factor encouraging African decolonization after 1945. Explain how one could weaken imperial control.

Check. Nationalist mobilisation challenged colonial authority; European economic strain after World War II reduced the resources available to maintain empire. Linking reduced resources to the costs of administration and coercion explains a mechanism. The two labels alone do not explain every colony's path.

2. Nuclear technology. Explain how nuclear weapons could discourage direct superpower war while conflict continued elsewhere.

Check. Fear of catastrophic retaliation increased the costs of direct war. Superpowers could nevertheless provide military aid and support opposing sides in local conflicts. Deterrence did not make the world peaceful or remove local actors' aims.

3. Source and inference. Paraphrase of the documented Marshall Plan context, not a quotation: U.S. leaders proposed aid to help Europe recover and stabilise after World War II. Explain one plausible U.S. objective and one limit of using a U.S. policy statement to establish all recipients' experiences.

Check. Recovery and political stability could support U.S. economic and strategic influence. An official statement reveals declared aims; it does not by itself prove how every recipient experienced the programme or that reconstruction was the only motive. Corroborate consequences with other evidence.

4. Test a causal claim. Assess: "Inherited borders caused government economic planning and migration to former imperial countries." Distinguish the three processes.

Check. Border changes could contribute to territorial conflict and displacement. Economic planning could reflect development goals and political choices; migration could reflect work, family and existing colonial links. These are related aspects of decolonization with distinct mechanisms, not three automatic results of a line on a map.

5. Weigh causes. A student says: "The syllabus has more internal than external causes of the end of the Cold War, so internal causes were necessarily more important." Explain the flaw and construct a better causal link.

Check. Counting entries does not measure historical importance. For example, military competition and the Afghanistan war increased pressures on a Soviet system already facing economic weakness and public discontent. A judgement must explain mechanisms and use evidence; it cannot derive weights from list length.

Exam tips

Follow the command, period and scope. Use particular evidence to explain a relationship, compare cases on a shared feature and qualify universal claims. Naming three effects is not automatically better than explaining one when one is requested. Non-alignment, inherited borders and the word "because" carry no automatic marks. Do not infer motives, outcomes or causal weights merely from a syllabus category.

Sources and demand grounding

Scope: local AP World History CED topics 8.1–8.9, PDF pages 151–160 (printed 144–153), including the economic-development and migration continuation on PDF page 157. Local 2024 set 2 SAQ 4 and official guidelines (QP PDF page 4; scheme pages 8–9) were read for political/economic decolonization factors and adoption of socialist policies. Local 2025 set 2 SAQ 4B and its scheme (QP PDF page 5; scheme page 8) were read for nuclear technology and international relations. The practice above is original, not an attributed released question.

College Board's May 2027 update changes exam presentation while retaining course content and skills; older no-stimulus questions are demand evidence, not the current template. The U.S. National Archives' Marshall Plan document and transcript supports the aid context and source-purpose exercise. The Nelson Mandela Foundation's biography supplies the qualification about armed struggle in 1961. No invented quotation, full-mark guarantee, causal ranking or numerical loss estimate is used.

Vocabulary card meanings

increasing anti-imperialist sentiment: Growing opposition to rule by foreign empires. technological and economic gains: Advances in tools and in wealth during the Cold War decades. ideological struggle: The contest between rival systems of political belief. New military alliances: Blocs such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Nuclear proliferation: The spread of nuclear weapons to more states. Proxy wars: Conflicts in which the superpowers backed opposite local sides. internal tension: Strains inside a country or a bloc, not only between enemies. Japanese aggression: Japan's military expansion in East Asia before and during the Second World War. Great Leap Forward: Mao's campaign of rapid collectivisation and backyard industry, followed by famine. Nationalist leaders and parties: People and organisations that led independence movements. inherited imperial boundaries: Borders drawn by empires and kept by new states. Mohandas Gandhi: The Indian leader who organised mass nonviolent resistance to British rule. Martin Luther King Jr.: The American minister who led nonviolent protest against racial segregation. Nelson Mandela: The South African leader who opposed apartheid and later became president. promoted non-violence: Urged resistance that refuses to kill or to answer force with force. public discontent: Widespread unhappiness with a government or an economic system. economic problems: Difficulties such as debt, inflation, or unemployment. decolonization: The ending of rule by an outside empire after 1945, which did not create a new state in every territory. capitalism: An economy based on private ownership and market exchange. Deterrence: Threatening terrible retaliation so that an enemy will not attack. partition: Dividing a territory into separate states, as in India and Pakistan.