

Cold War and Decolonization

AP World History ■ Unit 8

AP World History



How did global rivalry interact with local choices?

Cold War and decolonization

Explain a particular relationship using evidence. Distinguish global pressures from local aims, the method of gaining independence from later outcomes, and an official policy's purpose from its effects.

Scope: CED topics 8.1–8.9. Original tasks practise historical demands; older released formats are not the May 2027 paper template.

1

Setting the Stage for the Cold War

World War II changed the balance of power

Technological and economic gains 技术与经济收益

Wartime capabilities and the postwar distribution of power helped the United States and Soviet Union emerge as superpowers.

Imperial weakening

European wartime political and economic strain reduced the ability to maintain empires, while anti-imperialist and nationalist organisation challenged colonial rule.

A shared context can help explain two processes without making them identical or inevitable.

Your turn: distinguish political and economic factors

Original practice — attempt before the check

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

Check: connect a factor to its effect

Worked reasoning

Nationalist mobilisation challenged colonial authority. European economic strain after World War II reduced resources for maintaining empires. Reduced resources could make administration and coercion harder to sustain.

The political and economic factors could interact. Neither alone explains every colony's path.

2

The Cold War

Ideological struggle and competition for power

Ideological struggle 意识形态斗争

U.S.–Soviet rivalry involved capitalism and communism, strategic influence and military capability. The United States was a democracy; the Soviet Union was an authoritarian communist state.

Avoid a false bloc rule

Not every U.S.-supported government was democratic. Superpower rivalry did not erase the different political aims of allied governments and local movements.

The superpowers avoided open full-scale war against one another while intervening and supporting allies.

Non-alignment: room for independent action

Non-Aligned Movement 不结盟运动

Leaders such as Sukarno in Indonesia and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana sought alternatives to alignment with the major blocs.

What the label does not imply

Non-alignment did not mean no international interests, no relations with either superpower or no effects from the Cold War.

Include this evidence when it helps answer the prompt; a name is not an automatic scoring bonus.

3

Effects of the Cold War

Distinguish related effects of the rivalry

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.

These were related effects, not a compulsory chronology; local actors pursued their own aims.

Compare influence on a common feature

Military alliances

NATO 北约 and the **Warsaw Pact** 华沙条约组织 organised cooperation within rival blocs. Both illustrate efforts to maintain influence through military institutions.

Different tools

Aid, alliances, military support and intervention were distinct methods. The U.S. Marshall Plan supported European economic recovery and influence; it was not itself a military alliance.

A comparison needs specific evidence from each case on the feature being compared, not a claim that every programme was identical.

Nuclear proliferation and deterrence

Nuclear proliferation 核扩散

More states acquiring weapons could increase danger and encourage efforts to limit their spread.

Deterrence

Fear of catastrophic retaliation raised the costs of direct superpower war. Avoidance of direct war did not eliminate conventional wars or intervention.

Nuclear technology affected relations through threats, strategic choices and negotiations; do not equate it with universal peace.

Your turn: explain deterrence and continued conflict

Original practice — attempt before the check

Explain how nuclear weapons could discourage direct superpower war while conflict continued elsewhere. Identify the mechanism rather than merely stating that nuclear weapons were powerful.

Check: high costs did not remove every form of conflict

Worked reasoning

Fear of catastrophic retaliation increased the costs of direct war. Rival powers could still support opposing sides in local conflicts through military aid and other intervention.

The mechanism concerns strategic choices. It does not imply every regional war was caused solely by nuclear weapons.

Proxy conflicts: external support and local causes

Proxy wars 代理人战争

The Korean War, Angolan Civil War and Sandinista–Contras conflict in Nicaragua illustrate Cold War involvement in regional conflicts.

Local agency

Local groups pursued territorial, political and social aims. Outside support could intensify fighting without creating every local grievance.

Compare a shared feature while preserving differences in origin, actors and outcomes.

Supplied source context: aid after World War II

Paraphrase, not a quotation

Documented Marshall Plan context: U.S. leaders proposed economic aid for European recovery and stability after World War II.

Source: National Archives, Marshall Plan document and transcript. Distinguish declared objectives from recipients' experiences.

Your turn: interpret purpose and a limit

Original practice — attempt before the check

Using the supplied context, explain one plausible U.S. objective and one limit of using a U.S. policy statement to establish all recipients' experiences.

Check: purpose is evidence, not proof of every outcome

Worked reasoning

Recovery and stability could support U.S. economic and strategic influence. A policy statement reveals declared aims, but cannot establish every recipient's experience; consequences require corroboration.

Do not invent a quotation or assume a stated purpose was the only motive.

4

Spread of Communism After 1900

China: distinguish gaining power from later policy

Causes of adoption

Internal tension 内部矛盾 and **Japanese aggression** 日本侵略 contributed to the conditions in which Chinese communists gained power and established communist rule in 1949.

Consequences of state policy

The **Great Leap Forward** 大跃进 used state mobilisation to transform production, with repressive policies and severe population costs, including devastating famine.

A policy's intended production goal and its actual human consequences are different kinds of claim.

Redistribution does not by itself prove communism

Movements and aims

Movements to redistribute land and resources developed in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Some advocated communism or socialism; others did not.

Compare actual political settings

Land reform in Kerala and the White Revolution in Iran show why redistribution alone does not establish communist revolution or rule.

State direction and redistribution must be interpreted in their particular political contexts.

Why some postcolonial leaders favoured socialism

Development and colonial experience

A strong state role could be seen as a way to promote development or reject the exploitation associated with colonial capitalist economies.

International support

Communist states and allies offered ideas and support. Such opportunities could influence choices alongside local goals.

Motives varied; not every newly independent state adopted the same ideology or policy.

5

Decolonization After 1900

Nationalist organisation: identify the political setting

Example

Setting and relationship

Indian National Congress

Nationalist politics in British India.

Ho Chi Minh

Independence struggle in French Indochina.

Kwame Nkrumah / Nasser

Gold Coast nationalist leadership / Egyptian political change and autonomy.

Leaders and parties pursued varying degrees of autonomy or independence; not all movements had identical aims or methods.

Compare independence processes without fixing later outcomes

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.

Negotiation could coexist with violence; armed struggle could also end in negotiations.

Your turn: compare the Gold Coast and Algeria

Original practice — attempt before the check

Compare one method of achieving independence in the Gold Coast and Algeria after 1945. Apply a shared feature to both cases, then state a limit of an automatic outcome claim.

Check: compare methods, then qualify

Worked reasoning

Gold Coast nationalist political organisation and negotiations accompanied the British transfer of power. In Algeria, armed struggle against French rule was central. Both sought an end to colonial control, but prolonged anti-colonial war played different roles.

Negotiation does not guarantee stability, and armed struggle does not determine every later political outcome.

Autonomy, identity and inherited boundaries

Inherited imperial boundaries 沿袭的帝国边界

Regional, religious and ethnic movements challenged colonial rule and territorial arrangements. The Muslim League in British India and Biafra in Nigeria illustrate disputes over national identity and authority.

Explain the particular conflict

Borders could contribute, alongside competition for power, resources and outside intervention. A boundary is not a complete explanation of every dispute.

A claim about territorial inheritance requires a mechanism and particular evidence.

6

Newly Independent States

Territory, development and migration need distinct explanations

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.

These processes could interact; no single inherited border automatically caused all three.

Partition: territorial and demographic change

New states

Partition of British India and the creation of Pakistan illustrate how redrawing political boundaries could create states.

Population consequences

Violence and large-scale displacement accompanied partition. A negotiated transfer does not imply the absence of mass violence.

Connect territorial and demographic change without assuming every migrant had the same experience.

State development policies were choices, not border effects

Economic direction

Nasser's policies in Egypt and Nyerere's modernisation in Tanzania illustrate a strong state role in promoting development.

Comparison and limits

Strong government intervention can be compared across periods, but goals, systems and outcomes varied. State direction alone does not establish communism.

Explain a development strategy through political choices and economic goals, not automatically through inherited boundaries.

Migration sustained connections after empire

Examples

South Asians moved to Britain and Algerians to France, maintaining cultural and economic ties with former imperial countries.

Possible mechanisms

Work, family and existing colonial links can help explain movement. The former colonising country is a metropole; migration often involved its major cities.

A migration link and a border dispute are distinct processes, even when both belong to decolonization.

Your turn: test a border-only explanation

Original practice — attempt before the check

Assess: “Inherited borders caused government economic planning and migration to former imperial countries.” Distinguish territorial change, development policy and migration.

Check: separate three causal relationships

Worked reasoning

Boundary changes could contribute to territorial conflict and displacement. Planning could reflect development goals and political choices; migration could reflect work, family and prior ties. Related aspects of decolonization need distinct mechanisms.

A shared historical setting is not proof that every development had the same direct cause.

7

Global Resistance to Established Power Structures

Distinguish actors, methods and targets

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 over time; one label does not describe every stage of a movement.

Use particular evidence about resistance

Nonviolent campaigns

Mohandas Gandhi 甘地 and
Martin Luther King

Jr. 马丁·路德·金 used organised nonviolent resistance to challenge established power.

Changing methods

The CED associates **Nelson Mandela** 曼德拉 with nonviolence, but he also helped establish and lead the ANC's armed wing in 1961.

Militarised states and movements targeting civilians are distinct categories. Do not merge every use of force into one actor or method.

8

End of the Cold War

Explain interacting pressures on the Soviet system

Factor

Mechanism to investigate

U.S. military / technological development

Competition could increase pressure on Soviet resources and strategic choices.

Afghanistan war

The costly, unsuccessful invasion added economic and political burdens.

Economic weakness / public discontent

Material problems and opposition could undermine authority and support for the system.

The syllabus names several causes; it does not rank their importance by the number of entries.

Your turn: weigh causes without counting bullets

Original practice — attempt before the check

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: a list is not a scale of historical importance

Worked reasoning

Counting entries does not measure causal importance. Military competition and the Afghanistan war increased pressures on a Soviet system already facing economic weakness and public discontent.

Evaluate relative importance through evidence and mechanisms; an invasion abroad is not simply an internal event.

9

Causation in the Age of the Cold War

Extent: support a judgement and explain its limits

Shared feature across hemispheres

The Korean War and the Nicaragua conflict illustrate outside support interacting with local conflicts. This supports a claim about international involvement in regional struggles.

Qualification

Their origins, actors and outcomes differed. One similarity does not establish identical experiences across whole hemispheres.

Extent asks how far a claim holds. Use the relationship in the prompt; it is not inherently a comparison word.

10 Exam tips

Grounding and exam-format honesty

Scope and released demands

Local CED topics 8.1–8.9, PDF pp. 151–160, including p. 157 on development and migration. Local 2024 set 2 SAQ 4 and scheme informed decolonization factors and socialist policies; 2025 set 2 SAQ 4B and scheme informed nuclear technology and international relations.

Course content and skills remain for May 2027 while presentation changes. Tasks are original; older no-stimulus questions are not the current paper template. Source links are in the handout.

Check yourself

- 1 Connect one political or economic factor to decolonization.
- 2 Explain how deterrence differs from universal peace.
- 3 Compare an independence process using evidence from both cases.
- 4 Explain why a border alone does not account for every policy and migration.
- 5 Construct an interacting cause of the end of the Cold War.