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Cambridge Assessment International Education

Cambridge International AS & A Level

HISTORY **9489/33**

Paper 3 Interpretations Question **October/November 2025**

1 hour 15 minutes

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You must answer on the enclosed answer booklet.

You will need: Answer booklet (enclosed)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Answer **one** question from **one** section only.
  - Section A: The origins of the First World War
  - Section B: The Holocaust
  - Section C: The origins and development of the Cold War
- Follow the instructions on the front cover of the answer booklet. If you need additional answer paper, ask the invigilator for a continuation booklet.

INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is 40.
- The number of marks for each question or part question is shown in brackets [ ].

This document has **4** pages.

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Answer **one** question from **one** section only.

Section A: Topic 1

The origins of the First World War

1 Read the extract and then answer the question.

The great powers did not somehow 'slip over the brink without any worries as if in a fit of absent mindedness', as Lloyd George put it in his war memoirs. War had come as a result of individual decisions, and a rapid series of moves and counter-moves by the governments of Europe, set against the background of recent shifts in the international landscape and anticipated changes in the years to come. The powers did not operate in a vacuum. There was a system of great-power relationships – the European concert, with its norms of behaviour, accepted rules of conduct, and conflict-resolution arrangements. It is true that the understandings that underpinned great-power politics had become a little worn out by 1914, and the tools by which international disputes were settled were a little blunt from frequent use. Even so, each of the powers acted with explicit reference to the system and its norms, and it is against these that their actions need to be judged. The system of great-power politics was not a vast impersonal force that directed the actions of the statesmen of Europe. It was rather an informal framework of often unspoken assumptions about international behaviour and the accepted methods of allowing for the interests of the greater and smaller powers. The pre-1914 international system, then, consisted of shared understandings of the 'rules of the game', what the powers were and not permitted to do, and what tools they could use and under what circumstances.

However, abstract concepts, such as the 'balance of power' or the 'alliance system', did not cause Europe's descent into war. Individuals acting in response to external and internal events, and to perceived opportunities and threats, were central to the developments in July 1914. Their warlike or conciliatory views on the perceived realities of international politics, and how they acted given the existing political arrangements in their respective countries, hold the key to understanding how and why Europe descended into world war. The causes of the war are at one and the same time more ordinary and more complex than the standard arguments about the deeper forces determining Europe's unavoidable progress towards war would suggest. They are to be found in the near-collective failure of statecraft by the rulers of Europe. For much of the nineteenth century there had been a clear appreciation of the respective roles, rights and responsibilities of the great powers. This understanding had become more fragile by 1914. Thus, Sazonov (the Russian foreign minister), and Poincaré, and to some extent Grey, too, insisted that any Austrian demands on Belgrade had to respect Serbian sovereignty and independence. Yet at the same time the powers did little to establish effective limits for Serbia's undoubted provocations of Austria-Hungary, and for the pan-Serb agitation that was aimed at undermining the internal cohesion of one of the existing great powers. Statesmen of the nineteenth century would surely not have tolerated such an explicit challenge to the established international order.

The role of individuals in July 1914 was critical. Until the end of July diplomats and politicians continued to make the key decisions, although the important role played by junior and middle-ranking officials was one of the peculiarities of the crisis, especially so during its early stages. For much of the month, for instance, Russia's ambassadors were absent from the embassies in Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Belgrade. The German Chancellor was away from Berlin until late July, and the foreign minister had been on his honeymoon when the Austrians extracted 'the blank cheque' from the Kaiser.

What can you learn from this extract about the interpretation and approach of the historian who wrote it? Use the extract and your knowledge of the origins of the First World War to explain your answer. [40]

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Section B: Topic 2

The Holocaust

2 Read the extract and then answer the question.

The precondition for starting up the machinery of destruction was not the development of the varied schemes of economic and population planning, but their repeated and utter failure. With the arrival in German-controlled territory of the first tens of thousands of ethnic Germans from eastern and south-eastern Europe, a sinister chain reaction was set in motion. In order to make room for the resettled Germans, large numbers of Poles and especially Jews were deported from the Warthegau and other regions without provision being made for them. Now began a series of increasingly extensive deportation schemes contained within the idea of the 'ethnic cleansing' of central Europe. At the centre of these plans for expulsion and deportation stood the Jews, who the Germans wanted to push out of their sphere of influence entirely, into the eastern regions of the Government General, to Madagascar, or to the Arctic Ocean in northern Russia. Since no-one in a position of authority in the Nazi regime was prepared to accept the Jews in 'his' area, a system of stop-gap measures and compromises developed that, because of the much-deplored 'unacceptable conditions' that they brought about, created pressures for a long-term or 'final' solution. The murder of the Jews, who could not be resettled, began as the consequence of the failures of the various plans for deportation. Often, the same men who had been responsible for relocating Germans from the Soviet Union – Eichmann, for example – subsequently organised the deportation and murder of the Jews.

To be sure, a range of questions remains open. The radicalisation of Jewish policy is no longer understood as the product of long-term schemes, but rather as the result of the failure of plans for the Jews that were always being revised and extended – a process that proceeded in fits and starts and was always made to fit decisions designed to deal with the problems of the moment. Moreover, such plans, ultimately culminating in *Generalplan Ost*, never embraced the Jews alone but also involved Russians, Poles, and other countries lying to Germany's east. But the failure of the deportation plans evolved into the practice of genocide only in the case of the Jews. It was only that group that National Socialist ideology had branded as the unshakeable enemy, and which, within a few years of the Nazis' assumption of power in Germany, had been massively persecuted and deprived of its rights. What role, then, did antisemitism play here? In what ways did the dilemmas – real and contrived – arising in specific situations link up with long-standing attitudes and aims? What was the relationship between ideological factors, such as racism and hatred of Jews, to so-called 'rational' motives, such as economic modernisation or dealing with food scarcity? How did the motives – both individual and determined by the situation – of the murderers and those who bore responsibility for their actions relate to a general dynamic of violence directed against the Jews?

Considering these questions together enables us to distinguish two main lines of development leading to genocide. First, there were those ruthless and unethical schemes that, when implemented as an imperialistic policy, adapted themselves according to the circumstances, regarding the fates of independent ethnic populations as unimportant. Second there was that racist brand of antisemitism that set as its goal the expulsion, and ultimately the murder, of some or all Jews. The histories of each of these factors are closely intertwined, involving the planning for a German, quasi-colonial hinterland in eastern and south-eastern Europe, and on the other hand, the tradition of modern antisemitism.

What can you learn from this extract about the interpretation and approach of the historian who wrote it? Use the extract and your knowledge of the Holocaust to explain your answer. [40]

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Section C: Topic 3

The origins and development of the Cold War

3 Read the extract and then answer the question.

Second World War propaganda regarding the Soviet Union, combined with relief at the end of the war, left the United States in 1945 reluctant to lead a crusade against Soviet imperialism and very willing to work for the continuance of US-Soviet cooperation. When in March 1946 Winston Churchill delivered his celebrated Iron Curtain speech at Fulton, Missouri, the reaction in America was almost universally hostile. British diplomats were highly critical of the lack of realism and consistency in the American view of the Soviet Union. The swings of mood in the United States worried British diplomats. 'From gloom about Soviet–American relations', the head of the North American department in the British Foreign Office observed in late 1945, 'opinion is now in the usual way swinging to renewed hope.' In a pessimistic mood, the British feared America might resort to war. As the British embassy in Moscow reported in 1947, 'Any immediate danger to world peace lies in the possibility of the Americans pulling the trigger and firing the gun.' Yet in an optimistic mood, there was fear of unrealistic American moves for détente. Despite his fierce criticism of Soviet foreign policy, Truman stated in 1948 with regard to Stalin that 'I like old Joe.' A British Foreign Office official noted in January 1949 that Truman was 'rather naively liable to delude himself from time to time that détente can be achieved by some overnight miracle'.

With regard to economic issues, a number of Americans, especially in the State and Treasury departments, had clear ideas on using America's dominant position to reform the world economic system, break down economic nationalism and create a more open world of free trade. But the majority of Americans were not confident capitalists. There was a great fear of a return to the Depression conditions of the 1930s once wartime spending ended. The prevailing mood was cautious, with a desire to cut taxes and reduce government expenditure. The defence budget fell from $81 billion in 1945 to $13 billion in 1947. Opposition to the Marshall Plan in Congress was considerable, with the view commonly expressed that American taxpayers' money was being thrown away. Reluctance to undertake the commitment to the entangling alliance of NATO was widespread. British influence was an important factor in persuading the United States to undertake the Marshall Plan and join NATO. Thus, rather than a domineering United States forcing the European nations to join with America in an economic and military bloc to deter the Soviet Union, the evidence suggests that the United States moved hesitantly, with two steps forward and one step back, often requiring the encouragement of western European nations to accept the commitments of international involvement.

Gradually, however, between 1945 and 1949 the changing American image of the Soviet Union made an increasingly deep impact on American policy. Trade between the two countries was almost nil. No cultural, educational, and scientific exchanges were developed after the war. The Soviet Union became increasingly a closed society, with an emphasis on cultural nationalism. Furthermore, by 1949 a terrifying new element had been added to America's image of the Soviet Union as an alien threat, namely the atomic bomb. The United States came to view the Soviet Union as the new red menace. Americans were resolved not to repeat the mistakes of the 1930s but to deter this new menace by international involvement at an early stage. By 1949 the mood of America had swung firmly from hope of accommodation with the Soviets to crusading fervour against the red menace.

What can you learn from this extract about the interpretation and approach of the historian who wrote it? Use the extract and your knowledge of the Cold War to explain your answer. [40]

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