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CAMBRIDGE
International Education

Cambridge International AS & A Level

HISTORY **9489/31**

Paper 3 Interpretations Question **May/June 2026**

1 hour 15 minutes

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 **8** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

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Section A: Topic 1

The origins of the First World War

1 Read the extract and then answer the question.

The great powers plunged into war for the sake of a quick victory. Afterwards people looked back and puzzled how it could have happened. There was a varied list of possible 'war criminals'. The Allies wished to blame Kaiser Bill. This was unreasonable. As the record shows, William was one of the few who made consistent and constructive efforts to avoid war. Poor Tsar Nicholas also received much condemnation. Yet it seems that if the affair had been left to the crowned heads of Europe, there would never have been war at all. Unfortunately, in the twentieth century, they believed it was their duty to do what their statesmen said. Some have put forward an exactly opposite explanation. The war has been blamed on the peoples of Europe. The cheering crowds, it is said, gave the statesmen no choice and drove them to war. This too will not do. The crowds cheered only after the decisions were made. No one in Berlin waved banners declaring 'Stand by Austria-Hungary'. Indeed, this was an idea which would not even have occurred to any German outside the diplomatic service.

In every country the governments decided, with almost no reference to public opinion. Foreign ministers made their decisions as a sort of technical exercise. The considerations which moved them were not different from those on previous occasions. It has been suggested that the balance of power had broken down, and hence the German ministers were eager for war. This is the reverse of the truth. For years past, Germany had been the strongest of the powers, and others – Russia in 1909, France in 1905 and 1911 – had given way when faced with the German threat. In 1914 the French, and, more hesitantly, the Russians, believed that they were strong enough to face the threat. This may have been a mere change of mind, or it may have been a real change in power. The actual outcome proved that the Germans could not win a quick victory as everyone had expected in earlier crises. These earlier crises had ended without war, partly because the issues were not worth fighting about. French control of Morocco in 1905 and 1911, even Serbia's claim to Bosnia in 1909, were topics of remote importance. But there was a topic of real importance in 1914 – the assertion of Hapsburg power against Serb nationalism. None of the great powers wished to dispute this. All would have settled for a diplomatic solution. Instead, the crisis ran away with them.

When cut down to essentials, the only cause for the outbreak of war in 1914 was the Schlieffen Plan – product of the belief in speed and the offensive. Diplomacy functioned until the German demand that France and Russia should not mobilise. No power could accept such a demand in the circumstances of the age. Yet the Germans had no deliberate aim of bringing about hostilities. No one had time for a deliberate aim or time to think. All were trapped by the cleverness of their military preparations, the Germans most of all. In every country, people imagined that they were being called to a defensive war, and in a sense they were right. Since every army believed that attack was the only form of defence, every defensive operation appeared as an attack to someone else. There is no mystery about the outbreak of the First World War. The deterrent failed to deter. This was to be expected sooner or later. A deterrent may work ninety-nine times out of a hundred, but on the hundredth occasion it produces catastrophe.

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 purpose of National Socialism was to impose a new political, economic and social order on the German Reich, and ultimately on the entire European continent – and all within a very short space of time.

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The size and composition of the population were to be continuously monitored and regulated through programmes of birth control, resettlement and extermination.

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.

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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.

The confrontation in Berlin was not simply an episode in the early Cold War, it was when the conflict assumed its final shape.

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‘Not necessarily’, responded Acheson, but the task would be ‘to see who develops the most strength’.

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.

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