

OxfordAQA

International GCSE

History (9245)

Scheme of work

Détente and the collapse of communism, c1969-1991

For teaching from September 2026 onwards
For International GCSE exams in June 2028 onwards

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Introduction

This scheme of work is intended to help teachers plan and implement the teaching of Détente and the collapse of communism, c1969-1991 option of the Oxford AQA International GCSE History (9245) specification. The purpose is to provide advice and guidance to teachers, not to prescribe and restrict their approach to the specification. There are obviously many other ways of organising the work, and there is absolutely no requirement to use this scheme. We hope the suggested activities will support your teaching of this topic.

The scheme focuses on a period of growing understanding or détente between East and West and explores reasons why the Cold War ended and Communism eventually collapsed by 1991. It was not a period of consistent improvement in relations, and students have the opportunity to chart how events added to or detracted from cordial relations within the broad overall direction of the end of the confrontational relationship. The Specification content is based on an unfolding narrative of key developments in the Cold War and allows students to consider both the long and the short-term effect these developments had on international relations.

Students will study how international relations were affected by the role of individuals, ideology and broad political and economic factors and consider whether events stand in isolation or whether there is a clear pattern to change in the period.

Assumed coverage and teaching hours

This scheme of work assumes that the OxfordAQA International GCSE History (9245) is taught as a two-year linear course, with a total of approximately 120-140 guided learning hours in total, in line with specification guidance. This equates to approximately two hours of teaching per week over two academic years, although this may vary according to local timetabling arrangements and students' prior experience. As this particular optional topic equates to one quarter of the qualification, this scheme of work is designed to be taught in around 30-35 hours.

Work will also need to be completed outside of lessons. The amount of independent study required will depend on curriculum time, the pace of delivery and the extent to which assessment practice and consolidation activities are incorporated into timetabled lessons.

Assessment

Assessment points in the learning activity column indicate possible assessment opportunities. These could be short tests of about ten minutes (exam-style questions, short factual tests, source evaluation) or longer assessments (exam-style questions).

The assessment in Section B is based on a series of short and extended response questions.

- Question 1 tests AO1 and is worth 3 marks. It requires students to show their knowledge of a given issue.
- Question 2 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 6 marks. It requires students to explain one way in which a given issue developed, supporting their explanation with knowledge and understanding. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.

- Question 3 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 9 marks. It requires students to explain two changes or two ways/ reasons why a given issue developed, supporting their explanation with knowledge and understanding. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.
- Question 4 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 12 marks. It requires students to construct an extended response with a line of reasoning. It requires students to explain a given cause/ consequence/ change and at least cause/ consequence/ change in the context of a broader development leading to a judgement that evaluates their relative importance. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.

Resources

Research exercises assume students have access to a textbook(s) and / or the internet. You can supplement textbook(s) by other sources.

OUP support this option with Détente and the collapse of communism, c1969-1991 published in 2026 as part of the OxfordAQA International series and available in various formats.

Part 1: The problem of maintaining détente

Reasons for détente and its progress

Suggested timing

4-5 hours

Specification content

Reasons for détente and its progress: the motives of the USSR, USA, China and West Germany; the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, 1972; SALT I, 1972; Brezhnev-Nixon Summits; the Helsinki Accords, 1975.

Teaching guidance

- This study, by its nature, relates to the reasons for and the progress of détente in the 1970s, its collapse and subsequent re-emergence in the 1980s, and the broader reasons for the end of the Cold War.
- At an early stage, students might consider the nature of the Cold War and should have some understanding of the reason why there were tensions between East and West c1969. This provides some opportunity to ensure that students do not simply study the period in isolation but can fit it in to a broader chronology, by for example having some general contextual awareness of how the results of the Cuban Missile Crisis were still having an effect in c1969. However, the focus of the course, and of examination questions asked will be the period c1969 to 1991.
- Here is an early opportunity to practice writing in response to questions that require students to explain with evidence in response to a given issue: questions 2, 3 and 4. A common method to approach this is using the structure Point, Evidence, Explain, though this is by no means the only permissible approach.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organise their teaching around the enquiry question: why was there détente in the 1970s and what course did this détente take?
- Present students with contemporary posters and propaganda from the 1960s, especially around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Ask what common themes do these posters show – perhaps fear, nervousness and public concern mixed possibly with nationalism. Debate how far this might give an insight to why there was desire to develop a better relationship between countries by c1969.
- Students divide into groups, each representing Russia, the USA, China, West Germany, and 'other countries'. Each group is tasked with a 5 minute presentation explaining why their allocated country or region wanted détente. Follow this up with a

general class discussion about why there was a desire for détente in the 1970s. Discussion points might include whether one country more than any other wanted détente or whether it was an emerging consensus. Alternatively, discussion might include if there was a particular theme – for example Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)- which was a common motivation for all.

- Students might prepare a press release issued after SALT I, perhaps one from an American perspective and one from a Russian perspective. Having reviewed both 'press releases' students write a response to the question: what was achieved at SALT I and why was it important?
- Students might be encouraged to write a retrospective on summit diplomacy, detailing what the apparent friendship between Nixon and Brezhnev achieved. This might be presented as a response to a question demanding the prioritisation of factors. For example: what was the greatest achievement of Summit Diplomacy?
- Encourage students to consider a variety of perspectives by tasking them to write a paragraph detailing what each of the following countries thought of the Helsinki Accords:
 - The USA;
 - The USSR;
 - Eastern European countries.

This might then be used to help write an answer to the question: 'The Helsinki Accords did more harm than good to the cause of détente' - how far do you agree?

The collapse of *détente*

Suggested timing

5 hours

Specification content

The collapse of *détente*: reasons for Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, 1979; reaction of President Carter and the USA to the war; the failure of SALT II; the boycotts of the Olympic Games, 1980/1984; Reagan and the renewal of the Cold War; development of new weapons; the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI); deployment of Soviet and US missiles in Europe.

Teaching guidance

- This is an opportunity to develop the themes addressed in the previous section and consider why the late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a stepping away from the theme of *détente* prevalent in the 1970s.
- Students might consider if there was any one event that led to this reversal and/or whether it happened over a period of years. This provides further opportunity to consider the nature of turning points in historical study, how these can be assessed and whether they help to understand the nature of change in the past.
- This section also provides an opportunity to study historical narrative and sequencing. A good understanding of how one event led to another or how it contributed to a general narrative of change will be helpful.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organise their teaching around the enquiry question: why did *détente* collapse?
- Students might be tasked with writing a newspaper account announcing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This should be done from an American or from a Soviet perspective. Students should detail why the event occurred, an account of the event and a prediction of what this might mean for *détente* and why.
- Alternatively, students might produce a list of reasons why the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. From this list, students make connectives in which they give as many reason why one event led to the next. This might also provide an excellent opportunity to practice the skill of prioritisation, establishing one factor which was more significant than the rest.
- Students might write an account of why the USA decided to arm the Mujahideen. This might require further research but can be presented as a simple table detailing reasons for and reasons against.
- Understanding of consequence might be developed further to practice sequencing in longer style questions requiring a relative evaluation: for example 'The Salt II talks failed because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan' - how far do you agree?

- Students might design propaganda posters advertising the 'Soviet' games of the 1980 and 1984 Olympics. For the 1980 Olympics the poster would emphasise the friendship of the communist peoples and include reference to the 'Friendship of the Peoples' dance; for the 1984 Olympics reference should be made to the 'Friendship Games' being held despite the boycott of Los Angeles.
- Students might research the early life of Ronald Reagan and identify what his view of the Soviet Union was when he came to power in 1981. This might involve a good understanding of the Reagan Doctrine. Alternatively, students could write an election broadcast by Reagan for the 1980 election. In it he sets out what he thinks has gone wrong with US-Soviet relations in the past c10 years, and what he plans to do to improve things if he becomes president.
- Students could produce a news report of the shooting down of KAL flight 007. Research of this topic might include the debate over where the airliner was and who actually ordered the shooting. Students should then discuss how this event added to tension in the early 1980s.
- Students might research the Able Archer exercise. Soviet fears over this are often presented as unfounded, but task students, in the context of 'first strike' theory whether the USSR's fears were entirely irrational.
- Students might write a promotional piece for the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI). If SDI was heavily influenced by the desire to keep the Soviet military expenditure high then understanding the exaggerated claims made for it would be useful.
- Students might consolidate knowledge from this section by answering the question: 'Détente collapsed because of the actions of the Soviet Union' - how far do you agree?

The re-emergence of *détente*

Suggested timing

4 hours

Specification content

The re-emergence of *détente*: Reagan and Gorbachev, changing attitudes; Reykjavik Summit, 1986; START treaty, 1991; second period of *détente*.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on why and how the problems examined in the previous section resolved themselves into a period of renewed *détente* during the 1980s. Students might be given the opportunity to consider the role of individuals in the events of this period.
- Students should consider the new ideas of Gorbachev and begin to consider the extent to which these new ideas were a genuine driving force that explains change.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organise their teaching around the enquiry question: what impact did Gorbachev and Reagan have on changes to *détente*?
- Students might research Gorbachev's new ideas and explain why they represented a potential change.
- There is plenty of opportunity to consider the extent to which the summits actually produced any change. Students might be divided into groups, each researching a different summit and advocating that their allocated summit produced notable, concrete results. Class discussion might then revolve around the extent to which the summits were significant in the development of a new *détente*.
- Students might conduct a class debate concerning the extent to which the START treaty was a success. Here is an opportunity to reinforce the concept of turning points in history or indeed to consider long term and short term causes and consequences. Was the START treaty merely another part of a gradual shift to *détente* and understanding, or was it a rupture – a surprise considering the general direction of summits and treaty making?
- Linked to the above, students might debate the question of why the START negotiations took place and why they took so long to complete. This is an opportunity to consider the role of both the USSR and the USA. A debate might entail asking students which country was more responsible for the eventual of the Start Treaty.
- Here is an opportunity to place the events of this section within a broader chronology. On a timeline beginning in c1969 and running until 1991, students chart the rise and fall of tension between the USA and the USSR. For each change in the height of the line on the graph representing tension, students are to justify the change by means of a label on their graph. This will help to place the specific events within the broader question of the reason for changes in superpower relations.
- A broader question might then be asked whether, up to the mid 1980s, was there more

continuity than change in the Cold War? Students would be encouraged to consider the extent of change, its pace and its impact.

Review

Suggested timing

1 hour

Specification content

Review and assessment of Part 1: The problem of maintaining détente

Assessment guidance

- This is the opportunity to develop your students' exam technique and to test their learning so far.
- You can use exam-style questions based on the content of Part 1.
- For second order concept questions, analyse students' effectiveness when writing Point/Evidence/Explanation paragraphs in answer to an 'explain' style question.

Resources

Specimen papers and activities sections of the OUP textbook.

Part 2: The end of the Cold War in the USSR, Central and Eastern Europe

Soviet retreat from Afghanistan

Suggested timing

3 hours

Specification content

Soviet retreat from Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's failure in Afghanistan and its political and economic effects on the USSR.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on why the Soviet Union retreated from Afghanistan and its consequences.
- Teaching might develop students' understanding of the notion of turning points in History and also reinforce how we measure causation and consequence in History.
- There should be a good knowledge of the events of the withdrawal but these should be placed within a broader understanding of the ending of the Cold War.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organise their teaching around the enquiry question: Why did the USSR withdraw from Afghanistan.
- Students might list as many factors as they can that explain the withdrawal and place them within a diamond 9 exercise. Students should be able to move beyond a list of competing factors but show understanding by arguing for a particular priority or grouping by theme or according to time (eg long and short term).
- A linked exercise will be to consider why the Soviet militarily failed in Afghanistan. Was it the weakness of the Soviet plan and forces, or was it more due to the strengths of the defending forces?
- A possible exercise would be to task students with producing a propaganda speech or poster from the perspective of the mujahidin at the time of the Soviet withdrawal. The objective would be an explanation as to why the Soviet forces failed from the perspective of the mujahidin.
- Students might concentrate on the consequences of Soviet involvement and the eventual withdrawal by grouping consequences into economic, reputational, political etc. Students could then consider the most significant consequence of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan.

The Solidarity movement in Poland, 1980-81

Suggested timing

3 hours

Specification content

The Solidarity movement in Poland, 1980-81: the crisis in Poland; the role of Lech Walesa; aims of Solidarity, its impact and suppression.

Guidance

- Develop your students' understanding of how the end of the Cold War was due to a series of complementary factors, some from outside of the main themes of tension between the USA and the USSR.
- Opportunities here to explore how cold war tensions affected a broad range of countries and the contribution they made to the end of the Cold War.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Students might be asked to write a speech from the perspective of one of the striking workers in Gdansk. They should convey the problems that they face and the demands that they have.
- This might be developed further by asking students to script the meeting between Walesa and the Polish government in which the agreement to allow a legal trade union was taken.
- Research the decision to award Walesa the Nobel Peace prize. What does this mean about the role of Walesa in the development of the Cold War and tensions in Eastern Europe.
- Students might write the Nobel Prize award script for Walesa in which the Nobel committee explain why they think the award is justified. Students might debate how far they agree with this decision.
- Students might research the demands of Solidarity and for each demand explain why it was made and whether it was achieved. Students might then come to a conclusion about how far Solidarity achieved its stated objectives.
- Linked to the above, students should consider if there were other consequences of the Solidarity movement beyond simply the achievement of stated aims. How does this affect any conclusions about the achievements of the Solidarity movement?
- Students might be given a series of cards showing various, general consequences. The task is to select the correct cards that show consequences appropriate for the Solidarity movement. Students justify their selection but also explain why they have not selected other cards.

Gorbachev and Reagan

Suggested timing

2 hours

Specification content

Gorbachev and Reagan: Glasnost and Perestroika; changes in domestic and foreign policy and their effects.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on the impact that Gorbachev and Reagan had on the Cold War.
- This is an opportunity to consolidate knowledge acquired in an earlier section and to consider how the role of two prominent individuals became so significant in both foreign and domestic affairs.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Students might focus on the overall enquiry question: what changes did Gorbachev and Reagan bring to foreign and domestic policy?
- Students' knowledge of both individuals should move beyond simple potted biographies and instead try to relate factual knowledge of their period in office and policies to changes in the progression of the Cold War.
- The class might be divided into a group looking at Reagan and a group looking at Gorbachev. Within each group responsibility is taken to research the domestic and the foreign policy of each. Discussion should be held on establishing any links between domestic and foreign policy with the goal of producing a 5-10 minute presentation on the policies of Gorbachev and Reagan.
- Specific events might be reviewed, for example Chernobyl, with students tasked with explaining if these events prove that change had taken place. Use card sorts or similar exercises such as Diamond 9s to encourage students to compare the importance of different factors and practice reaching supported judgements.
- Class debate: are there significant events under Gorbachev and Reagan that that did not bring an improvement?
- The concept of change and continuity might be developed – question what the greatest element was of continuity and the greatest change to occur under both leaders.
- For both leaders, Students produce the political obituary for each, i.e. the summary of their political impact at the moment that they leave office. This might be in the form of a written piece or a piece of visual art.

The end of Soviet control in Eastern Europe

Suggested timing

5/6 hours

Specification content

The end of Soviet control in Eastern Europe: the success of Solidarity; the opening of the Berlin Wall; the success of movements against Communism and the end of Communist rule in East Germany; Hungary and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia; the fate of Gorbachev; the collapse of the USSR; the end of the Cold War and its impact on the US as a global power.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on the reasons for the end of Soviet control in Eastern Europe.
- This is an opportunity to bring together knowledge of a range of events and to explain how they worked together to bring about problems for, and the eventual end of, Soviet control.
- Whilst knowledge of individual events will be important, so too will an understanding of how the various events interacted, plus knowledge of the broad sweep of a narrative employing concepts of cause and effect.
- Some awareness of the circumstances particular to each country studied will be useful combined with a discussion about the extent to which there were factors common to all.
- Here again, is an opportunity to consider the skill of sequencing in history and to consider how one factor led to another. In addition, the concept of turning points in history might be useful.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Students might focus on the overall enquiry question: Why did Soviet control in Eastern Europe collapse?
- Students might consider the broader concept of whether there was a gradual deterioration of Soviet control or whether there was a series of largely unexpected events. Therefore, it will be important to try to encourage a move away from the compartmentalized approach and to try to link factors and regions together.
- Knowledge of individual events might be developed by tasking students in groups to prepare a presentation on an allocated region; Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania, the Baltic States, Yugoslavia or Hungary. For each state, students might indicate what happened and explain what impact this had on Soviet control in their allocated region.
- In order to avoid compartmentalisation of knowledge, the groups are then teamed up with another to establish any connections in terms of cause, events and consequence between their country and one other.
- This exercise is then repeated so that eventually every student has a summary of connections between each country originally allocated.

- Towards the end of the unit, this exercise can be returned to with an exercise asking whether the changes in one particular country are more significant to the end of the Cold War than those in other countries.
- There are certain events that lend themselves to whole class exercise. This is especially true of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Here a whole class activity might include designing the news report announcing the fall of the Berlin Wall. The report should contextualize the event and explain what has happened and why it is important.
- Students might be tasked with presenting these reports from the perspective of different countries – for example, an East German perspective, an Austrian one and an American perspective.
- In explaining any of the identified events, students might be given a card-sort causation activity in which they are required to place several causes in chronological order or alternatively in order of significance.
- The 'Baltic Way' is another key event which lends itself to this type of news reporting activity. Alternatively, students might design a poster encouraging those across the Baltic region to participate. This should include why it is being done, what the planned activity is, and what the hoped for consequences will be.
- A more evaluative exercise fixed around a specific event might be an essay type response to the question: 'Explain why Germany was reunified'. Students should include at least one long and one short term factor in their response.
- A much broader exercise that ties together the themes and events of this section would be: 'Assess the reasons why Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe'. This is a good exercise in encouraging students in extended response questions to still ensure that they utilise specific subject knowledge in support of argument. This is an opportunity to make use of the detail about each country in Eastern Europe that they may have acquired from a previous suggested activity.
- A focus on the consequences of the Cold War provides a useful chance to bring in all features studied in this unit. Students might be given a range of possible consequences and are tasked with researching how far these are valid. A tighter focus on the consequences for the USA can be done with a similar exercise.
- A return to sequencing of events and trying to establish a broad chronology across a range of different countries might be achieved by completing a timeline possibly showing events in different countries in different colours.

Review and assessment of Part 2

Suggested timing

1 hour

Assessment guidance

- This is opportunity to develop your students' exam technique and to test their learning on the content of Part 2.
- You could use this as an opportunity to develop their understanding of how to answer AO1/AO2 questions such as the 6 and 9 mark questions and the bullet-point 12 mark evaluative question.
- Discuss exam technique with your students. Use low tariff questions to check acquisition of knowledge.
- For second order concept questions, analyse students' effectiveness when writing Point/Evidence/Explanation paragraphs in answer to an 'explain' style question.