



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2R (A-level)
Question 02 Student 2
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

Specimen answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 2R (A-level): Specimen question paper

02 'US policies in response to the rise of Communism in Asia in the years 1949 to 1960 consistently failed'

Assess the validity of this view

[25 marks]

Student response

Following the success of the Berlin Airlift which was followed by the division of Germany into two countries and the creation of NATO it seemed as though the US's aim to contain communism in Europe had succeeded. However, in 1949 not only did the USSR get the A bomb earlier than expected, but China became Communist under Mao Zedong following a prolonged civil war against the Guomindang. With the invasion of North Korea into the South in 1953, and then the defeat of the French in Vietnam in 1954 by the Communist forces led by Ho Chi Minh, it seemed as though Communism was on the march in Asia. The US's response to the rise of Communism in Asia was to be far less successful than it had been in Europe. Although there were some notable successes in containing Communism, it failed to halt the spread of Communism in Vietnam and its response to events in China and Korea was often based on false premises and ended up widening the cold war conflict.

The USA failed to prevent the victory of Mao Zedong in China despite sending substantial aid to the Nationalists. However, the more significant failure was the response of the US to this new situation. While Dean Acheson in a White Paper in 1949 commented that Mao's victory was unavoidable given the failures of the GMD, and American advisors on the ground had commented that Mao's communism had the support of the majority of the Chinese, this pragmatic viewpoint soon dissipated in the 'Red Scare' hysteria that took hold in the US. US officials were accused of having 'lost' China and McCarthyism increased the fear that Communists in the government had allowed this to happen. Acheson decided to 'reconsider' his findings on China now claiming that China was '..completely subservient to the Moscow regime'. Following the Korean War, the US went on to isolate China diplomatically and economically from the rest of the world. They saw Chinese and Soviet communism as one; this was known as 'monolithic' communism and it meant that the US failed to understand the differences between these two countries or later to take advantage of the growing split between China and the Soviet Union.

The US response to events in Korea was also influenced by this idea that all communist threats came from Moscow; the rapid US response was triggered by the belief that North Korean's invasion of the South indicated that Stalin was on the march again and had to be contained in the same way as he had been contained in Europe. However, this war was more about nationalism with Kim Il Sung desperate to unite the peninsula. Due to the US's invasion under the flag of the UN, what could have been a short civil war escalated into a three year war that ravaged the peninsula and cost the lives of millions of Koreans as well as 54 thousand Americans. The result of the Korean War was also the militarization and the globalization of the

cold war. NSC 68 was implemented allowing the US to step up its spending and defences in all areas of the world in response to what it saw as a global threat.

This consistent failure to distinguish between nationalism and communism in Asia further impacted on the US's actions with regard to Vietnam. The US gave aid to the French who were disastrously defeated at Dien Bien Phu. Then, at the Geneva Conference the US supported a division of Vietnam with the South under the control of Diem. It went on to support Diem's decision to abandon the elections which had been planned for '56 and which could have united the peninsula; the fact that Ho Chi Minh was expected to win 80% of the vote meant that this was unacceptable to the US. Diem's regime was corrupt, brutal and nepotistic and led to the growth of popular support for communism; the US's support of this regime and its obsession with the 'domino theory' meant that it became tied into helping Diem fight the growing opposition which was driven by nationalist as well as communist ideas. By 1960 it was heavily committed to financial and military aid. Ultimately this would lead to increased advisors under Kennedy and finally ground troops under Johnson.

However, there were some successes in US policy in Asia in response to Communism which means that it did not consistently fail. It could be argued that the US had no alternative but to get involved in Korea. Truman was anxious to show that the UN would not stand by in the face of blatant aggression of one state to another in the way that the League of Nations had stood by. Thus the involvement of the UN to deal with North Korean actions was key. In addition, the end result preserved South Korea, preventing from becoming communist; containment was thus a success, albeit at a huge cost.

Events in Korea also forced the US to change its policy in Japan and this can be seen as a success. Japan was now encouraged to develop industrially and to become a bulwark against the spread of communism in the area. Following the American Japanese Security Treaty, signed in 1951, the US was able to station its forces there and maintain a strong presence in this area. It could be argued that this was a success in that it allowed Japan to become a successful economic power house and keep it as a strong ally of the US.

America's response to China with regard to Taiwan can also be seen as a success in containing Communism. Following the invasion of South Korea, The US decided to defend the Chinese nationalist stronghold of Taiwan. It sent the Seventh fleet to the Taiwan Strait to keep peace and it gave military and economic aid to Taiwan to contain Chinese communism. In 1953, following a Chinese attack on the islands of Quemoy and Matsu, Eisenhower used brinkmanship, threatening the use of nuclear weapons against China. As a result China backed down. A similar scenario took place in 1958 and again China backed down; brinkmanship had been successful and Taiwan remained independent.

In conclusion, although the US had successes in containing communism in Asia, it was far less successful in its policies towards communism than it had been in Europe before 1949. This was partly because Communism in Asia was much more diverse. It was often linked to nationalist movements; Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh also had support because of local circumstances and because of their struggles for independence. The US did not understand this. Thus, while it thought it was fighting Soviet imperialism in Vietnam in fact it was fighting nationalist feeling. US policy was not consistently a failure; South Korea, Japan and Taiwan remained independent due to US support. However, the US consistently misunderstood the nature of Asian communism and this led to a substantial widening of cold war hostility.

Commentary – Level 5

The answer is generally effective and has a balanced response to the issue of ‘consistent failure’, examining how this might and might not seem to have been the case. Supporting information is appropriate and there is a clear conclusion. The introduction could have been more focused and the answer very occasionally loses some direct link to the question, but there is a persuasive analysis throughout and this is a Level 5 answer.