

Yishun Innova Junior College
2025 JC2 H1 History Prelim exam: 8838/01
Suggested answer guide

Section A: Question 1

1a. Compare and contrast the evidence provided in Sources A and B on the superpowers' strategic geopolitical priorities during the 1987 Washington Summit. [10]

How are the sources similar/different?

Similarity

- **Inference:** Both sources A and B are **similar** in terms of demonstrating that both the United States and Soviet Union **prioritised the altruistic peacekeeping aim of nuclear disarmament to ease the tensions** between the Western and Eastern blocs and establish peace and security in Europe.
- **Evidence:** In **Source A**, Reagan emphasises the importance of 'deep reductions in these offensive weapons' and 'agreed to reach agreements' with 'Gorbachev on reducing the levels of U.S. and Soviet long-range, or strategic, nuclear arms' as part of a broader effort to reduce reliance on 'mutual assured destruction.' Similarly, in **Source B**, Gorbachev resonates with Reagan's sentiments by underpinning the 'signing of the treaty on the elimination of two classes of nuclear missiles' as the summit's main outcome and expresses hope for the 'deepening of positive tendencies' in nuclear disarmament.
- **Explanation:** This reflects a shared superpower interest in de-escalating the arms race and reducing the threat of nuclear confrontation, indicating that disarmament was a common geopolitical priority despite ideological differences.

Difference

- **Inference:** Both sources A and B are **different** in terms of their **divergent superpowers' geopolitical priorities regarding the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), reflecting their contrasting geopolitical concerns**. While the United States fervently regarded the continued development of SDI as essential to deterring future Soviet aggression and ensuring strategic superiority even against the backdrop of easing Cold War tensions, the Soviet Union viewed SDI as the ultimate threat to genuine disarmament and advocated for its discontinuation/termination/halt/suspension to uphold the peacekeeping spirit of the 1987 Washington treaty.
- **Evidence:** Source A highlights Reagan's defense of the SDI program, asserting that the continued 'development of SDI would do much to make the world safer' as it functions as a 'defense against offensive missiles.' He presents SDI as part of a broader strategic shift away

from a reliance on mutual deterrence, where nations 'hold each other hostage to nuclear terror and destruction.' However, Source B reflects Gorbachev's strategic concern that the expansion of SDI mirror 'dangerous tendencies' of rearmament which could 'undermine the nascent turn in the process of demilitarizing international relations,' thereby threatening the fragile progress prospects made in the disarmament agreement of 1987.

- **Explanation:** While Reagan viewed SDI as an American defense mechanism rather than its weaponisation for future aggression — intended to legitimise U.S. status quo as a peacekeeping superpower, Gorbachev feared that the continued development of the SDI programme would inadvertently derail disarmament efforts and potentially revitalise the Cold War arms race in the long run, highlighting the deep-seated divergent strategic geopolitical priorities between the United States and Soviet Union over the conundrum of how global peace and security should be achieved and sustained against the evolving world order.

Why are the sources similar/different?

Comparison based on Contextualisation of the Sources

Similarity based on Historical Context

- Any of the following specific historical content can be used to illustrate how the situational contexts of both the United States and the Soviet Union fostered greater openness to negotiations, thereby enabling both powers to find common ground in recognising the importance of denuclearisation and disarmament in easing Cold War tensions and promoting global peace and security:
 - **Reagan's doctrine** escalated the arms race, raising U.S. defence spending from **\$134 billion in 1980 to \$253 billion by 1989**, which placed unsustainable pressure on the Soviet Union's already struggling economy. By 1986, Soviet GNP growth had fallen to 1.4%, with excessive spending on nuclear weapons diverting resources from consumer goods and social services. The economic burden and looming threat of nuclear war compelled both powers to pursue arms reduction, culminating in key summits from Geneva (1985) to Washington (1987), where the **Intermediate-range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF Treaty)** was signed.
 - **U.S. Public and Congressional Pressure for Arms Control made Reagan more willing to ease the arms race** => By the mid-1980s, there was growing public and bipartisan political support in the U.S. for nuclear arms reductions due to the significant increase in military expenditure that reduced government public spending. Reagan's political legitimacy and mass popularity were at stake, motivating him to negotiate with Gorbachev on arms reductions, especially given his awareness of the USSR's economic struggles and inability to match U.S. military power.
 - The **Geneva Summit** marked a turning point where both Reagan and Gorbachev acknowledged the unsustainability of the arms race, issuing a joint statement that 'a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.' It signalled Reagan's willingness to ease military rivalry and Gorbachev's openness to compromise, paving the way for substantive disarmament talks at the Reykjavik and Washington summits.

- **Both Reagan and Gorbachev shared a strategic purpose at the 1987 Washington Summit:** to demonstrate that meaningful nuclear disarmament was achievable through diplomacy. This was reflected in the signing of the **Intermediate-range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF Treaty)**, the first concrete arms-reduction agreement to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons, encompassing both intermediate and shorter-range missiles. The INF Treaty also enabled both powers to establish extensive on-site verification, a historic first in arms control.
- For Reagan, it reinforced his image as a strong yet pragmatic leader committed to global security. For Gorbachev, it supported his domestic reform agenda by easing military tensions and reducing defence expenditure.

Difference based on Purpose

Source A

- **Authorship:** American President Reagan
- **Audience:** To both the American public and global media
- **Purpose:** As a staunch anti-communist who had reversed the U.S. policy of détente, Reagan sought to reassure the American public that his administration remained committed to maintaining and strengthening U.S. military superiority over the Soviet Union, even after the INF Treaty. By emphasizing continued advancement of the SDI program, he wanted to tacitly remind the USSR of America's strategic and technological military edge, deterring Gorbachev from adopting a more aggressive foreign policy in the future and also to hasten the speed of his socio-political reforms to undermine the central tenets communism. The expected outcome was to sustain domestic support for his administration while heightening Soviet paranoia and insecurity over its military inferiority.

Source B

- **Authorship:** Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev
- **Audience:** Soviet public
- **Purpose:** Gorbachev thus used this televised opportunity to tacitly criticise American expansion of the SDI programme of undermining the tangible progress towards disarmament and the easing of Cold War tensions. By outrightly demonising American pursuit of SDI as a "dangerous tendency" that could revitalise the arms race, he hoped to mobilise mass domestic and global support to place pressure on the Whitehouse and Reagan to consider halting its missile defense project. This move would also crystallise and solidify his global image as the peace-oriented leader, further bolstering his political legitimacy to govern Soviet Union.

1b. How far do Sources A–E support the assertion that Reagan was the key driving force behind the end of the Cold War? [30]

Sources A, C and E support the assertion while Source B and D challenge the assertion that Reagan was the key driving force for the end of the Cold War.

(You are expected to cite evidence as part of your explanation of the sources)

Support group

Source/s	Explanation
A and E	Sources A and E both support the assertion that Reagan was a key driving force behind the end of the Cold War by highlighting his pivotal/instrumental role in steering the arms reduction talks and shifting U.S.-Soviet relations.
C	Source C acknowledged Reagan's initial 'confrontational' anti-Soviet stance, especially via his acceleration of 'strategic nuclear modernization plans,' before applauding his eventual shift towards undertaking 'a more conciliatory approach' to engage with Gorbachev diplomatically. In doing so, Source C adds more nuanced credence to the claims made in Sources A and E by demonstrating how Reagan arguably weaponised his ambitious SDI programme as a geopolitical bargaining chip to tacitly threaten and compel the economically weakened Soviet Union to negotiate and accelerate the process of disarmament prior to his pursuance of détente and diplomacy with Gorbachev.

Challenge group

Source/s	Explanation
B and D	Sources B and D thus attribute a more influential and proactive role to Gorbachev than Reagan in ending the Cold War. In Source B, Gorbachev primarily argues that there could be 'no winners in a nuclear war' and that nations should work together in ensuring peace and security like 'climbers roped together on a mountainside'. Likewise, in Source D, the Soviet leader expounds on the notion of a 'common European home' and denounces the perception of the region being 'divided into sphere of influence' for 'confrontation' as an outdated and misguided Cold War rhetoric.

Evaluation of sources

Source	Reliability check	Status
Support sources		
A and E	In Source A, we see Reagan's tacit self-congratulatory approach in elaborating on the geopolitical implications of the landmark 1987 Soviet-U.S. Summit overtly suggests a degree of political bias towards U.S.-centrism by downplaying the agency of Soviet leadership, Mikhail Gorbachev, and overstating the impact of U.S. foreign policy in jumpstarting the process of ending the Cold War. Reagan sought to legitimise himself as the chief architect of the disarmament progress and to reassure the American public that arms reduction would not compromise national security or U.S. military superiority, thereby consolidating domestic support for his administration. However, Source A is still not a holistically reliable source within the support set due to Reagan's biased and self-congratulatory political rhetoric. Source E depicts the fall of the Berlin Wall as the 'Reagan Memorial,' with a jubilant family standing in the gap where the Wall has been broken. Given that this pictorial source was produced in an American newspaper one day after Reagan's passing in 2004, along with the historical context of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and its purpose, like Source A, the reliability of Source E is highly questionable. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was in tandem with sustained Reagan-era geopolitical pressure for the democratisation of Eastern Europe via his aggressive pursuit of military build-up and his famous 1987 'tear down this wall' speech.	Unreliable
C	Source C, unlike Sources A and E, is moderately reliable in supporting the assertion. The Reagan Doctrine strained the Soviet economy, forcing Gorbachev to abandon the arms race and pursue disarmament. Growing public pressure for denuclearisation also aligned with Reagan's détente and Gorbachev's '<i>New Thinking</i>' reforms. Source C aims to legitimise Reagan's key role in ending the Cold War by tracing the evolution of his foreign policy.	Moderately reliable
Challenge sources		
B and D	Gorbachev adopts a candid yet unpretentious language in Sources B and D. This is evident in his sincere call to 'work all together' despite openly criticizing the acceleration of the 'SDI' in Source B, and in his pragmatic acknowledgment that 'states of Europe belong to different social systems is a reality' despite being a Soviet leader in Source D. Furthermore, Gorbachev claims in both Sources B and D are arguably manifestations of his '<i>New Thinking</i>' doctrine that underscored the provision of interdependence, cooperation and peaceful coexistence between U.S. and Soviet Union. This momentous shift in Soviet foreign policy from zero-sum Cold War logic and towards cooperation with the West arguably enabled Gorbachev to foster a close relationship with the western leaders,	B and D: reliable

	ranging from American President Reagan to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and even British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, dispelling effectively dispelling the myopic American perception of the Soviet Union as the 'evil empire' during the 1991 Moscow summit. Source B's reliability may be questioned due to Gorbachev's vested political interest in securing domestic support for his conciliatory shift in foreign policy towards the United States. While Source B's reliability may be questioned due to Gorbachev's vested political interest in securing domestic support for his conciliatory shift in foreign policy towards the United States, Source D adds weight and credibility to Source B by offering a more nuanced and objective perspective, especially when considered in light of its situational context.	
E	Therefore, the main purpose of Source E is to commemorate and honour the legacy of Ronald Reagan by oversimplifying the complex/multi-dimensional narrative of the Berlin Wall's fall into a singular achievement of the United States. By overstating Reagan's role and understating both the impact of Gorbachev's socio-political reforms and people's power in ending the Cold War is highly unreliable in supporting the assertion statement, as it stems from a very typical pro-American retrospective vantage point that embellishes complex narratives by over-glorifying American centrality in Cold War historiography.	Highly unreliable