

Optimised Study Guide — Origins of the Cold War in Europe

Optimised, exam-focused study guide for the origins of the Cold War in Europe (Unit 4, Elective 1, Component C01-U4E1). Grounded in the 2020–2025 SCSA exams and marking keys, especially the 2023 Q13 on the role of communism in shaping the region. Covers the ideological clash, wartime distrust and the Yalta/Potsdam conferences, Stalin's buffer zone, the Iron Curtain, the Truman Doctrine and containment, the Marshall Plan, the Berlin Blockade and Airlift, the formation of NATO and the division of Germany, and the orthodox/revisionist/post-revisionist historiographical debate. Leads with exam priorities and marking-key expectations.

The Cold War in Europe begins as the wartime alliance curdles into mutual suspicion. Within a few years a continent is split into two hostile camps. This is the foundational topic of the elective, and the exam reliably asks you to explain *why* — to analyse the origins and the early division of Europe. Get the chain Yalta → Truman Doctrine → Marshall Plan → Berlin → NATO firmly in place.

The marking-key steer. The 2023 essay — *"Examine the role of communism in shaping the region"* — shows how the markers frame the origins: **Stalin's expansionist creation of a buffer zone** of communist states was the catalyst for **Truman's containment**, delivered mainly through the economic **Marshall Plan**, until by 1949 (with NATO) Europe had **clearly divided into two camps**. Build your answer on that cause-and-effect spine.

How this content is examined

- **Essays.** The origins of the Cold War; the role of communism/ideology in dividing Europe; the reasons for specific flashpoints.
- **Source analysis (Section One, Unit 4).** Cartoons on the Marshall Plan vs the "Molotov Plan," the Iron Curtain or containment recur — you need precise contextual knowledge.

Answer the verb. Examine / Analyse the origins = investigate the causes and show how they interacted. A strong answer organises causes (ideological, strategic, economic, personal) and shows escalation, rather than listing events.

1. The roots of conflict

- **Ideological clash:** Soviet communism (one-party state, command economy) vs Western liberal capitalism and democracy — fundamentally incompatible visions.

- **Wartime distrust:** the legacy of mutual suspicion, the delayed second front, and disagreements at the **Yalta and Potsdam conferences (1945)** over the future of Eastern Europe, especially Poland.
- **The security dilemma:** Stalin wanted a **buffer zone** of friendly states to protect the USSR after two devastating invasions; the West read this as aggressive expansion.

2. The division hardens (1946–47)

- **The "Iron Curtain":** Churchill's 1946 image of a Europe split in two captured the new reality.
- **The Truman Doctrine (1947):** the US pledge to support free peoples resisting communism — the policy of containment.
- **The Marshall Plan (1947):** massive US economic aid to rebuild Western Europe — containment through prosperity. Stalin forbade Eastern bloc participation and answered with Cominform/Comecon.

3. The first great crisis: Berlin (1948–49)

- Disagreement over Germany's future and the introduction of a new Western currency led Stalin to impose the **Berlin Blockade**, cutting off West Berlin (deep inside the Soviet zone).
- The Western **Berlin Airlift** supplied the city for nearly a year, forcing Stalin to back down — a major propaganda victory for the West.

4. Two camps (1949)

- **NATO (1949)** formalised the Western military alliance; Germany was split into the **Federal Republic (West)** and the **German Democratic Republic (East)**.
- Europe was now clearly divided into two ideological and military blocs — the structure that would define the next four decades (the Warsaw Pact followed in 1955).

5. Historical perspectives (the classic Cold War debate)

- **Orthodox:** Soviet expansionism was the cause; the West reacted defensively.
- **Revisionist:** aggressive US economic and atomic policy (and the Marshall Plan as economic imperialism) drove Soviet defensiveness.
- **Post-revisionist:** a tragic spiral of mutual misperception and the security dilemma — neither side solely to blame.

6. Recurring exam question patterns & what high answers do

- **"Examine the origins of the Cold War / the role of communism in dividing Europe."** High answers: organise causes, trace the escalation Yalta → Truman Doctrine → Marshall Plan → Berlin → NATO, and engage the orthodox/revisionist debate.
- **Source questions:** use the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan and Berlin Airlift to decode containment-era cartoons.

Recall self-test. Can you:

- Explain the ideological clash and the wartime/Yalta–Potsdam roots of distrust?
- Explain Stalin's "buffer zone" motive and how the West interpreted it?
- Define the Truman Doctrine, containment and the Marshall Plan, and explain how they were linked?
- Explain the Berlin Blockade and Airlift and their significance?
- Explain how NATO and the division of Germany created "two camps" by 1949?
- Argue the orthodox, revisionist and post-revisionist interpretations of who caused the Cold War?