

Optimised Study Guide — Soviet Control of Eastern Europe

Optimised, exam-focused study guide for Soviet control of Eastern Europe during the Cold War (Unit 4, Elective 1, Component C03-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 instruments of control (satellite states, the Warsaw Pact, Comecon, repression), the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968 and the Brezhnev Doctrine, and how repeated interventions drained communism's legitimacy and set up the collapse of 1989. Leads with exam priorities and marking-key expectations.

Between the Wall and the fall, the Soviet Union held its Eastern European empire together by force. The pattern is brutally consistent: a satellite state pushes for reform or freedom, and Moscow crushes it. Understanding how the USSR maintained control — and the doctrine that justified it — is essential, because it sets up the drama of 1989, when that control was finally withdrawn.

The marking-key steer. The 2023 essay — *"Examine the role of communism in shaping the region"* — frames the middle Cold War precisely: **the Hungarian Uprising (1956) and the Prague Spring (1968) were both examples of the USSR enforcing communism**, first with the Red Army and then with Warsaw Pact troops under the **Brezhnev Doctrine**. Use these two case studies as the backbone of any answer on Soviet control.

How this content is examined

- **Essays.** How the USSR maintained control of Eastern Europe; the role of communism/repression in the region; the significance of resistance movements.
- **Source analysis.** Sources on 1956, 1968 or Warsaw Pact intervention require precise knowledge of the doctrine and the crackdowns.

Answer the verb. Examine = investigate in detail. A strong answer uses the case studies (1956, 1968) as evidence for a clear argument about *how* and *why* Soviet control was enforced — and at what cost to communism's legitimacy.

1. The instruments of control

- **The satellite system:** communist governments installed across Eastern Europe, loyal to Moscow.

- **The Warsaw Pact (1955):** the Soviet-led military alliance — both a counter to NATO and a tool for disciplining members.
- **Comecon:** economic integration binding the bloc to the Soviet economy.
- **Repression:** secret police, censorship and one-party rule throughout the bloc.

2. The Hungarian Uprising (1956)

- Reformist leader **Imre Nagy** moved to leave the Warsaw Pact and end one-party rule.
- The USSR responded with a full **Red Army invasion**, crushing the rising at the cost of thousands of lives; Nagy was later executed.
- **Significance:** a clear signal that Moscow would not tolerate defection from the bloc — and that the West (despite its rhetoric) would not intervene.

3. The Prague Spring (1968)

- In Czechoslovakia, **Alexander Dubček** pursued "socialism with a human face" — liberalising reforms within communism.
- **Warsaw Pact troops** invaded to end it.
- This was justified by the **Brezhnev Doctrine**: the USSR claimed the right to intervene in any socialist state where socialism was "threatened" — formalising the logic of control.

4. Why control mattered for the wider Cold War

- These interventions kept the bloc intact for decades but **drained communism's legitimacy** — each crackdown advertised that the system survived only by force.
- The Brezhnev Doctrine is the crucial setup for 1989: when **Gorbachev abandoned it**, the satellites were free to fall — and they did (see the "Collapse of Communism" guide).

5. Historical perspectives

- **Strength or fragility?** Did repeated interventions show Soviet strength, or expose a brittle empire that could only be held by tanks?
- **Ideology vs empire:** was Soviet control about defending communism, or simply maintaining a Russian sphere of influence?

6. Recurring exam question patterns & what high answers do

- **"Examine how the USSR maintained control of Eastern Europe."** High answers: combine the structural instruments (Warsaw Pact, Comecon, repression) with the 1956 and 1968 case studies, and link to the Brezhnev Doctrine.
- **"Examine the role of communism/resistance in the region."** High answers: use 1956 and 1968 to show the cycle of reform and repression, and connect it to communism's eventual collapse.

Recall self-test. Can you:

- Name the instruments of Soviet control (satellites, Warsaw Pact, Comecon, repression)?
- Explain the Hungarian Uprising (1956) — Nagy, the Red Army, the outcome?
- Explain the Prague Spring (1968) — Dubček, "socialism with a human face," Warsaw Pact invasion?
- Define the Brezhnev Doctrine and explain its significance?
- Explain how repeated crackdowns drained communism's legitimacy and set up 1989?
- Argue both the "strength" and "fragility" interpretations of Soviet control?