

IB DP History HL

Paper 3 Complete Study Guide

Sections 12, 14 and 16. A revision textbook

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IB DP History

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IB DP History HL – Paper 3 Complete Study Guide (revision textbook)

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IB DP History HL — Paper 3 Complete Study Guide

A revision textbook for Sections 12, 14 and 16.

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How to use this book

This textbook is designed for revision rather than first-time learning. Each chapter opens with a short Summary of events, a list of key questions framed in the language of IB command terms, and a timeline of the most important dates. The body of every chapter is broken into numbered sections, each devoted to one focused historical problem. Every chapter closes with a narrative discussion of the main historiographical debates, a chapter summary, a table of key terms and a set of practice questions in the style of Paper 3.

When you sit down to revise, start by reading the chapter summary and skimming the timeline. Then read the opening section slowly, because it orients you to the main question the chapter is trying to answer. Move through the numbered sections in order. When you reach the end of the chapter, do not close the book. Look at the key terms table and make sure you can define each term in one sentence without help. Read at least one of the essay questions and sketch a plan in the margin, because the ability to plan quickly is what separates a seven from a five on exam day.

A reader who finishes this book will have covered all three higher-level Paper 3 options that form the Russian and interwar European track, namely Imperial Russia and the emergence of the Soviet state between 1853 and 1924, the interwar authoritarian states of Europe between roughly 1918 and 1939, and the Soviet Union followed by post-Soviet Russia from 1924 to 2000. The fourth part of the book contains the examination apparatus, offering a guide to command terms, an essay-writing technique, practice questions organised by syllabus section, a historiographical quick reference and a consolidated glossary.

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PART 0: PAPER 3 — THE EXAM ITSELF

0.1 What Paper 3 is and how it differs from Paper 2

Paper 3 is the higher-level paper in IB History, taken only by HL candidates and weighted at thirty-five per cent of the final grade. The examination runs for two hours and thirty minutes. Each of the four regional options has its own examination paper. This book covers the European and Middle Eastern regional option, which means that on examination day you sit a paper containing thirty-six questions, organised as two questions for each of the eighteen syllabus sections, and you answer any three of those thirty-six. The maximum mark is forty-five, fifteen marks per essay.

The format invites a misunderstanding. Two and a half hours, three essays. Fifty minutes per essay. The temptation is to assume that Paper 3 is just a long version of Paper 2 with one extra essay. The IB does not assess them on the same scale. Paper 2 essays are short, ranging from eight hundred to one thousand two hundred words, comparative across two regions, and lightly historiographical. Paper 3 essays are longer, ranging from one thousand two hundred to one thousand six hundred words, focused within one region across the long sweep of its history, and more densely historiographical.

Five extra minutes per essay sounds small, but five minutes at the end of an essay is when the conclusion gets written and the perspective element gets tightened. The marker reading a Paper 3 essay expects sustained analysis over four or five paragraphs of substantive argument, not the compressed three or four paragraphs of Paper 2. The depth requirement is the chief reason why Paper 3 is HL only. The candidate has signed up to know the region in detail, and the paper assesses that detail.

The other big structural difference is the absence of the two-region rule. Paper 2 most often pairs cases from two of the four IB regions. Paper 3 is single-region by design. A question in our regional option about Russian industrialisation is answered with Russian evidence. A question about authoritarian states in the interwar period is answered with European evidence. The examiner expects examples drawn from the syllabus's eighteen sections and treats material outside those sections as off-topic, even when it is historically accurate.

The choice of three essays from thirty-six is wider than candidates often realise. This book covers three of the eighteen sections in real depth, namely Section 12 on Imperial Russia and the establishment of the Soviet state from 1853 to 1924, Section 14 on interwar European and Middle Eastern states, and Section 16 on the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia from 1924 to 2000. Each of these sections offers two questions on the paper, so a candidate who has studied all three has six questions to choose three from. This is a generous menu and almost guarantees that three usable questions will appear, but it imposes a discipline. You cannot afford to know one section thinly. The risk that two of the three usable questions fall in your weakest section is real. The remedy is even preparation across the three.

Reference point	Paper 2 (SL and HL)	Paper 3 (HL only)
Duration	1 hour 30 minutes	2 hours 30 minutes
Number of essays	2	3
Minutes per essay	approximately 45	approximately 50
Marks per essay	15	15
Total marks	30	45

Reference point	Paper 2 (SL and HL)	Paper 3 (HL only)
Weighting	25 per cent HL, 30 per cent SL	35 per cent
Regional rule	Often two regions required	Single region throughout
Depth expected	Comparative across regions	Sustained within one region

Selecting the three questions on examination day

The first ten minutes of the examination are not for writing. They are for reading. The candidate scans all thirty-six questions, identifies the six that lie within the prepared sections, and ranks those six by confidence. The strongest essay is written first because first impressions count and because the freshly-rested mind produces the cleanest prose. The weakest of the three is written last, when the wrist is tired and the marker has already received the better part of the candidate's thinking on the easier topics.

A practical hint that examiners reward is to scan the questions for the command term first and for the content second. Evaluate, to what extent, discuss, examine, analyse, compare and contrast. The command term shapes the essay more than the topic does. A question on Stolypin's reforms framed with evaluate is a different essay from the same topic framed with to what extent. Choose the questions whose command term you have rehearsed, not just the questions whose content you remember best.

A common trap reported in IB subject reports is the misread question. The candidate sees the words Russia and industrialisation and writes the essay they had prepared on the Witte system, only to discover at the end that the question asked about the impact of industrialisation on the peasantry. Underline the command term and the historical issue at the head of every chosen question, even when you are confident. Ten seconds of underlining is the cheapest insurance the paper offers.

The fifty-minute clock

Time discipline at Paper 3 is more demanding than at Paper 2 because the absolute time investment is larger and the failure mode is also larger. A candidate who runs short on Paper 2 loses five marks. A candidate who runs short on Paper 3 can lose fifteen if the third essay never gets written. Examiner reports return to this failure year after year.

The recommended allocation for each fifty-minute essay is roughly eight minutes of planning, thirty-eight minutes of writing, and four minutes of review. The planning phase is when you outline the thesis, list the four or five paragraphs, fix the historians you will integrate and identify the specific dated evidence you will deploy. The writing phase moves through introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion at roughly one paragraph every six to seven minutes. The review phase scans the essay for the one or two corrections that lift it from twelve to thirteen, namely a sharper opening sentence, a missing perspective evaluation, or a conclusion that lacks a final judgement.

Skipping the planning phase is the single most consistent error in Paper 3 scripts. The candidate dives in, the first paragraph is strong, and then the second wanders, the third forgets the thesis, and the fourth runs out of steam. Eight minutes spent at the start saves twelve minutes of confused writing in the middle.

0.2 Reading the markbands the examiner uses

The IB publishes a single generic markband for Paper 3 essays, applied identically to every regional option and every section. The bands run from zero to fifteen, divided into five levels of difficulty. The examiner reads the essay, identifies the band that best fits the response, and then places the essay at the top, middle or bottom of that band depending on how fully the band's criteria are met. Understanding what each band asks for is the cheapest way to add marks, because it tells you precisely which moves earn the next two points.

The four assessment dimensions that the examiner uses to reach a band are not weighted separately but appear together in every band descriptor. The first is focus, namely whether the essay addresses the question and stays addressed to it from start to finish. The second is knowledge, namely whether the candidate produces accurate, relevant, dated, named historical material. The third is analysis, namely whether the candidate explains rather than narrates, and whether each piece of evidence is followed by a sentence that says why the evidence matters. The fourth is perspective, namely whether the candidate is aware that the question can be read from more than one historical or historiographical position, and whether competing positions are evaluated rather than merely listed.

The top band, 13 to 15 marks

In the top band, the IB expects (in paraphrase) an essay that is sharply focused and fully aware of what the question demands and implies. It is well organised and balanced, with detailed, accurate and relevant knowledge. Events are set in context and the historical concepts are clearly understood. The examples are well chosen and used effectively to support analysis or evaluation. The arguments are clear and coherent, different perspectives are evaluated and that evaluation is built into the answer, and the critical analysis is well developed. Almost every main point is backed by evidence, and the essay argues towards a reasoned conclusion.

What this paragraph asks for in plain English is an essay that does six things. The thesis answers the question directly. Each paragraph develops one substantive argument with named, dated evidence. Each paragraph then explains why the evidence matters rather than merely reporting it. At least two historians are named with their views and the candidate evaluates which view is better supported by the evidence at hand. The structure is balanced rather than lopsided. The conclusion delivers a judgement that is consistent with the body of the essay. A fifteen is a thirteen with no real weaknesses, where every paragraph lands and every historian is integrated rather than name-dropped.

The upper band, 10 to 12 marks

In the upper band, the IB describes (in paraphrase) an essay that understands and addresses what the question demands. It is generally well organised, though some repetition or unclear passages may remain. Knowledge is mostly accurate and relevant, events are set in context and the historical concepts are clearly understood. The examples are appropriate and support analysis or evaluation, the arguments are mainly clear and coherent, and there is some awareness and evaluation of different perspectives alongside critical analysis. Most main points are substantiated, and the essay argues towards a consistent conclusion. This is the band that most prepared HL candidates reach. The characteristic shortfall is the perspective element. The essay is competent, the evidence is solid, but the historians are mentioned rather than evaluated, or the candidate names a school of thought without contrasting it with another. The move from twelve to thirteen is almost always made by upgrading two of the perspective elements from name-drop to evaluation. The cost of this upgrade is two extra sentences per perspective, total perhaps four sentences across the essay. That is the cheapest two-mark gain available on Paper 3.

The middle band, 7 to 9 marks

In the middle band, the IB describes (in paraphrase) an essay that understands what the question demands but addresses it only in part. There is an attempt at a structured approach. Knowledge is partly accurate and relevant, events are generally set in context and the examples are appropriate. The essay goes beyond description into some analysis or critical comment, but cannot sustain it.

The middle band is where narrative dominates over analysis. The candidate knows the topic, can name the events, can place them in order, but cannot extract argument from narrative. The classic shape of a middle-band essay is four chronological paragraphs. The first describes events from 1855 to 1861. The second from 1861 to 1881. The third from 1881 to 1894. The fourth from 1894 to 1905. The chronology is correct, the dates are right, but the question asked about the causes of revolutionary opposition rather than the chronology of reform. The remedy is thematic organisation. Each paragraph addresses one factor that bears on the question, draws evidence from across the chronological range, and analyses the factor's contribution.

The lower bands, 1 to 6 marks

Essays in the lower bands are typically the product of underpreparation rather than misreading the rubric. The candidate does not know the dates, cannot name the key figures, has only general impressions of the topic. The four to six band gives credit for the general impression. The one to three band is reserved for essays that miss the question entirely or that contain so little accurate content that the examiner cannot find a position to reward. The remedy is preparation rather than technique. The chapters of this book are built specifically to lift a candidate out of these bands by giving names, dates and analytical handles for every section it covers.

How Paper 3 markbands differ from Paper 2

Side by side, the Paper 2 and Paper 3 markbands look almost identical. Both run zero to fifteen. Both award the top band for focus, accurate knowledge, integrated perspectives and reasoned conclusions. The substantive difference is what counts as detailed knowledge. A Paper 2 essay can reach the top band with eight to ten specific dated facts spread across three or four paragraphs. A Paper 3 essay needs roughly twelve to fifteen, because the paragraphs are longer and the regional grounding is expected to be richer. The candidate who writes a Paper 2 essay under Paper 3 conditions will land in the upper band rather than the top, because the essay will read as thin for the longer time available.

The other difference is regional grounding. Paper 2 markschemes reward comparison across two regions. Paper 3 markschemes reward depth within one region. A Paper 3 essay on Russia that drifts into a comparison with German industrialisation under Bismarck has wandered off the regional discipline and will lose marks on focus. The remedy is to stay inside the region, to use the region's own internal comparisons (Witte versus Stolypin, the 1905 Revolution versus the February Revolution) and to bring in non-Russian material only as brief context, not as substantive evidence.

Mark band	Marks	Defining feature
Top	13 to 15	Focused, detailed, analytical, perspectives integrated and evaluated, reasoned conclusion
Upper	10 to 12	Addressed, mostly analytical, some perspectives mentioned, consistent conclusion
Middle	7 to 9	Mix of analysis and narrative, evidence present but not sustained, structured attempt
Lower-middle	4 to 6	Mostly descriptive, limited evidence, weak structure
Lower	1 to 3	Little focus, vague examples, generalisations rather than analysis

0.3 Essay technique for a 50-minute Paper 3 essay

This book uses the same paragraph model for Paper 3 as for Paper 2, namely PEEL with a fifth element called Perspective, written as PEEL(P). The five elements are Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link and Perspective. What changes between Paper 2 and Paper 3 is not the model but the depth at which each element is developed. A Paper 2 PEEL(P) paragraph runs roughly one hundred and sixty words. A Paper 3 PEEL(P) paragraph runs roughly two hundred and twenty. The extra sixty words are spent on richer evidence, fuller explanation and a more developed perspective element.

The introduction

The Paper 3 introduction is short and analytical. Two to four sentences, no longer. A long context-setting introduction is the most common time-killer on the paper, and examiner reports flag it consistently. The functions the introduction has to perform are three. It locates the question in its historical context with one sentence of background. It states the thesis in one sentence using the wording of the question. It signposts the main arguments that the body paragraphs will develop in one sentence.

A worked example responds to the question, To what extent did foreign intervention shape the outcome of the Russian Civil War? On 7 November 1920, the last White army evacuated Crimea after three years of fighting, and the Bolsheviks emerged in control of the territory of the former empire. Foreign intervention shaped the outcome of the Civil War, particularly through the supply of Allied munitions and the diplomatic isolation of the Whites, but it was not the principal factor. Internal divisions between the White generals, the geographic advantages of the Bolshevik central position, the mobilisation of the Red Army by Trotsky and the alienation of peasant populations from White restoration policies all carried greater weight, and this essay will argue that the structural advantages of the Bolshevik position outweighed the effects of foreign aid.

Notice the discipline. One sentence of context naming a specific date and event. One sentence of thesis using the question's command term and key terms. One sentence signposting four arguments that the four body paragraphs will develop. Total length, eighty-seven words, and the marker already knows what the essay is going to argue.

The body paragraphs

A Paper 3 essay has four or five body paragraphs of roughly two hundred to two hundred and fifty words each. The candidate who has internalised PEEL(P) writes them on autopilot once the outline is in place.

The Point sentence is the topic sentence and it argues rather than describes. Compare two openings to a paragraph on Stolypin's land reforms. The first reads, Stolypin introduced significant land reforms between 1906 and 1911. The second reads, Stolypin's land reforms achieved limited but real economic success between 1906 and 1911 while failing to deliver the political stability the regime had hoped to buy. The first sentence is descriptive and tells the marker the paragraph will be in the middle band. The second is argumentative and signals an upper-band paragraph before the evidence has been presented. A well-known writing tip applies. Start strong. The first sentence of every paragraph is your second-best chance to argue, after the introduction.

The Evidence sentences deliver specific, dated, named material. Generality is the most common middle-band fault. Many peasants benefited is generality. By 1916, approximately twenty per cent of communal land had

passed into private peasant ownership through the consolidation procedures of the Land Reform Act of November 1906 is specificity. The Paper 3 marker expects three or four pieces of specific evidence in every body paragraph. Memorise short clusters of dated facts for each section so that your evidence sentences are dense rather than vague.

The Explanation sentences answer the silent question so what. After each piece of evidence, ask yourself why this fact matters for the argument. The candidate who writes the kulaks emerged as a new agricultural elite, which suggests that the reforms were producing the differentiation Stolypin had hoped for as a basis of regime support has converted evidence into argument. The candidate who simply lists the evidence has not.

The Link sentence returns the paragraph to the question. One sentence is enough. Stolypin's reforms therefore achieved a partial economic success but did not deliver the political stability the regime needed, for example, links the paragraph back to a question about the success of late tsarist reform.

The Perspective sentences integrate one or two historians. A common template for the Perspective sentences is worth memorising. This is supported by Author X, who argues… establishes the view. However, while Author X claims…, Data Y suggests… establishes the contrast. Given X, it can be concluded that Y establishes the evaluation. The three-move structure of state-contrast-evaluate is the difference between name-dropping and integration. A perspective element that only states a view, however correctly, does not lift the essay into the top band. A perspective element that does the three moves, in three or four sentences, is the technical move that earns the top band.

A worked Perspective on Stolypin

This interpretation aligns with Abraham Ascher, who argues in his 2002 biography that Stolypin combined genuine reformist conviction with an authoritarian streak that was the source of his ultimate political failure. Orlando Figes challenges this reading, suggesting in A People's Tragedy that the reforms were too tightly bound to repression to produce the social transformation Stolypin hoped for, and that the long-term effect was to deepen rather than to mitigate peasant resentment of the state. The available evidence on rural unrest in the years between 1907 and 1914 supports a synthesis closer to Figes than to Ascher, namely that whatever the personal qualities of Stolypin, the structural conditions of late tsarist agriculture were too entrenched for his reforms to dislodge in the time the regime had remaining.

Notice how the example does the three moves in three sentences. The first names a historian and states the view. The second names a counter-view with a second historian. The third evaluates the two views against the evidence in the paragraph. That is a top-band Perspective element, and it occupies four lines of handwritten script.

The conclusion

The Paper 3 conclusion is short, two or three sentences, and it does two things. It restates the thesis in stronger language than the introduction allowed, since the body of the essay has now demonstrated the argument. It delivers a final judgement that responds to the command term. An evaluate essay closes with an appraisal. A to what extent essay closes with a degree marker. A discuss essay closes with a verdict on which factor was most important. An examine essay closes with a summary of how the elements connect.

The candidate who runs out of time and writes only a one-sentence conclusion has lost two or three marks unnecessarily. The four minutes of review allocated in the time plan should always include the conclusion, and the planning phase should include the conclusion in skeleton form so that no thinking happens at the end of the essay when fatigue is highest. The top band expects an essay that is well structured, balanced and effectively organised, which means an actual conclusion of the kind that closes the argument rather than

abandons it.

Writing tips drawn from examiner reports

Three writing tips that recur in examiner reports deserve emphasis at the start of the year and again before the examination. The first concerns adding information. Asterisks and arrows that indicate forgotten sentences slow the marker down and signal poor planning. If you must add content, leave the bottom fifteen per cent of each page blank so that the addition can sit in context rather than at the back of the booklet. The second concerns handwriting. Examiners read the scripts on screens after they are scanned, and illegible script costs marks the candidate has earned through content. Print rather than cursive, leave space between words, skip a line between paragraphs. The third concerns specific historical vocabulary. Use the original-language terms when they exist (Sturmabteilung rather than brownshirts, zemstvo rather than local council, kombedy rather than peasant committee) because they signal the kind of detailed regional knowledge the top band rewards.

Two further tips emerge from the IB subject reports themselves. Challenging the question does not mean ignoring the named factor. A to what extent question on Stolypin's reforms invites you to argue that they were not the most important factor, but only after you have addressed Stolypin's reforms head-on. Skipping the named factor and writing only about the alternatives is one of the most common ways to lose four marks. And distinctions between social, cultural, economic, political and diplomatic history matter. A question on the diplomatic causes of the First World War in the European section is not a question on its economic causes, and treating the two as interchangeable will lose marks on focus.

Cross-references to Part IV

The exam-preparation chapters at the end of this book develop these themes further. Chapter 17 lists every IB command term with worked examples. Chapter 18 expands the essay technique with longer worked paragraphs across all three sections of our regional option. Chapter 19 contains practice essay questions with model thesis statements. Chapter 20 collects the historians named throughout the book into a quick-reference table. Chapter 21 glosses the regional vocabulary that the top band expects. Read those chapters in the weeks before the examination. Read this Part 0 in the first week of the course, and again the night before the examination, because it is the cheapest preparation the paper offers.

PART I: IMPERIAL RUSSIA, REVOLUTION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOVIET STATE (1853–1924)

Chapter 1: Alexander II and the Era of Reform (1855–1881)

Summary of events

Alexander II came to the throne of a Russian Empire that had just been humiliated in the Crimean War. Convinced that reform was a matter of state survival rather than liberal principle, he launched the most ambitious programme of modernisation that imperial Russia would ever see. Between 1861 and 1874 he freed twenty-three million serfs, created elected local councils called zemstva, opened the courts to jury trial, reorganised the army on the principle of universal conscription and eased the grip of censorship over the universities. The reforms modernised Russia but also raised expectations that the autocracy could not satisfy, producing a new opposition of populists and revolutionaries. After several failed attempts on his life, Alexander II was killed by a bomb of the People's Will on 1 March 1881, on the very day he had approved a cautious step toward representative government. His death closed the possibility of reform from above and set the terms of the Russian question for the next generation.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. Why did Alexander II launch the Great Reforms, and to what extent were they driven by the Crimean defeat rather than by liberal conviction?
2. How far did the Emancipation of 1861 solve the agrarian problem of the Russian Empire?
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the zemstva, the judicial reform and the military reform as instruments of modernisation.
4. Why did the reforms produce a radical opposition rather than a grateful society?
5. To what extent was Alexander II a genuine reformer, as liberal historians have argued, and to what extent a pragmatic autocrat forced into concessions?

Timeline of Chapter 1

1853–1856	Crimean War. Russia defeated by Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire, Sardinia
1856	Treaty of Paris. Russia loses Black Sea fleet and southern Bessarabia
1855	Accession of Alexander II
19 February 1861	Emancipation Edict frees twenty-three million serfs
1864	Zemstva created and judicial reform enacted
1863–1864	Education reform and university autonomy restored
1864	Polish January Uprising suppressed
1866	Karakozov attempts to assassinate the Tsar. Conservative reaction begins
1874	Military reform introduces universal conscription. "Going to the People" movement
1876	Land and Liberty founded

1879 People's Will splits from Land and Liberty

1 March 1881 Alexander II assassinated. Loris-Melikov proposals abandoned

The Crimean War and Its Legacy

The Crimean War (1853–1856) exposed the fundamental weaknesses of the Russian autocratic system. Russia's defeat by Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire revealed technological backwardness, administrative incompetence, and the failure of serfdom-based agriculture to sustain a modern military. The Treaty of Paris (1856) humiliated Russia: it lost control of the Black Sea, ceded southern Bessarabia, and saw its claim to protect Ottoman Christians rejected.

The new Tsar, Alexander II (r. 1855–1881), recognised that reform was necessary for Russia's survival as a great power. As he famously stated: "It is better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait for it to abolish itself from below." This pragmatic calculus — reform as a tool of state power, not liberal conviction — would define his entire reign.

The Great Reforms

The Emancipation of the Serfs (19 February 1861) was the centrepiece of Alexander's reform programme. Approximately 23 million serfs were legally freed. However, the terms of emancipation contained critical limitations:

- Peasants received land but had to pay redemption payments over 49 years
- Land was allocated to the mir (commune), not to individuals, restricting mobility
- Former serfs often received less land than they had previously farmed
- The nobility retained the best agricultural land

Reform	Date	Key Features	Limitations
Emancipation	1861	Freed 23M serfs; land allocation via mir	Redemption payments; communal ownership; land shortage
Zemstva	1864	Elected local government; roads, schools, health	Limited franchise; no national assembly; gentry dominated
Judicial reform	1864	Independent courts; jury trials; equality before law	Peasant courts remained separate; political cases exempt
Military reform	1874	Universal conscription; modern training; reduced service (6 years)	Officer corps still aristocratic; slow implementation
Education reform	1863–64	University autonomy; expanded secondary schools	Censorship remained; universities became centres of opposition

The Emergence of Opposition

The reforms paradoxically stimulated opposition. Educated Russians (the intelligentsia) demanded further change, while conservatives resisted any erosion of autocratic power. Key opposition movements included:

- Nihilists (1860s): Influenced by Chernyshevsky's What Is to Be Done? (1863); rejected existing institutions
- Populists (Narodniki): Believed Russia's future lay with the peasant commune; the "Going to the People" movement (1874) saw thousands of students travel to villages — and be rejected by suspicious peasants
- Land and Liberty (Zemlya i Volya, 1876): Organised revolutionary movement
- People's Will (Narodnaya Volya, 1879): Terrorist splinter group that adopted assassination as political strategy

On 1 March 1881, a People's Will bomb killed Alexander II in St Petersburg. The assassination was deeply ironic: on the day of his death, Alexander had approved the Loris-Melikov proposals — a cautious step toward representative government. His death ended any prospect of constitutional reform from above.

Historiographical Debate

> **Liberal view:**
> Alexander II was a genuine reformer — the "Tsar Liberator" — whose reforms modernised Russia and could have led to constitutional government had he lived. (W. Bruce Lincoln)
>
> **Revisionist view:**
> The reforms were driven by state necessity, not liberal conviction. Their contradictions (emancipation without adequate land, courts without political rights) created the conditions for revolution. (David Saunders)
>
> **Soviet/Marxist view:**
> The reforms were a "bourgeois revolution from above" — concessions by the ruling class to prevent revolution from below, which ultimately failed. (P.A. Zaionchkovsky)

Chapter summary

Alexander II inherited a Russian state that had been exposed as militarily backward by the Crimean War. Rather than reform out of conviction, he concluded that only sweeping change from above could save the autocracy. The Emancipation of 1861 was his central act, but it was followed by the creation of zemstva, an independent judiciary, a modernised army and a temporarily open university system. Each reform modernised Russia unevenly, each left the social hierarchy essentially intact, and each raised expectations that the autocracy was unwilling to meet. The result was the emergence of a radical intelligentsia, the populist mission to the countryside, and finally the terrorist campaign of the People's Will. Alexander's assassination on the day he approved the Loris-Melikov proposals closed the most promising window for constitutional evolution that imperial Russia would ever have.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Autocracy	The unlimited personal rule of the Tsar, unrestricted by constitution or legislature

Term	Meaning
Serfdom	The legal binding of peasants to the land, giving landlords authority over their labour, movement and property
Mir	The peasant commune that collectively held allocated land after 1861
Redemption payments	Compulsory repayments by former serfs over forty-nine years to compensate the state for land allotted to them
Zemstvo	An elected local council created in 1864 with responsibility for roads, schools and public health
Intelligentsia	The educated class of critics, writers and students that emerged as a self-conscious force of opposition
Nihilism	A radical philosophical current rejecting all existing authority, associated with Chernyshevsky's What Is to Be Done?
Populism (narodnichestvo)	The movement that saw Russia's revolutionary future in the peasant commune rather than in the industrial proletariat
People's Will (Narodnaya Volya)	The terrorist wing that split from Land and Liberty in 1879 and assassinated Alexander II
Loris-Melikov proposals	The cautious, consultative reform plan approved by Alexander II on the morning of his assassination

Questions

1. To what extent was the Emancipation of 1861 a genuine liberation of the Russian peasantry?
2. "Alexander II's reforms created more problems than they solved." Discuss.
3. Evaluate the claim that the reforms of Alexander II were driven by the requirements of state power rather than by liberal principle.
4. Examine the reasons for the growth of revolutionary opposition in Russia between 1861 and 1881.
5. Compare the effectiveness of two of the Great Reforms in modernising Russian society.

Source-based exercise

> *Source A. Alexander II, address to the Moscow nobility, 30 March 1856: "It is better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait for it to abolish itself from below."*
> *Source B. From the manifesto of the People's Will, announcing the sentence of death on the Tsar, 1879: "The Russian people are oppressed economically, politically and spiritually. Reforms from above have been shown to be a deception. The autocracy is the enemy of the people and must be destroyed by revolutionary means."*

(a) What does Source A reveal about the motives of Alexander II in launching the Great Reforms? [3 marks] (b) Compare and contrast the views expressed in Sources A and B about the possibility of reforming Russia. [6 marks] (c) Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess the argument that the failure of the Great Reforms to satisfy radical opinion made revolutionary violence inevitable. [9 marks]

Chapter 2: Alexander III and Conservative Reaction (1881–1894)

Summary of events

The assassination of Alexander II brought to the throne a very different ruler. Alexander III was physically imposing, pious and deeply conservative, and he repudiated the reformist direction of his father almost at once. Guided by his former tutor Konstantin Pobedonostsev, he issued the Manifesto on Unshakeable Autocracy, introduced a permanent state of emergency through the Statute on State Security, rolled back the independence of the zemstva and the universities and pursued a systematic programme of Russification that bore down hardest on Poles, Jews, Ukrainians and Finns. At the same time, and paradoxically, his reign saw the beginnings of the industrial transformation of the empire under Finance Minister Sergei Witte. Political reaction and economic modernisation ran in parallel, and the tension between them would define the reign of Alexander's son and successor.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. Why did Alexander III reject the reformist direction of his father, and what were the chief instruments of the reaction?
2. How effective was the policy of Russification, and what were its long-term consequences?
3. Evaluate the economic modernisation pursued by Witte and assess the social tensions it created.
4. To what extent did Alexander III succeed in shoring up the autocracy?

Timeline of Chapter 2

1 March 1881	Assassination of Alexander II. Accession of Alexander III
29 April 1881	Manifesto on Unshakeable Autocracy
1881	Statute on State Security. Emergency powers for provincial governors
1882	May Laws restrict Jewish residence and economic activity
1882	Press regulations. Closure of liberal newspapers
1884	University Statute ends university autonomy
1889	Land Captains replace elected justices of the peace
1890	Zemstva counter-reform raises property qualifications
1891	Trans-Siberian Railway construction begins
1892	Witte appointed Minister of Finance
1 November 1894	Death of Alexander III. Accession of Nicholas II

Counter-Reforms and Repression

Alexander III (r. 1881–1894) repudiated his father's reformist direction. Influenced by his tutor Konstantin Pobedonostsev — the ultra-conservative Procurator of the Holy Synod — Alexander III issued the Manifesto on Unshakeable Autocracy (1881), declaring that autocratic power would remain inviolate.

Key counter-reforms included:

- Statute on State Security (1881): Gave governors extraordinary powers of arrest, exile, and censorship — effectively a permanent state of emergency
- Land Captains (1889): Replaced elected justices of the peace with government-appointed officials who controlled peasant affairs
- Zemstva counter-reform (1890): Increased property qualifications, reducing peasant representation
- University Statute (1884): Ended university autonomy; restricted access for lower classes and Jews
- Press regulations (1882): Tightened censorship; closed liberal newspapers

Russification

Alexander III pursued aggressive Russification — the imposition of Russian language, culture, and Orthodox religion on the empire's diverse nationalities. This particularly affected Poles, Finns, Ukrainians, Baltic Germans, and Jews (who faced the May Laws of 1882, restricting where they could live and work, and periodic pogroms).

Economic Modernisation

Paradoxically, the politically reactionary Alexander III oversaw significant economic modernisation. Sergei Witte, appointed Minister of Finance in 1892, began policies that would transform Russia:

- Promoted railway construction (including the Trans-Siberian Railway, begun 1891)
- Attracted foreign investment (particularly French capital)
- Established the gold standard (1897) under Nicholas II
- Pursued protective tariffs to encourage domestic industry

Comparison: Alexander II vs Alexander III

Aspect	Alexander II	Alexander III
Approach to reform	Reform from above	Counter-reform and repression
Attitude to autocracy	Cautious liberalisation	Absolute defence of autocracy
Key adviser	Loris-Melikov (reformist)	Pobedonostsev (reactionary)
Treatment of nationalities	Relatively tolerant	Aggressive Russification
Economic policy	Limited reform	Beginning of industrialisation (Witte)
Opposition	Radical intelligentsia	Driven underground but growing

Chapter summary

Alexander III reversed the reformist trajectory of his father without formally abolishing the reforms themselves. The Statute on State Security, the Land Captains, the tightening of the zemstvo franchise and the University Statute hollowed out the institutions of 1861 to 1874 without dismantling them. Russification turned the diversity of the empire into a political problem, and the May Laws of 1882 codified Jewish disabilities that would produce waves of emigration and radicalisation. At the same time, the appointment of Witte in 1892 launched a state-directed industrial revolution built on foreign investment, protective tariffs and the Trans-Siberian Railway. The reign therefore combined political petrifaction with economic dynamism, and it bequeathed to Nicholas II a society in which the demands generated by modernisation could no longer be contained by the institutions inherited from his father.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Counter-reforms	The package of measures from 1881 onwards that rolled back the scope of the Great Reforms without abolishing them outright
Pobedonostsev	Procurator of the Holy Synod, tutor to Alexander III and Nicholas II, ideologist of unshakeable autocracy
Statute on State Security 1881	The emergency law granting governors wide powers of arrest, exile and censorship in designated provinces
Russification	The imposition of the Russian language, Orthodox religion and Russian administration on non-Russian peoples of the empire
May Laws 1882	Restrictions on where Jews could live, work and own property, concentrated in the Pale of Settlement
Pogroms	Violent anti-Jewish riots, sometimes tolerated or encouraged by local authorities
Land Captains	Appointed officials who from 1889 replaced elected justices of the peace and controlled peasant affairs
Witte system	The industrialisation strategy based on foreign capital, high protective tariffs, the gold standard and railway construction
Trans-Siberian Railway	The strategic infrastructure project begun in 1891 that integrated Siberia into the imperial economy
Gold standard	The pegging of the rouble to gold in 1897, securing foreign confidence at the cost of tight monetary policy

Questions

1. To what extent did Alexander III succeed in reversing the Great Reforms of his father?
2. Examine the aims and consequences of the Russification policy under Alexander III.
3. "Economic modernisation under Witte created the conditions for revolution." Discuss with reference to the reign of Alexander III.
4. Compare and contrast the domestic policies of Alexander II and Alexander III.

Chapter 3: Nicholas II and the Crisis of Autocracy (1894–1914)

Summary of events

Nicholas II came to the throne convinced that his role was to preserve the autocracy unchanged for his son. He inherited a society that was modernising faster than its political institutions could absorb, and within a decade the strain had produced a revolutionary crisis. The Russo-Japanese War, begun in the belief that a small victorious war would strengthen the regime, ended in the humiliation of Tsushima and in Bloody Sunday outside the Winter Palace. The 1905 Revolution forced Nicholas into the October Manifesto, which conceded civil liberties and an elected State Duma. The promise of constitutional development was real but limited. Stolypin's combination of repression and agrarian reform stabilised the regime in the short term, yet his assassination in 1911 and the manipulation of the electoral laws exposed how narrow the basis of the new order remained. By 1914 Russia was the fifth industrial power in the world, but the tensions between a growing proletariat, a frustrated middle class, a restless peasantry and an autocrat committed to personal rule made the empire the most fragile of the great powers that marched into war.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. Why did the autocracy face such serious crises in the first decade of the reign of Nicholas II?
2. Evaluate the causes and consequences of the 1905 Revolution.
3. To what extent did Stolypin's reforms address the structural problems of the Russian Empire?
4. Examine the reasons why constitutional development stalled after the October Manifesto.
5. How far had Russia recovered by 1914, and how stable was the social order on the eve of the First World War?

Timeline of Chapter 3

1894	Accession of Nicholas II
1897	Gold standard introduced
1903	Formation of the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the RSDLP
1904–1905	Russo-Japanese War
9 January 1905	Bloody Sunday at the Winter Palace
May 1905	Destruction of the Baltic Fleet at Tsushima
June 1905	Mutiny on the battleship Potemkin
October 1905	General strike. Formation of the St Petersburg Soviet
17 October 1905	October Manifesto
1906	First Duma. Stolypin appointed Prime Minister

1906–1911	Stolypin agrarian reforms
1911	Assassination of Stolypin at Kiev opera
April 1912	Lena Goldfields massacre
July 1914	Russian entry into the First World War

Nicholas II: Character and Rulership

Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917) was fundamentally ill-suited to the challenges facing Russia. A devoted family man with a strong sense of duty to autocracy, he lacked the political skill, intellectual curiosity, and decisiveness required to navigate an era of rapid change. He dismissed the idea of constitutional government as "a senseless dream" and was deeply influenced by his wife, Empress Alexandra, and later by Rasputin.

Witte's Industrialisation

Under Sergei Witte (Finance Minister 1892–1903), Russia experienced rapid industrialisation:

- Industrial output grew by approximately 8% per year in the 1890s
- Railway network expanded from 29,000 km (1890) to 59,000 km (1905)
- Urban population surged — Moscow and St Petersburg doubled in size
- Foreign investment poured in: by 1900, ~45% of industrial capital was foreign-owned
- BUT: rapid growth created a new urban proletariat living in appalling conditions, with no political rights and minimal labour protections

The Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905)

Russia's defeat by Japan — the first time a European power had been beaten by an Asian nation — shattered the regime's prestige. Key events: the fall of Port Arthur (January 1905), the destruction of the Baltic Fleet at Tsushima (May 1905), and the Treaty of Portsmouth (September 1905). The war exposed military incompetence, logistical failures, and governmental corruption.

The 1905 Revolution

Bloody Sunday (9/22 January 1905): Father Gapon led a peaceful march of workers to the Winter Palace to petition the Tsar. Troops opened fire, killing approximately 200 people (government figures) or up to 1,000 (opposition estimates). The massacre destroyed the myth of the benevolent Tsar.

The revolution spread rapidly: general strikes, peasant uprisings, military mutinies (Potemkin, June 1905), and the formation of workers' soviets (councils) — the St Petersburg Soviet, with Leon Trotsky as vice-chairman, became a model for 1917.

The October Manifesto (17/30 October 1905) conceded: - Civil liberties (freedom of speech, assembly, conscience) - An elected legislature — the State Duma - Universal male suffrage (subsequently restricted)

Stolypin and the Dumas

Pyotr Stolypin (Prime Minister 1906–1911) pursued a dual strategy of repression and reform:

- Repression: Military courts, executions (the hangman's noose became known as "Stolypin's necktie"); over 3,000 executions between 1906–1909
- Agrarian reform: Allowed peasants to leave the mir, consolidate holdings, and become independent farmers — a "wager on the strong" aimed at creating a conservative peasant class loyal to the regime
- Stolypin was assassinated in 1911, leaving reforms incomplete

The four Dumas (1906–1917) progressively lost influence as electoral laws were manipulated to reduce opposition representation. By the Third Duma (1907–1912), conservative landowners dominated.

Russia on the Eve of War

By 1914, Russia was a society of deep contradictions: - Rapid economic growth (world's 5th largest industrial economy) but persistent rural poverty - A growing middle class and proletariat but no genuine political representation - Modernisation in cities coexisting with near-medieval conditions in villages - Rising labour unrest: the Lena Goldfields massacre (1912) — 270 striking miners shot — revived revolutionary sentiment

Historiographical debate on the stability of late imperial Russia

The debate over whether imperial Russia would have survived without the First World War has been one of the most productive in modern Russian historiography. The optimist school, associated with Leopold Haimson's early work and later with the economic historians Paul Gregory and Peter Gatrell, stresses that the rates of industrial growth between 1907 and 1913 were among the highest in the world, that Stolypin's land reforms were creating a conservative peasantry and that the Duma was acquiring habits of legislative cooperation. From this perspective, the war was a contingent shock that derailed a reforming trajectory. The pessimist school, associated with the later Haimson, Teodor Shanin and more recently with Orlando Figes, argues that the social divisions exposed in 1905 had not been resolved, that the regime had lost the trust of its middle class after the dissolution of the first two Dumas, that industrial unrest had reached almost revolutionary levels at the Lena Goldfields in 1912 and during the Petrograd strikes of the summer of 1914, and that the autocracy was incapable of reforming itself to the extent that modern society demanded. A post-revisionist position, found in the work of Dominic Lieven, argues that the empire faced a geopolitical problem as much as a domestic one, since any Russian regime in 1914 had to bear the strategic burdens of a great power that its economy and its political legitimacy could not sustain. For Paper 3 purposes the honest answer is that the outbreak of war transformed a difficult but not hopeless situation into a catastrophic one.

Chapter summary

Nicholas II ruled a society that was changing faster than his political imagination. Witte's industrialisation produced a large urban workforce, a growing professional middle class and a railway network that tied the empire together. None of this was matched by political development. The Russo-Japanese War and Bloody Sunday brought the autocracy to the brink of collapse in 1905, and the October Manifesto was the price of survival. Stolypin's dual strategy of hanging revolutionaries and freeing enterprising peasants stabilised the regime for a decade, but his assassination and the manipulation of the electoral laws meant that by 1914 the Duma represented a narrow slice of privileged Russia. The empire entered the First World War with great industrial strength, a rapidly expanding population and a political system that had never recovered the trust of its educated society or solved the agrarian question.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Russo-Japanese War	The 1904 to 1905 conflict over Manchuria and Korea, ended by the Treaty of Portsmouth after Russian defeats at Port Arthur and Tsushima
Bloody Sunday	The massacre of Father Gapon's peaceful workers' procession outside the Winter Palace on 9 January 1905
Soviet	An elected council of workers' deputies, first formed in St Petersburg in 1905, which would become the revolutionary institution of 1917
October Manifesto	The 17 October 1905 concession of civil liberties and an elected legislature that ended the general strike
Fundamental Laws	The constitutional framework published in April 1906 that reserved wide powers to the Tsar and reduced the role of the Duma
Kadets	The Constitutional Democrats, the main liberal party that dominated the First Duma and later became a loyal opposition
Octobrists	The moderate conservative party of landowners and industrialists that supported the post-1907 parliamentary order
Stolypin's necktie	The hangman's noose, shorthand for the summary military justice used to crush the revolution
Wager on the strong	Stolypin's agrarian policy of encouraging peasants to leave the mir and consolidate independent farms
Lena Goldfields	The 1912 massacre of striking miners in Siberia that revived the strike wave and undermined the myth of post-1905 stability

Questions

1. To what extent was the 1905 Revolution a failure for its supporters?
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of Stolypin's policies of repression and reform.
3. "By 1914 Russia had solved the problems that had produced the 1905 Revolution." Discuss.
4. Examine the reasons for the failure of the State Duma to develop into a genuine representative institution.
5. Compare the impact of the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War on the stability of the Russian autocracy.

Chapter 4: The Revolutions of 1917

Summary of events

The two revolutions of 1917 ended more than three centuries of Romanov rule and opened the way to the first Communist state. The February Revolution began with bread riots in Petrograd and ended, within eight days, with the abdication of Nicholas II, who had lost the confidence of his garrison, his Duma and his generals. Power then passed into the hands of a Provisional Government committed to continuing the war alongside the elected Petrograd Soviet, which held real authority over the workers and soldiers. This unstable dual power was punctured by the return of Lenin in April, who rejected cooperation with the bourgeois government and demanded all power to the Soviets. The summer saw the failure of the Kerensky offensive, the July Days and the Kornilov affair, which discredited the government and armed the Bolsheviks. In October the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, orchestrated by Trotsky and sanctioned by Lenin, seized the capital almost without bloodshed. Whether what followed was a popular revolution or a minority coup has divided historians ever since, but the effect was immediate and decisive. The new regime announced peace, the nationalisation of the land and workers' control of the factories, and began the construction of a dictatorship that would reshape Russia and much of the world.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. To what extent was the February Revolution caused by the First World War rather than by longer-term structural weaknesses?
2. Why did the Provisional Government fail to consolidate its authority between March and October 1917?
3. Evaluate the roles of Lenin and Trotsky in the Bolshevik seizure of power.
4. Was the October Revolution a popular revolution or a coup?
5. Examine the significance of dual power for the development of the revolution.

Timeline of Chapter 4

August 1914	Russian entry into the First World War Defeats at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes
August–September 1914	
August 1915	Nicholas II assumes personal command of the army
December 1916	Murder of Rasputin
23–27 February 1917	Bread riots in Petrograd. Strikes. Mutiny of the garrison
2 March 1917	Abdication of Nicholas II. Formation of Provisional Government
1 March 1917	Petrograd Soviet issues Order No. 1
3 April 1917	Lenin returns to Russia
4 April 1917	April Theses presented
June–July 1917	Kerensky offensive fails

3–7 July 1917	July Days. Lenin flees to Finland
24–30 August 1917	Kornilov affair
September 1917	Bolshevik majorities in Petrograd and Moscow Soviets
25–26 October 1917	Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd
26 October 1917	Decrees on Peace and Land issued

The Impact of World War I

Russia's entry into WWI in August 1914 initially united the nation in patriotic fervor. But the war rapidly became a catastrophe:

- Military disasters: Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes (August–September 1914) — ~300,000 casualties in the first months
- Casualty toll: By 1917, approximately 2 million dead, 5 million wounded, 2.5 million prisoners
- Economic collapse: Inflation soared; food shortages in cities; transport system overwhelmed by military demands
- Political crisis: Nicholas II took personal command of the army (August 1915), leaving government in the hands of the increasingly erratic Empress Alexandra and Rasputin (murdered December 1916)

The February Revolution (23 February – 2 March 1917)

The revolution began with bread riots in Petrograd on 23 February (8 March) — International Women's Day. Within days:

- 250,000 workers were on strike
- Troops of the Petrograd garrison refused to fire on demonstrators and mutinied (27 February)
- The Duma formed a Provisional Committee
- Nicholas II abdicated on 2 March 1917 — ending 304 years of Romanov rule

Dual Power: Provisional Government vs Soviets

The Provisional Government (led successively by Prince Lvov and then Alexander Kerensky) governed alongside the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. This "dual power" was inherently unstable:

Provisional Government	Petrograd Soviet
Formally held state authority	Held actual control over workers and soldiers
Liberal/moderate; wanted elections	Socialist; demanded peace, bread, land
Continued the war (obligations to Allies)	Issued Order No. 1 (soldiers' committees)
Postponed land reform until Constituent Assembly	Demanded immediate redistribution

Lenin and the Bolsheviks

Lenin returned to Russia on 3 April 1917 (in a sealed train provided by Germany). His April Theses (4 April) stunned even fellow Bolsheviks with their radicalism:

1. No support for the Provisional Government
2. End the war immediately
3. All power to the Soviets
4. Land to the peasants; factories to the workers
5. Abolish the police, army, and bureaucracy

The Road to October

- July Days (3–7 July): Premature Bolshevik-inspired uprising; failed; Lenin fled to Finland
- Kornilov Affair (August 1917): General Kornilov attempted a military coup; Kerensky armed the Bolsheviks (Red Guards) to defend Petrograd — giving them weapons and legitimacy
- By September 1917, Bolsheviks won majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. Trotsky became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet

The October Revolution (25–26 October / 7–8 November 1917)

On the night of 25–26 October, the Bolsheviks seized key points in Petrograd: the telegraph offices, railway stations, bridges, and banks. The cruiser Aurora fired a blank round signalling the assault on the Winter Palace. The Provisional Government was arrested (Kerensky escaped).

Lenin declared: "We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order."

Historiographical Debate: Coup or Revolution?

> **Liberal/Western view**
> : October was a coup d'état by a disciplined minority exploiting chaos — not a genuine popular revolution. (Richard Pipes, The Russian Revolution)
> **Revisionist view**
> : October had genuine popular support among workers and soldiers disillusioned with the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks articulated widespread demands. (Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch)

The sharpest formulation of the liberal position comes from Richard Pipes, who describes October as a conspiracy of intellectuals manipulating the tired masses of Petrograd against a weak government they could not sustain. The revisionist answer, developed most fully by Alexander Rabinowitch in The Bolsheviks Come to Power, is that the Bolshevik party had become the authentic voice of the workers of Petrograd and the garrison by September 1917 precisely because it articulated demands that the Provisional Government would not meet. Sheila Fitzpatrick's The Russian Revolution bridges these positions by distinguishing between the urgency of popular anger against the Provisional Government, which was genuine and widespread, and the political technique of the Bolshevik seizure itself, which was the work of a small organised minority. For a Paper 3 essay, the most defensible line is that the collapse of the Provisional Government was a popular process while the seizure of power was a disciplined Bolshevik operation, and that the two were only loosely

connected.

Source-based exercise

> *Source A. Lenin, April Theses, 4 April 1917: "No support for the Provisional Government. The war remains a predatory imperialist war on the part of the new government. Not a parliamentary republic but a Republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country. Confiscation of all private lands. The immediate amalgamation of all banks into a single national bank, and the institution of control over it by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies."*
> *Source B. Resolution of the Petrograd Soviet, Order No. 1, 1 March 1917: "In all military units elected committees shall be created. The orders of the Military Commission of the State Duma shall be executed only in so far as they do not contradict the orders and resolutions of the Soviet. All weapons shall be at the disposal and under the control of the company and battalion committees, and not given out to officers, even on their demand."*

(a) According to Source A, what is Lenin's position on cooperation with the Provisional Government? [3 marks] (b) Compare and contrast the attitude to state authority expressed in Sources A and B. [6 marks] (c) Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess the argument that the structure of dual power made the fall of the Provisional Government inevitable. [9 marks]

Chapter summary

The revolutions of 1917 were driven by the impact of a total war on a society that had never fully solved the problems of 1905. The February Revolution was a broad, largely unplanned rising of workers, soldiers and Duma politicians that swept away the autocracy in a week. The Provisional Government that replaced it was unable to satisfy the demands for peace, bread and land because it refused to abandon its commitments to the Allies and deferred social questions to a Constituent Assembly that never met. The Petrograd Soviet held the real power of military obedience but declined to exercise government until the Bolshevik majority of September. Lenin's return and the April Theses transformed the politics of dual power by offering an uncompromising alternative to cooperation. The failure of the Kerensky offensive, the July Days and above all the Kornilov affair destroyed the moral authority of the Provisional Government and rearmed the Bolsheviks. On the night of 25 to 26 October the Military Revolutionary Committee completed a seizure of power that had been prepared politically for months.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Dual power	The coexistence of the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet between March and October 1917
Provisional Government	The liberal-socialist cabinet that replaced the autocracy in March 1917, led by Prince Lvov and then by Kerensky
Petrograd Soviet	The council of workers' and soldiers' deputies that held real authority over the capital's workforce and garrison
Order No. 1	The soldiers' charter of 1 March 1917 that placed the garrison under Soviet rather than officer command

Term	Meaning
April Theses	Lenin's ten-point programme of 4 April 1917 rejecting cooperation with the Provisional Government
July Days	The premature Bolshevik-led rising of 3 to 7 July 1917 that was crushed and drove Lenin into hiding
Kornilov affair	The attempted military coup of August 1917 that Kerensky defeated by arming the Bolshevik Red Guards
Military Revolutionary Committee	The Soviet body, dominated by Trotsky, that organised the seizure of the Winter Palace on 25 to 26 October
Decrees on Peace and Land	The first acts of the new Sovnarkom on 26 October proposing an immediate armistice and abolishing private landownership
Sovnarkom	The Council of People's Commissars, the executive of the new Bolshevik state

Questions

1. To what extent did the First World War cause the February Revolution?
2. Evaluate the reasons for the failure of the Provisional Government.
3. Compare and contrast the role of Lenin and Trotsky in the October Revolution.
4. "The October Revolution was a coup, not a revolution." Discuss.
5. Examine the significance of the Kornilov affair in the collapse of the Provisional Government.

> **Soviet view**
> : October was the inevitable culmination of class struggle — the proletariat seizing power under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party. (Official Soviet historiography)

Chapter 5: Bolshevik Consolidation of Power (1917–1924)

Summary of events

The Bolsheviks seized the Winter Palace with comparative ease. The harder task was to keep power. Between October 1917 and Lenin's death in January 1924 the new regime fought a civil war against White armies and foreign interventionists, dispersed the Constituent Assembly that did not return a Bolshevik majority, signed a punishing peace at Brest-Litovsk, created a secret police, nationalised the economy under War Communism and then partially retreated under the New Economic Policy. The suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion in March 1921 marked the end of any illusion that Soviet democracy would operate through genuinely autonomous councils, and the Tenth Party Congress in the same month banned factions inside the Communist Party itself. By 1922 the Treaty on the Formation of the USSR had rebuilt much of the old imperial space under new political authority. When Lenin suffered his first stroke in May 1922 and was effectively removed from day-to-day politics, the question of succession began to absorb the leading Bolsheviks, setting in motion the struggle that would elevate Stalin.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. How did the Bolsheviks consolidate their hold on power in the first months after October?
2. Why did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?
3. To what extent was War Communism driven by necessity and to what extent by ideology?
4. Evaluate the achievements and limitations of the New Economic Policy.
5. Examine the significance of Kronstadt and the Tenth Party Congress for the political development of the Soviet state.

Timeline of Chapter 5

26 October 1917	Decrees on Peace and Land
November 1917	Creation of the Cheka
5 January 1918	Constituent Assembly dispersed after single day
3 March 1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
Summer 1918	Outbreak of full-scale Civil War
July 1918	Execution of the Romanov family at Ekaterinburg
1918–1921	War Communism. Red Terror
1920	Defeat of Wrangel in the Crimea ends the Civil War
1920–1921	Polish-Soviet War
March 1921	Kronstadt rebellion

March 1921	Tenth Party Congress. Ban on factions. NEP introduced
1922	Treaty on the Formation of the USSR
May 1922	Lenin's first stroke
21 January 1924	Death of Lenin

First Decrees and Early Measures

Within hours of seizing power, the Bolsheviks issued landmark decrees:

- Decree on Peace (26 October): Called for immediate armistice; "peace without annexations or indemnities"
- Decree on Land (26 October): Abolished private land ownership; land distributed to peasants (essentially ratifying what peasants had already done)
- Decree on Workers' Control (November): Workers' committees to supervise factory management
- Establishment of the Cheka (December 1917): Secret police under Felix Dzerzhinsky — the instrument of Red Terror

The Constituent Assembly

Elections in November 1917 gave the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) a clear majority (370 seats to the Bolsheviks' 175). When the Assembly met on 5 January 1918, it refused to accept Bolshevik authority. Lenin dissolved it the next day — ending Russia's brief experiment with democratic representation.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (3 March 1918)

Desperate to exit the war, Lenin accepted Germany's harsh terms:

- Russia lost ~34% of its population, ~32% of agricultural land, ~54% of industry, ~89% of coal mines
- Lost territories: Poland, Finland, Baltic states, Ukraine, Belarus, parts of the Caucasus
- The treaty caused a split within the Bolshevik Party; Left SRs left the coalition government in protest

The Russian Civil War (1918–1921)

The Civil War pitted the Reds (Bolsheviks) against the Whites (loose coalition of monarchists, liberals, SRs, and nationalists), with foreign intervention from 14 nations (including Britain, France, USA, Japan).

Why the Reds Won:

Factor	Detail
Leadership	Trotsky's organisation of the Red Army; 5 million strong by 1920
Central position	Controlled Moscow, Petrograd, railways, industry
Unity of purpose	Single command, clear ideology
White weaknesses	Disunited; no common programme; alienated local populations

Factor	Detail
Foreign intervention	Half-hearted; limited; withdrew by 1920
Propaganda	Effective mobilisation; Whites associated with old regime

War Communism (1918–1921)

Economic policy during the Civil War included:

- Grain requisitioning (prodrazvyorstka): Forcible seizure of peasant grain
- Nationalisation of industry and banking
- Abolition of money and private trade
- Labour conscription

Results: economic catastrophe. Industrial output fell to ~20% of 1913 levels. A devastating famine in 1921–22 killed an estimated 5 million people.

The Kronstadt Rebellion (March 1921)

Sailors at the Kronstadt naval base — once the Bolsheviks' strongest supporters — rebelled, demanding free elections to soviets, freedom of speech and press, and an end to grain requisitioning. The rebellion was crushed by the Red Army crossing the ice, but it shocked Lenin into recognising the need for change.

NEP: The New Economic Policy (1921–1928)

Lenin introduced NEP at the Tenth Party Congress (March 1921):

- Grain requisitioning replaced by a tax in kind (prodnalog)
- Private trade legalised for small businesses
- "Commanding heights" (heavy industry, banking, foreign trade) remained state-controlled
- Small-scale capitalism tolerated — the NEPmen (private traders) emerged

NEP was an ideological retreat — Lenin called it "state capitalism" and "a step backward in order to take two steps forward." Economically, it worked: by 1926, production had returned to 1913 levels. Politically, it created tensions that fuelled the succession struggle after Lenin's death.

Lenin's Death and Legacy

Lenin suffered a series of strokes from May 1922 and died on 21 January 1924. His Testament (December 1922) warned against Stalin's accumulation of power: "Comrade Stalin has concentrated enormous power in his hands, and I am not sure he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution."

The testament was suppressed. The succession struggle between Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Bukharin would determine the Soviet Union's future — and cost millions their lives.

Key Historiographical Question

> Was Bolshevik authoritarianism inevitable from October 1917, or did the Civil War and external threats force an initially democratic movement toward dictatorship?
>
> **Continuity thesis**
>
> (Pipes, Malia): Bolshevik ideology was inherently authoritarian; Lenin = proto-Stalin.
>
> **Discontinuity thesis**
>
> (Fitzpatrick, Cohen): The Civil War radicalised the regime; Stalinism was NOT the inevitable outcome of Leninism; NEP offered an alternative path.

The fullest statement of the continuity case comes from Richard Pipes, whose The Russian Revolution and Russia under the Bolshevik Regime argue that the Cheka, the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, the Red Terror and the ban on factions of March 1921 flowed directly from the Leninist conception of a vanguard party that knew better than the class it claimed to represent. Martin Malia extends this reading in The Soviet Tragedy, arguing that any attempt to build socialism on the Marxist model in an agrarian society must produce coercion. The discontinuity case, developed by Stephen Cohen in his biography of Bukharin and by Sheila Fitzpatrick in The Russian Revolution, holds that the NEP period of 1921 to 1928 represented a genuine alternative, in which a mixed economy, peasant markets and a degree of cultural pluralism could have evolved in directions very different from those taken by Stalin. Robert Service, writing in Lenin: A Biography and A History of Twentieth-Century Russia, offers a middle position, conceding that Lenin's authoritarian instincts were real but arguing that the system he left behind was not yet the personal dictatorship that emerged under Stalin. For Paper 3 purposes, candidates need to be able to distinguish between what Lenin created, namely a one-party state with wide coercive powers, and what Stalin added, namely the personal terror of the 1930s.

Chapter summary

The Bolsheviks consolidated power by combining decisive legislation, ruthless coercion and a willingness to make tactical concessions when necessary. The first decrees on peace, land and workers' control transferred popular demands into state policy. The dispersal of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 and the creation of the Cheka showed that the regime would not accept the verdict of a genuinely democratic election. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk bought peace with Germany at a steep territorial price but allowed the regime to concentrate on the Civil War. Bolshevik victory in that war rested on interior lines, on an effective Red Army built by Trotsky, on the inability of the Whites to unite their armies and their political programmes, and on the Red Terror that intimidated wavering populations. War Communism met immediate military needs but produced famine and open rebellion, above all at Kronstadt in March 1921. The NEP restored the peasant economy and stabilised society, and the Tenth Party Congress cemented the monopoly of a single, ideologically uniform Communist Party over Soviet political life. By the time Lenin died the basic shape of the Soviet system was set, even though the succession was still open.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Sovnarkom	The Council of People's Commissars, headed by Lenin, which served as the cabinet of the new state
Cheka	The extraordinary commission for combating counter-revolution and sabotage, created in December 1917 under Dzerzhinsky
Red Terror	The systematic use of revolutionary violence from 1918, directed against social categories as much as against individual opponents

Term	Meaning
War Communism	The coercive economic regime of 1918 to 1921 comprising forced grain requisitioning, nationalisation of industry and the abolition of money transactions
Grain requisitioning	The forcible collection of peasant grain by armed detachments, the flashpoint of rural resistance
Kronstadt rebellion	The March 1921 rising of sailors and workers who had once been the vanguard of the revolution, demanding free soviets
NEP	The New Economic Policy introduced in March 1921, which permitted small-scale private trade and replaced requisitioning with a tax in kind
Scissors crisis	The 1923 gap between rising industrial prices and falling agricultural prices that threatened the viability of the NEP
Brest-Litovsk	The March 1918 peace treaty with Germany that ceded Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic provinces
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, established by treaty in 1922 to integrate Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Transcaucasia
Testament	The document dictated by Lenin in late 1922 warning against Stalin's concentration of power in the Party Secretariat

Questions

1. To what extent was Bolshevik victory in the Civil War the result of Red strengths rather than White weaknesses?
2. Evaluate the claim that War Communism was driven more by ideology than by military necessity.
3. Examine the significance of the Kronstadt rebellion in shaping the political development of the Soviet state.
4. "The New Economic Policy was a tactical retreat, not a change of direction." Discuss.
5. Compare and contrast the uses of terror by the Bolsheviks between 1917 and 1921.

Source-based exercise

> *Source A. Lenin, speech to the Tenth Party Congress, March 1921 (adapted): "We must not try to conceal our mistakes from the enemy. Whoever fears this is no revolutionary. On the contrary, if we openly declare, 'Yes, we made an economic mistake', we shall be ten times stronger. Freedom of trade for the peasant is our unavoidable task."*
> *Source B. Demands of the Kronstadt sailors, Petropavlovsk Resolution, 1 March 1921 (abridged and adapted): "To hold immediately new elections by secret ballot to all Soviets, free elections of workers and peasants, with an unrestricted campaign; freedom of speech and press for workers and peasants, for anarchists and left-socialist parties; freedom of assembly of trades unions and peasant associations; the liberation of all political prisoners of the socialist parties."*

(a) According to Source A, why does Lenin believe the shift to free trade is necessary? [3 marks] (b) Compare and contrast the programmes for change set out in Sources A and B. [6 marks] (c) Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess the argument that the Tenth Party Congress marked the end of Soviet pluralism. [9 marks]

End of Part I. Continue to Part II: Interwar States.

PART II: INTERWAR STATES

Chapter 6: Poland (1918–1939)

Summary of events

Poland reappeared on the map of Europe in November 1918 after one hundred and twenty-three years of partition. The reborn republic faced tasks of extraordinary difficulty, including the unification of three separate legal codes, three currencies, three rail gauges and three political cultures, combined with a war for its borders against Soviet Russia that it won at the Battle of Warsaw in August 1920. The March Constitution of 1921 modelled the new state on the French Third Republic with a weak presidency and proportional representation, and the result was the acute instability of fourteen governments in five years, culminating in the assassination of President Narutowicz. Marshal Piłsudski's May Coup of 1926 ended the experiment in full parliamentarism and introduced the Sanacja, a semi-authoritarian regime that retained the trappings of democracy while hollowing out their substance. Sanacja was authoritarian but not fascist, and its most ambitious domestic achievement was the Central Industrial District launched by Kwiatkowski in 1936. In foreign policy it pursued the balance between Berlin and Moscow until Hitler and Stalin divided Poland in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. What were the main structural problems inherited by the reborn Polish state?
2. Why did Polish parliamentary democracy fail between 1921 and 1926?
3. Evaluate the nature of the Sanacja regime and the extent to which it should be classified as authoritarian rather than fascist.
4. Examine the successes and failures of Polish economic and social policy in the interwar period.
5. To what extent was Polish foreign policy between 1926 and 1939 the product of geographical constraint rather than political choice?

Timeline of Chapter 6

11 November 1918	Armistice. Piłsudski arrives in Warsaw. Independence proclaimed
28 November 1918	Electoral decree grants women the vote
1919–1921	Polish-Soviet War
12–25 August 1920	Battle of Warsaw, the Miracle on the Vistula
18 March 1921	Treaty of Riga. Eastern border established
17 March 1921	March Constitution
9 December 1922	Narutowicz elected President
16 December 1922	Assassination of Narutowicz at the Zachęta Gallery
1924	Grabski reforms. Introduction of the złoty
12–14 May 1926	May Coup

1928	Formation of the BBWR
1930	Brest trials
23 April 1935	April Constitution
12 May 1935	Death of Piłsudski
1936	Central Industrial District launched by Kwiatkowski
October 1938	Zaolzie annexation from Czechoslovakia
23 August 1939	Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Secret protocol partitions Poland
1 September 1939	German invasion of Poland

6.1 The Rebirth of Poland

123 Years of Partition

Poland disappeared from the map of Europe in 1795 following the Third Partition, when the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were divided among three empires: Russia, Prussia, and Austria. For 123 years, Poles lived under foreign rule, and the legacy of this partition shaped virtually every challenge the reborn state would face after 1918.

Each partition zone developed distinct administrative, legal, economic, and cultural characteristics:

Feature	Russian Partition (Congress Kingdom + Kresy)	Prussian/German Partition (Poznań, Pomerania, Silesia)	Austrian Partition (Galicia)
Legal system	Russian Imperial Code	Prussian Civil Code (BGB from 1900)	Austrian Civil Code (ABGB)
Currency	Russian rouble	German mark	Austrian krone
Railways	Russian broad gauge	German standard gauge	Austrian standard gauge
Literacy rate	~30%	~95%	~55%
Industry	Concentrated around Łódź (textiles) and Warsaw	Developed (mining, heavy industry in Silesia)	Underdeveloped, agrarian except oil around Drohobych
Political culture	Conspiratorial, insurrectionary tradition	Legal, civic, "organic work" tradition	Relative autonomy; Poles held positions in Vienna's parliament

The new Polish state therefore had to unify three separate legal codes, integrate three rail networks (including incompatible gauges), merge three currencies, and reconcile three fundamentally different political cultures. Norman Davies described interwar Poland as existing in a "grey zone" between Western democracy and Eastern autocracy –- a state burdened by enormous structural challenges from the moment of its birth.

Independence and the Founding Figures

Poland's independence was proclaimed on 11 November 1918, the same day the armistice ended the First World War. Two figures dominated the independence movement, representing fundamentally different visions for the new state:

Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) was a socialist-turned-military leader from the Russian partition. He had led the Polish Legions fighting alongside Austria-Hungary during the war, then been imprisoned by the Germans in Magdeburg. Piłsudski advocated a federalist vision: a large, multiethnic Poland allied with Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus –- recreating, in modern form, the old Jagiellonian Commonwealth. He became Head of State (Naczelnik Państwa) on 14 November 1918.

Roman Dmowski (1864–1939), leader of the National Democrats (Endecja), represented the opposite approach. Operating from the Allied side (Paris), Dmowski promoted an ethnic nationalist conception of

Poland: a state defined by Polish language, Catholic culture, and ethnic homogeneity. His vision was exclusionary toward minorities, particularly Jews and Ukrainians. Dmowski's diplomatic lobbying at the Paris Peace Conference was instrumental in shaping Poland's western borders.

Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points (Point 13) called for "an independent Polish state" with "free and secure access to the sea," providing crucial international legitimacy for the new republic. However, the precise borders remained contested and were settled not by diplomacy alone but by a series of conflicts: the Silesian Uprisings (1919, 1920, 1921), the Vilnius dispute with Lithuania (1920), and above all, the Polish-Soviet War.

The Polish-Soviet War (1919–1921)

The Polish-Soviet War was the defining conflict of the new state's early existence. What began as a series of border skirmishes escalated dramatically when Piłsudski launched an offensive into Ukraine, capturing Kyiv in May 1920. The Red Army counterattacked, and by August 1920, Soviet forces under General Tukhachevsky were advancing on Warsaw itself, with Bolshevik propaganda declaring the imminent spread of revolution to Germany and Western Europe.

The Battle of Warsaw (12–25 August 1920) –- known as the "Miracle on the Vistula" (Cud nad Wisłą) –- was the decisive engagement. Piłsudski executed a daring flanking manoeuvre from the south, striking the exposed Soviet southern flank and routing Tukhachevsky's armies. The British diplomat Edgar Vincent, Viscount D'Abernon, called it "the eighteenth decisive battle of the world," arguing it saved Europe from Bolshevism. Approximately 4,500 Polish soldiers died in the battle, and over 60,000 Soviet troops were captured.

The war ended with the Treaty of Riga (18 March 1921), which established Poland's eastern border well to the east of the Curzon Line, incorporating large populations of Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Jews. This outcome satisfied Piłsudski's expansionist aims but created the minority problem that would plague the state throughout its existence.

The March Constitution (1921)

The Constitution of 17 March 1921 established Poland as a parliamentary republic modelled largely on the French Third Republic. Key provisions included:

- A bicameral parliament: Sejm (lower house, dominant) and Senate
- A weak presidency with limited executive power
- Proportional representation, encouraging multiparty politics
- Universal suffrage for all citizens over 21, including women (Poland was among the first European states to grant women's suffrage, on 28 November 1918)
- Guarantees of civil liberties and minority rights

The constitution deliberately weakened executive authority –- a reaction against the perceived danger of Piłsudski's personal power. This decision, historian Antony Polonsky argues, sowed the seeds of the parliamentary instability that would follow.

6.2 Democratic Failure (1921–1926)

Political Fragmentation

The combination of proportional representation, deep social divisions, and the legacy of partition produced extraordinary political fragmentation. Over 30 political parties held seats in the Sejm, spanning the full ideological spectrum:

Party/Bloc	Orientation	Key Figure	Base
Endecja (ND)	Right-wing, ethnic nationalist	Dmowski	Urban middle class, western Poland
PPS (Polish Socialist Party)	Left-wing, democratic socialist	Daszynski, later Niedzialkwoski	Urban workers
PSL "Piast"	Centre-agrarian	Witos	Peasants (Galicia)
PSL "Wyzwolenie"	Left-agrarian	Thugutt	Peasants (Congress Kingdom)
Chadecja	Christian Democratic	Korfanty	Catholic middle class
KPP (Communist)	Far left	Illegal after periods	Underground
Minority parties	Various (Jewish, Ukrainian, German, Belarusian)	Various	Ethnic minorities

No single party could command a majority. Poland experienced 14 governments in 5 years between 1921 and 1926, with an average government lasting approximately four months. Coalition-building required unwieldy alliances that frequently collapsed over policy disagreements, personality clashes, or factional splits.

The Assassination of President Narutowicz (1922)

The first presidential election under the new constitution exposed the depth of Poland's political divisions. Gabriel Narutowicz, a distinguished engineer and diplomat, was elected president on 9 December 1922 with the support of left-wing and minority-party votes. The right-wing Endecja was outraged that a president had been chosen with the votes of non-Polish minorities, launching a furious propaganda campaign that denounced Narutowicz as "president of the Jews."

On 16 December 1922 -- just five days after taking office -- Narutowicz was assassinated by Eligiusz Niewiadomski, a right-wing painter and nationalist fanatic, at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw. The murder shocked the nation and revealed the fragility of democratic norms. Niewiadomski was executed, but much of the nationalist right treated him as a martyr rather than a criminal. The assassination demonstrated that significant segments of Polish society were unwilling to accept democratic outcomes when those outcomes were perceived to threaten ethnic Polish supremacy.

Economic Instability and the Grabski Reforms

The economic situation compounded political dysfunction. The new state had inherited three currencies, three tax systems, and enormous war devastation. Hyperinflation wracked Poland in 1923, with the Polish mark losing value catastrophically.

Prime Minister Władysław Grabski undertook a bold stabilisation programme in 1924, replacing the debased mark with a new currency, the złoty (literally "golden"), backed by a reformed central bank (Bank Polski). The reform initially succeeded: inflation was tamed, and the złoty stabilised. However, a tariff war with Germany and the structural weaknesses of the Polish economy undermined the recovery. By 1925, the złoty was under pressure again, and Grabski resigned.

Growing Disillusionment

By 1926, Polish public opinion was thoroughly disillusioned with parliamentary politics. The constant rotation of governments, the inability to address economic problems, corruption scandals, and the spectacle of the Narutowicz assassination had eroded faith in democracy. The formation of the centre-right government of Wincenty Witos (his third term as prime minister) in May 1926, which included elements of the far right that Piłsudski despised, provided the immediate trigger for action.

6.3 The May Coup and the Sanacja Regime (1926–1935)

The May Coup (12–14 May 1926)

On 12 May 1926, Piłsudski marched on Warsaw at the head of loyal military units, demanding the resignation of the Witos government. For three days, fighting raged in the streets of the capital between pro-Piłsudski forces and troops loyal to the legal government. An estimated 379 people were killed and over 900 wounded.

The critical turning point came when railway workers, sympathetic to Piłsudski's socialist past, went on strike, preventing the government from transporting reinforcements to Warsaw. President Wojciechowski and Prime Minister Witos resigned on 14 May 1926. Piłsudski had won.

The causes of the coup were multiple and interconnected:

1. Parliamentary dysfunction: 14 governments in 5 years had discredited democracy
2. Corruption: widespread perception of political venality
3. Personal grievance: Piłsudski viewed the Witos III government, with its Endecja allies, as a betrayal of the independence movement
4. Military prestige: Piłsudski's status as the "Father of Independence" and victor of the Battle of Warsaw gave him unmatched moral authority
5. Public support: broad segments of the population, including the left, initially welcomed the coup as a necessary correction

The Nature of the Sanacja Regime

Piłsudski called his movement Sanacja (sanacja –- "moral cleansing" or "sanation"), presenting it as a campaign to purify Polish political life of corruption and partisan excess. Significantly, Piłsudski did not declare himself president or prime minister (though he briefly served as PM in 1926–28 and again in 1930). Instead, he took the position of Minister of Military Affairs and Inspector General of the Armed Forces, exercising power from behind the scenes through loyal subordinates.

This was a deliberate strategy. Piłsudski maintained the formal institutions of parliamentary democracy –- the Sejm continued to sit, elections were held, opposition parties were legal –- while hollowing out their substance. The regime existed in a constitutional grey zone that historians have found difficult to categorise.

Instruments of Control

The BBWR (Non-Partisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government), established in 1928, served as Piłsudski's political vehicle. It was not a party in the traditional sense but a loose coalition of individuals loyal to the Marshal, drawn from across the political spectrum. The BBWR won the largest share of seats in the 1928 elections but not an outright majority, forcing continued manoeuvring.

The Brest trials (1930) marked a significant escalation toward authoritarianism. In September 1930, Piłsudski dissolved the Sejm and ordered the arrest of 11 opposition leaders, including former prime ministers, who were imprisoned in the fortress of Brest-Litovsk. They were subjected to physical mistreatment and tried in 1931–32 on dubious charges of conspiracy. The trials provoked international condemnation and permanently damaged Piłsudski's reputation as a democrat.

The April Constitution (1935)

The culmination of constitutional transformation came with the Constitution of 23 April 1935, which replaced the 1921 document with a fundamentally different framework:

Feature	March Constitution (1921)	April Constitution (1935)
Executive power	Weak president, strong Sejm	Powerful president, weakened parliament
Presidential accountability	To parliament	"To God and History"
Emergency powers	Limited	Broad decree powers
Electoral system	Open proportional representation	Government-controlled candidate lists
Rights framework	Extensive individual guarantees	Duties of citizens emphasised
Political model	Parliamentary republic	Presidential-authoritarian state

The phrase "responsible to God and History" encapsulated the regime's claim to authority beyond democratic accountability. Piłsudski died on 12 May 1935, just weeks after the new constitution's passage, and never governed under it. Power passed to a fractious group of his followers –- the so-called "Colonels' regime" –- who lacked his personal authority.

Categorising the Sanacja: Authoritarian, Not Fascist

IB students must be precise about the nature of the Sanacja regime. It was semi-authoritarian but emphatically not fascist:

- There was no mass party: the BBWR was a top-down grouping, not a mobilising movement
- There was no totalitarian ideology: Piłsudski was a pragmatist, not an ideologue
- There was no cult of violence: political repression was selective, not systemic terror
- Opposition parties remained legal, the press operated under censorship but was not abolished, and civil society (churches, trade unions, cultural organisations) continued to function
- There was no equivalent of the SS, Gestapo, or OVRA: the Polish police state was mild by contemporary standards

Davies calls it "authoritarian without being dictatorial," while Polonsky emphasises that it was "a military regime with democratic trappings." For IB comparative purposes, Poland under Piłsudski sits between Czechoslovakia's genuine democracy and Mussolini's Italy or Horthy's Hungary on the authoritarian spectrum.

6.4 Domestic Policies

Economic Development

Currency reform. The unification of three inherited currencies into the single złoty (1924) was a foundational achievement. Grabski's reform established the Bank Polski as the central bank and pegged the złoty to gold. Though the currency faced crises, it survived as the national unit until 1939.

The Great Depression. Poland was devastated by the global economic crisis. Industrial output fell by approximately 40% between 1929 and 1933. The predominantly agricultural economy suffered as commodity prices collapsed. In rural areas, where over 70% of the population lived, the depression was catastrophic: peasant incomes fell, debt mounted, and hidden unemployment (surplus labour on small plots) became endemic. By 1935, Poland's GDP per capita remained among the lowest in Europe.

COP: The Central Industrial District (Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy). The most ambitious economic initiative of the interwar period was launched in 1936 under Deputy Prime Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski. The COP was a state-led industrialisation programme centred on a "safety triangle" (trójkąt bezpieczeństwa) in south-central Poland –- the area between the Vistula, San, and Dunajec rivers –- chosen because it was the region farthest from both the German and Soviet borders.

The programme constructed armaments factories, chemical plants, steel works, and hydroelectric stations. By 1939, COP had created over 100,000 new industrial jobs and significantly boosted military production capacity. However, it was cut short by the outbreak of war and never achieved its full ten-year targets. Historians debate its effectiveness: some see it as a visionary developmental programme; others, like Polonsky, note it was too little, too late to close the gap with industrialised Western Europe.

Gdynia. Perhaps the most striking symbol of interwar Poland's developmental ambitions was Gdynia. In 1920, it was a fishing village of approximately 1,000 inhabitants. Because the Free City of Danzig (Gdansk) was under League of Nations administration and could not be relied upon as Poland's sole port, the government invested massively in building an entirely new port at Gdynia. By 1939, Gdynia had a population of approximately 120,000 and had become the largest and most modern port on the Baltic Sea, handling more tonnage than Danzig. It was a remarkable achievement of state-directed development.

Land Reform

Land reform was the most politically contentious domestic issue. Poland's agricultural structure was deeply unequal: large estates (many owned by the old landed gentry) coexisted with millions of tiny, uneconomic peasant plots. The 1920 and 1925 Land Reform Acts mandated the redistribution of large estates.

By 1939, approximately 2.6 million hectares had been redistributed. However, the pace was slow, compensation to landowners was contentious, and millions of peasants remained landless or with plots too small for subsistence. The "agrarian question" was never resolved, and rural overpopulation remained interwar Poland's most intractable social problem.

Education and Literacy

The unification of three separate educational systems was a major undertaking. Under the Jędrzejewicz reform (1932), Poland created a unified national curriculum. Literacy rates rose from approximately 60% in 1921 to 80% by 1939. New universities were established, and Polish-language education became standard across all former partition zones. These achievements were significant, though rural areas continued to lag behind urban centres.

Women's Rights

Poland granted women's suffrage on 28 November 1918, making it one of the earliest European states to do so -- before Britain (full suffrage 1928), France (1944), or Italy (1946). Women sat in the Sejm from the first parliament. However, social conservatism and the influence of the Catholic Church meant that women's formal political rights did not always translate into substantive social equality.

6.5 The Minority Question

Demographic Composition

Interwar Poland was a profoundly multiethnic state. According to the 1931 census, approximately 35% of the population belonged to national minorities:

Minority	Approximate % of population	Approximate numbers	Main regions
Ukrainians	~16%	~5 million	South-eastern Poland (Galicia, Volhynia)
Jews	~10%	~3.1 million	Throughout, concentrated in towns and cities
Belarusians	~5%	~1.5 million	North-eastern Poland
Germans	~2.3%	~780,000	Western Poland (Silesia, Pomerania, Poznań)
Others (Lithuanians, Czechs, Russians)	~1.5%	Various	Border regions

This made Poland one of the most ethnically diverse states in Europe, a reality that generated enormous political tensions.

The Minorities Treaty (1919)

At the Paris Peace Conference, the Allied Powers imposed the Minorities Treaty of 1919 on Poland as a condition for international recognition of its borders. The treaty guaranteed minorities the right to their own language, schools, and religious practice. Poland deeply resented this imposition, viewing it as an infringement of sovereignty -- no such treaty was imposed on the major Western powers. In 1934, Poland formally renounced the treaty before the League of Nations.

Polish-Jewish Relations

Poland contained the largest Jewish community in Europe: approximately 3.1 million people. The interwar period saw a paradox: on one hand, Jewish cultural, political, and intellectual life flourished -- Yiddish and Hebrew literature, theatre, political movements (Bund, Zionists, Agudat Israel), religious scholarship. On the other hand, antisemitism intensified throughout the period, especially after Piłsudski's death in 1935.

Key developments included:

- Numerus clausus: informal (and later formal) quotas restricting Jewish admission to universities. By the late 1930s, Jewish university enrolment had declined sharply
- "Ghetto benches" (1937): the introduction of segregated seating for Jewish students in university lecture halls, enforced by Endecja student groups
- Economic boycotts: campaigns urging Poles not to patronise Jewish businesses

- Przytyk pogrom (1936): violent anti-Jewish riots in the town of Przytyk, resulting in deaths on both sides but primarily targeting the Jewish community
- Emigration pressure: the Polish government actively explored plans for mass Jewish emigration, including to Madagascar

It is essential for IB students to note that while interwar Poland was marked by serious and growing antisemitism, it did not implement genocide. The Polish state did not adopt racial laws comparable to the Nuremberg Laws, and the Holocaust was a German, not a Polish, programme. The relationship between interwar antisemitism and wartime events remains one of the most sensitive topics in Polish historiography.

The Ukrainian Question

The approximately 5 million Ukrainians in south-eastern Poland represented the largest and most politically restive minority. Ukrainian political life was divided between:

- UNDO (Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance): a moderate party seeking autonomy within the Polish state through legal means
- OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists): a radical, violent movement committed to Ukrainian independence, responsible for assassinations and sabotage

The Polish government's response oscillated between conciliation and repression. The most notorious episode was the Pacification of Galicia (September–November 1930), in which Polish military and police units carried out punitive expeditions against Ukrainian villages suspected of supporting the OUN. Over 800 were arrested, property was destroyed, and the action was condemned internationally. The Pacification radicalised Ukrainian opinion and strengthened the OUN at the expense of moderates.

The German Minority

Approximately 780,000 ethnic Germans lived in western Poland, mainly in territories transferred from Germany under the Versailles Treaty. Relations were tense: Germany never accepted the loss of these territories, and after 1933, the German minority increasingly aligned with the Nazi regime. The German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact of 1934 temporarily eased tensions, but the minority question remained a tool of German revisionist policy.

6.6 Foreign Policy

The "Policy of Balance"

Poland's geopolitical position –- wedged between Germany and the Soviet Union –- was the defining constraint on its foreign policy. Foreign Minister Józef Beck pursued a "policy of balance" (polityka równowagi), seeking to maintain equidistant relations with both threatening neighbours while avoiding dependence on either.

Key developments:

- Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (25 July 1932): secured Poland's eastern frontier and demonstrated that Poland could deal independently with Moscow
- German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact (26 January 1934): a diplomatic coup that temporarily stabilised the western border and seemed to validate Beck's strategy. Hitler used it to weaken the French alliance system
- Renunciation of the Minorities Treaty (1934): Beck asserted Polish sovereignty and great-power status, though this damaged Poland's international reputation

The Zaolzie Crisis (1938)

Poland's seizure of Zaolzie (Trans-Olza) from Czechoslovakia in October 1938, simultaneous with Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland following the Munich Agreement, was the most damaging episode of interwar Polish diplomacy. The region had a significant Polish population and had been disputed since 1920, but the timing –- acting as a "jackal" alongside Nazi Germany in dismembering Czechoslovakia –- severely damaged Poland's international standing and destroyed any possibility of a Polish-Czechoslovak alliance against Hitler. Prazmowska emphasises this as a catastrophic misjudgement that isolated Poland at the worst possible moment.

The Road to War

The failure of collective security left Poland fatally exposed. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (23 August 1939), with its secret protocol dividing Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union, sealed the country's fate. Britain and France had issued guarantees to Poland in March–April 1939, but these proved hollow in practice.

Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. The Soviet Union invaded from the east on 17 September. The interwar Polish state ceased to exist.

Historiography

Historian	Key Argument
Norman Davies (God's Playground)	Poland existed in a "grey zone" between East and West; its interwar problems were structural and not merely the result of political failure; emphasises the genuine achievements alongside the failures

Historian	Key Argument
Antony Polonsky (Politics in Independent Poland)	More critical; argues that democratic failure was not inevitable but resulted from specific political choices; highlights the role of the Endecja in poisoning democratic culture
Anita Prazmowska (A History of Poland; Poland: A Modern History)	Emphasises the constraints of foreign policy and geopolitics; Poland's choices were severely limited by its geographical position between two hostile great powers
Peter Stachura (Poland 1918–1945)	Provides detailed documentary and interpretive coverage; balanced assessment of achievements and failures

IB P3 Exam Connections

P3 Theme	Poland Application
Origins of authoritarian states	May Coup (1926): democratic failure as cause; military prestige as enabler
Methods of maintaining power	BBWR, Brest trials, April Constitution, selective repression
Domestic policies	COP, land reform, education, Gdynia
Impact on civil society	Treatment of minorities, press censorship, political prisoners
Role of ideology	Piłsudski's pragmatism vs. Endecja ethnic nationalism
Comparison	Semi-authoritarian (vs. Mussolini's totalitarian aspiration, vs. Horthy's conservative authoritarianism)

Chapter summary

Poland after 1918 faced an unusually demanding set of founding problems. The state had to unify three former partition zones with different laws, currencies and political cultures, to defend contested borders in six separate conflicts and to construct a political system that could accommodate an unusually diverse population of Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Germans and Belarusians. The March Constitution imposed a fragile parliamentary design on this inheritance, and the sheer number of parties produced a rotation of governments so rapid that public opinion turned against the parliamentary system itself. Piłsudski's May Coup of 1926 introduced the Sanacja, which preserved the forms of legality while concentrating effective power in the hands of a military elite that governed through the BBWR and, after 1935, under the April Constitution. The regime was authoritarian without being fascist, repressive without being terroristic, and moderately successful in economic development through the złoty stabilisation, the port of Gdynia and the Central Industrial District. Foreign policy balanced between Berlin and Moscow until the geopolitical collapse of 1939 destroyed the second republic.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Partitions	The three divisions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth among Russia, Prussia and Austria, completed in 1795, that erased Poland from the map for one hundred and twenty-three years

Term	Meaning
Kresy	The eastern borderlands populated by Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews and Poles, incorporated into the Second Republic after the Treaty of Riga
Sejm	The lower, dominant house of the Polish parliament
Endecja	The National Democrats of Roman Dmowski, representing an ethnic, Catholic, anti-minority conception of Poland
PPS	The Polish Socialist Party, the political home of Piłsudski before 1918
Sanacja	Literally "moral cleansing", the political camp around Piłsudski established after the May Coup
BBWR	The Non-Partisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government, the political vehicle of the Sanacja after 1928
Brest trials	The 1931 to 1932 prosecution of opposition leaders imprisoned in Brest fortress after the dissolution of the Sejm
April Constitution	The 1935 constitutional replacement of the 1921 text, establishing a strong presidency responsible "to God and History"
Zloty	The Polish currency introduced by Grabski in 1924
COP	The Central Industrial District launched in 1936 by Kwiatkowski as a state-led programme of industrialisation
Policy of balance	Colonel Beck's foreign policy doctrine of equidistance between Germany and the Soviet Union

Questions

1. To what extent was the May Coup of 1926 the result of the failures of Polish parliamentary democracy?
2. Evaluate the achievements and limitations of Polish economic policy in the interwar period.
3. Examine the treatment of national minorities in interwar Poland.
4. "The Sanacja regime was authoritarian but not fascist." Discuss.
5. Compare and contrast the political development of Poland with that of one other interwar state you have studied.

Chapter 7: Germany under Hitler (1933–1939)

Summary of events

Hitler came to the chancellorship on 30 January 1933 through a back-room agreement with the conservative politicians around President Hindenburg, who believed they could contain him inside a coalition cabinet. Within eighteen months the cabinet was irrelevant, the other parties were banned, the trade unions were dissolved, the federal states were centralised, the last rivals inside the Nazi movement had been murdered and the army had sworn a personal oath of loyalty to the Führer. The mechanisms of this transformation were the Reichstag Fire Decree, the Enabling Act, the waves of Gleichschaltung that brought every institution into line, the Night of the Long Knives and the merger of the offices of president and chancellor after Hindenburg's death. Domestic policy rested on three pillars, namely rearmament-driven economic recovery directed first by Schacht and then by Göring, the construction of a national community on racial lines that excluded Jews through the Nuremberg Laws and the pogrom of Kristallnacht, and the total saturation of culture and leisure by the propaganda apparatus of Joseph Goebbels. Foreign policy combined patient salami tactics with sudden leaps, passing from the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in March 1936 through the Anschluss and the Munich agreement to the seizure of the rump Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August and the invasion of Poland that opened the Second World War.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. Why was Hitler appointed chancellor on 30 January 1933, and to what extent was this outcome the result of economic crisis rather than political miscalculation?
2. How did the Nazi regime consolidate power so rapidly, and how complete was Gleichschaltung?
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of Nazi economic policy between 1933 and 1939.
4. Examine the role of propaganda and cultural control in sustaining the regime.
5. To what extent did Nazi Germany achieve totalitarian control over German society?
6. Was Hitler a master planner of foreign policy or a gambler who exploited opportunities created by the weakness of his opponents?

Timeline of Chapter 7

30 January 1933	Hitler appointed Chancellor
27 February 1933	Reichstag Fire
28 February 1933	Decree for the Protection of the People and the State
5 March 1933	Reichstag elections. Nazis win 43.9 per cent
23 March 1933	Enabling Act passed
2 May 1933	Trade unions dissolved. German Labour Front created
14 July 1933	Nazi Party becomes only legal party
30 June 1934	Night of the Long Knives

2 August 1934	Death of Hindenburg. Army oath to Hitler personally
15 September 1935	Nuremberg Laws
7 March 1936	Remilitarisation of the Rhineland
1936	Four-Year Plan under Göring. Hitler Youth compulsory
12 March 1938	Anschluss with Austria
29–30 September 1938	Munich Agreement
9–10 November 1938	Kristallnacht
15 March 1939	Occupation of the rump Czechoslovakia
23 August 1939	Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact
1 September 1939	Invasion of Poland

7.1 The Rise of Hitler

Weimar Weaknesses

The Weimar Republic (1919–1933) was born in defeat and burdened by structural vulnerabilities that Hitler would exploit:

- Proportional representation produced fragmented parliaments with no stable majorities, mirroring (and exceeding) Poland's problem
- Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution gave the president emergency decree powers, creating a constitutional pathway to authoritarian rule
- The "stab in the back" myth (Dolchstoßlegende) –- the false claim that Germany's army had been undefeated in the field and betrayed by civilian politicians, Jews, and socialists –- poisoned democratic legitimacy from the start
- The Treaty of Versailles (reparations, territorial losses, Article 231 "war guilt") provided a permanent grievance that extremists could exploit

The Great Depression and Electoral Breakthrough

The Great Depression transformed German politics. By 1932, approximately 6 million Germans were registered as unemployed (the true figure, including those who had stopped seeking work, was likely higher). The crisis destroyed the political centre and drove voters to extremes.

The NSDAP (Nazi Party) rose from obscurity –- winning just 2.6% of the vote in May 1928 –- to become the largest party in the Reichstag, winning 37.3% in July 1932. Hitler's appeal combined nationalist resentment, antisemitism, anti-communism, and a promise to restore German greatness. The party's vote slipped to 33.1% in November 1932, but conservative elites around President Hindenburg calculated that they could control Hitler by placing him in a coalition government.

On 30 January 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor in a cabinet where Nazis held only three of eleven posts. Franz von Papen, the conservative kingmaker, declared: "We've hired him." Within months, it became clear who had hired whom.

The Destruction of Democracy

The consolidation of power was swift and systematic:

- 27 February 1933: The Reichstag Fire (blamed on Dutch communist Marinus van der Lubbe) provided the pretext for the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State, which suspended civil liberties indefinitely
- 5 March 1933: Elections held under conditions of terror gave the Nazis 43.9% –- still short of a majority
- 23 March 1933: The Enabling Act (Ermächtigungsgesetz) passed the Reichstag with the required two-thirds majority (only the SPD voted against; the Centre Party was persuaded; the KPD had already been banned). It granted Hitler the power to pass laws without parliamentary approval for four years. This was the legal death of Weimar democracy.

7.2 Consolidation of Power: Gleichschaltung

Gleichschaltung ("coordination" or "bringing into line") was the process by which all institutions of German society were brought under Nazi control:

- 2 May 1933: Trade unions dissolved; replaced by the German Labour Front (DAF)
- 14 July 1933: All political parties other than the NSDAP banned; Germany became a one-party state
- 30 June 1934: The Night of the Long Knives –- Hitler ordered the murder of SA leader Ernst Röhm and approximately 85 other perceived rivals and enemies (the true death toll may have been higher). The purge eliminated the radical wing of the SA, which had demanded a "second revolution," and reassured the conservative army officer corps
- 2 August 1934: President Hindenburg died. Hitler merged the offices of president and chancellor, becoming Führer und Reichskanzler. The army swore a personal oath of loyalty to Hitler –- not to the constitution or the state. This bound the military to the dictator personally

By late 1934, the totalitarian state was essentially complete. Germany had gone from democracy to dictatorship in eighteen months.

7.3 Domestic Policies

Economic Policy

Nazi economic policy prioritised rearmament and the elimination of unemployment:

- Hjalmar Schacht, president of the Reichsbank and Minister of Economics, devised the New Plan (1934), which regulated foreign trade through bilateral agreements to preserve foreign currency reserves for raw material imports
- Mefo bills: a financial instrument (essentially disguised government bonds) used to fund rearmament secretly, circumventing Versailles restrictions. Between 1934 and 1938, approximately 12 billion Reichsmarks were issued in Mefo bills
- Autarky: the drive for economic self-sufficiency, intensified under the Four-Year Plan (1936) directed by Hermann Göring. Synthetic rubber (Buna), synthetic fuel, and other ersatz products were developed, though true autarky was never achieved
- Unemployment fell from approximately 6 million in January 1933 to under 300,000 by 1938. This was achieved through rearmament, public works (Autobahn construction), conscription, the removal of women and Jews from the workforce, and statistical manipulation

The economic "miracle" was built on unsustainable deficit spending and the assumption that war would eventually pay for itself through conquest. As historian Adam Tooze argues in Wages of Destruction, the Nazi economy was a "war economy in peacetime."

Social Policy

The concept of Volksgemeinschaft ("people's community") was central to Nazi social engineering –- the idea of a racially pure, classless national community united by blood and loyalty to the Führer:

- Strength Through Joy (KdF –- Kraft durch Freude): a leisure organisation providing subsidised holidays, concerts, and sports for workers. The KdF Volkswagen ("people's car") programme collected payments from workers but never delivered the cars
- German Labour Front (DAF): replaced trade unions; membership was compulsory; controlled working conditions, set wages, eliminated the right to strike
- Women: relegated to Kinder, Küche, Kirche ("children, kitchen, church"). Marriage loans incentivised motherhood; the Mother's Cross rewarded prolific mothers. Women were progressively excluded from professions, though wartime labour demands later reversed some of these policies
- Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend): membership became compulsory in 1936 for boys aged 10–18; the parallel League of German Girls (BDM) organised girls. Education was restructured to emphasise racial ideology, physical fitness, and obedience

Racial Policy

Antisemitism was the ideological core of Nazism:

- April 1933: Boycott of Jewish businesses; Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service (Jews dismissed from government positions)

- 15 September 1935: Nuremberg Laws –- the Reich Citizenship Law (stripped Jews of citizenship) and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour (banned marriages and sexual relations between Jews and "Aryans")
- 9–10 November 1938: Kristallnacht ("Night of Broken Glass") –- a coordinated pogrom in which approximately 91 Jews were killed, 30,000 sent to concentration camps, and over 7,500 Jewish businesses destroyed. The Jewish community was collectively fined 1 billion Reichsmarks
- From 1941, the regime escalated to the systematic murder of European Jews –- the Holocaust/Shoah –- in which approximately 6 million Jews were killed, along with Roma, disabled people, Soviet POWs, and other groups

Propaganda and cultural control

No dimension of the Nazi state is more important for understanding how the regime was experienced by ordinary Germans than the systematic saturation of culture and public life by the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. The ministry was created for Joseph Goebbels on 13 March 1933, less than three weeks after the Reichstag Fire, and its brief was nothing less than the coordination of every form of expression through which Germans learned about politics, history, art or themselves. In September of the same year the Reich Chamber of Culture was established with membership compulsory for any writer, journalist, painter, composer, film-maker or theatre director who wished to continue to practise their profession. Expulsion from the relevant chamber meant professional death, and with that single bureaucratic instrument the regime obtained a level of control over German cultural life that it never needed to enforce by arrest.

Film occupied the centre of the propaganda system because Goebbels believed that cinema reached audiences more deeply than print. Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will recorded the 1934 Nuremberg rally with a technical brilliance that still makes the film a textbook case in the study of political imagery, and Olympia did the same for the 1936 Berlin Games. Yet most output of the Ufa studios was not overt propaganda but entertainment, melodrama and historical romance, designed to keep audiences in their seats for the newsreels that preceded the main feature. Radio mattered even more. Goebbels commissioned the cheap Volksempfänger receiver, whose limited range was a deliberate feature that kept German listeners within the reach of Reich broadcasters. By 1939 about seventy per cent of German households owned a radio, the highest rate in Europe, and public loudspeakers in workplaces and squares ensured that the remaining thirty per cent could not escape the Führer's speeches either.

Visual culture was policed as aggressively as broadcasting. The Degenerate Art Exhibition mounted in Munich in July 1937 gathered six hundred and fifty works by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, Max Beckmann, Marc Chagall and many others and displayed them in deliberately cramped and sarcastic conditions to contrast with the neoclassical and heroic imagery of the parallel Great German Art Exhibition. Book burnings in university cities in May 1933 performed a similar demonstrative function, consigning Heinrich Heine, Thomas Mann, Sigmund Freud and Erich Maria Remarque to the bonfire. Press concentration followed more quietly. By the outbreak of war the Eher Verlag, the publishing house of the Nazi Party, controlled more than two thirds of German newspaper circulation, and the Reich Press Chamber set the line that every editor was required to follow.

The aim of this apparatus was not only to prohibit but to shape the emotional vocabulary of daily life. The Hitler salute, the swastika, the Nuremberg rallies, the annual Remembrance of the Fallen at the Feldherrnhalle, the summer solstice bonfires and the Winter Help campaign turned the calendar into a liturgy of Nazi symbols. Ian Kershaw's concept of the Hitler Myth, developed in The Hitler Myth of 1987, captures the effect with great

precision. Kershaw argues that propaganda worked most powerfully not when it convinced Germans of specific claims but when it separated the popular image of the Führer as an incorruptible national saviour from the unpopular realities of the regime's party officials and daily hardships. Foreign policy triumphs between 1936 and 1938 broadened the reach of the myth, while the approach of war in 1939 and the rationing and bombing that followed gradually hollowed it out again. For Paper 3 candidates the right analytical move is to distinguish between the pervasiveness of propaganda, which was real, and its depth of penetration, which varied with the credibility of the specific claims being made at any given moment.

7.4 The Nature of the Nazi State

A central historiographical debate concerns the structure of the Nazi state:

Intentionalist view: Hitler was the driving force; his ideology (expressed in Mein Kampf and elsewhere) was a programme that was systematically implemented. The Holocaust was always the intended goal.

Structuralist/functionalist view (Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen): The Nazi state was characterised by polycratic chaos –- competing agencies, overlapping jurisdictions, and institutional rivalry. Policy emerged not from clear commands but from the cumulative radicalisation of subordinates competing for favour.

Ian Kershaw's synthesis: Kershaw offers the most influential modern interpretation. He describes Hitler as a "lazy dictator" who set the broad ideological framework but rarely gave direct orders for specific policies. Instead, subordinates engaged in "working towards the Führer" (dem Führer entgegenarbeiten) –- anticipating Hitler's wishes and competing to realise them, producing a dynamic of cumulative radicalisation. This explains how the regime could be simultaneously chaotic in its administrative structure and devastating in its outcomes.

For IB purposes, the key point is that the Nazi state combined totalitarian control (Gestapo surveillance, propaganda monopoly, education indoctrination, terror) with structural incoherence (competing power centres: SS, Wehrmacht, party apparatus, state bureaucracy, Göring's economic empire).

7.5 Foreign Policy

Hitler's foreign policy combined ideological goals (Lebensraum, racial empire) with tactical opportunism:

Date	Event	Significance
Mar 1936	Remilitarisation of the Rhineland	First major treaty violation; Western powers did not respond
Mar 1938	Anschluss with Austria	Union with Austria; violated Versailles and Saint-Germain treaties
Sep 1938	Munich Agreement	Sudetenland annexed; Britain and France appeased Hitler; Czechoslovakia abandoned
Mar 1939	Invasion of rump Czechoslovakia	Destroyed the fiction that Hitler only sought ethnic German territories
23 Aug 1939	Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact	Non-aggression pact with USSR; secret protocol divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence
1 Sep 1939	Invasion of Poland	Triggered British and French declarations of war; beginning of WWII in Europe

Each step tested Western resolve and found it wanting until March 1939, when the seizure of Prague finally convinced Britain and France that appeasement had failed.

Historiography

Historian	Key Argument
Ian Kershaw (Hitler: Hubris; Nemesis)	Intentionalist-structuralist synthesis; "working towards the Führer"; charismatic authority as the key to understanding the regime
Martin Broszat (The Hitler State)	Polycratic chaos; the regime was administratively fragmented; radicalisation emerged from structural competition, not central planning
Daniel Goldhagen (Hitler's Willing Executioners)	Controversial: argues that "eliminationist antisemitism" was deeply embedded in German culture, making ordinary Germans willing participants in genocide. Criticised for monocausal explanation and methodological flaws
Adam Tooze (The Wages of Destruction)	The Nazi economy was driven by the logic of war from the start; economic recovery was inseparable from rearmament

Richard Evans, in his three-volume history of the Third Reich, has produced the most systematic modern narrative of the regime, integrating political, social, cultural and economic dimensions and insisting on the continuities between Weimar and Nazi Germany that the regime itself tried to conceal. Tim Mason's Social Policy in the Third Reich and his essay on the crisis of the Nazi regime in 1939 argue that working-class discontent and the strain on living standards imposed by rearmament were driving Hitler toward war faster

than his strategic plans required, giving the foreign policy of 1938 and 1939 a domestic motor that Mason calls the flight into war. Richard Overy, in Why the Allies Won and The Dictators, has compared Hitler and Stalin systematically and suggested that the Nazi state, for all its totalitarian ambitions, was administratively less coherent than the Soviet system. Saul Friedländer's Nazi Germany and the Jews has provided the definitive integrated history of the Holocaust, combining perpetrator documentation with survivor testimony to reconstruct how the regime moved from exclusion through ghettoisation to industrial murder. For Paper 3 essays, the strongest positions draw explicitly on at least two of these traditions and use them to argue rather than to illustrate.

Source-based exercise

> *Source A. Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, volume two, 1926: "The foreign policy of a folkish state must safeguard the existence on this planet of the race embodied by the state, by creating a healthy, viable natural relation between the nation's population and growth, on the one hand, and the quantity and quality of its soil, on the other hand. And so we National Socialists consciously draw a line beneath the foreign policy tendency of our pre-War period. We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east."*
> *Source B. The Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Reich, the Enabling Act, 23 March 1933, articles one and two: "In addition to the procedure prescribed by the constitution, laws of the Reich may also be enacted by the government of the Reich. The laws enacted by the Reich government may deviate from the constitution as long as they do not affect the institutions of the Reichstag and the Reichsrat as such. The rights of the President remain undisturbed."*

(a) According to Source A, what does Hitler identify as the central task of foreign policy? [3 marks] (b) Compare and contrast the views of state authority implicit in Sources A and B. [6 marks] (c) Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess the argument that Nazi foreign policy was the pursuit of long-held ideological aims rather than opportunistic improvisation. [9 marks]

Chapter summary

Hitler came to power in 1933 not because the Nazi movement had won a majority, for it had not, but because the conservative politicians around Hindenburg decided to use him. Once in the chancellorship he moved with remarkable speed through the Reichstag Fire Decree, the Enabling Act, the dissolution of the trade unions and the other parties and the Night of the Long Knives to establish a single-party dictatorship. By the summer of 1934 the Third Reich was constitutionally in place, and the following five years saw the completion of Gleichschaltung through the Nuremberg Laws, the Four-Year Plan and the permeation of public life by Goebbels's propaganda apparatus. Economic recovery rested on rearmament and was shadowed from the start by the question of how those rearmament debts would be repaid once peace conditions ended the flow of Mefo bills. The historiographical debate between intentionalists and structuralists has converged, through the work of Kershaw and others, on a synthesis in which Hitler set the broad ideological direction while subordinates working towards the Führer produced the cumulative radicalisation that ended in world war and genocide.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Weimar Republic	The parliamentary democracy of Germany from 1919 to 1933, weakened by proportional representation, Article 48 and the stab-in-the-back myth
NSDAP	The National Socialist German Workers' Party, Hitler's vehicle for power
Article 48	The Weimar constitutional clause granting the president emergency decree powers, invoked repeatedly after 1930
Reichstag Fire Decree	The 28 February 1933 suspension of civil liberties after the burning of the parliament building
Enabling Act	The 23 March 1933 statute authorising Hitler to legislate without the Reichstag
Gleichschaltung	The coordination of social, political and cultural institutions under Nazi control
Volksgemeinschaft	The racially defined national community, the central social concept of Nazi ideology
Mefo bills	The disguised government bonds used by Schacht to fund rearmament without appearing on the federal budget
Autarky	The drive for economic self-sufficiency, intensified under the Four-Year Plan of 1936
Nuremberg Laws	The racial legislation of September 1935, stripping Jews of citizenship and banning racial mixing
Kristallnacht	The state-sponsored pogrom of 9 to 10 November 1938
Working towards the Führer	Kershaw's formula for the dynamic of subordinate initiative that produced cumulative radicalisation
Reich Chamber of Culture	The 1933 institution that required every cultural producer to hold membership of a regulated chamber
Volksempfänger	The cheap state-sponsored radio receiver designed to bring Reich broadcasting into every household

Questions

1. To what extent was Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933 the result of the Great Depression rather than of elite miscalculation?
2. Evaluate the success of Nazi economic policy between 1933 and 1939.
3. Examine the role of propaganda in consolidating Nazi power.
4. "The Nazi state was more chaotic than totalitarian." Discuss with reference to the structuralist-intentionalist debate.
5. Compare and contrast the treatment of opposition in Nazi Germany and one other interwar authoritarian state.

Chapter 8: Italy under Mussolini (1922–1943)

Summary of events

Mussolini came to power in October 1922 after the March on Rome, a bluff rather than a seizure of government, to which King Victor Emmanuel III chose to yield rather than risk a confrontation that the army might have won for the state. The consolidation of fascist power proceeded more slowly than its German equivalent. The Acerbo Law rigged the electoral system, the Matteotti crisis of 1924 produced a political near-death from which Mussolini recovered by accepting personal responsibility for fascist violence and daring his opponents to act, and the Fascistissime laws of 1925 and 1926 banned the opposition parties and established the secret police. Domestically the regime pursued a corporatist restructuring of the economy that existed more in propaganda than in reality, fought three famous battles over grain, births and the value of the lira, concluded the Lateran Pacts with the papacy in 1929 and built one of the most popular leisure organisations in Europe in the Dopolavoro. The economic crisis of the early 1930s forced a further nationalisation of the banking and industrial sectors through the creation of IRI in 1933 and the pursuit of autarky. Foreign policy passed from prudent balancing in the 1920s to aggressive imperialism after 1935, with the invasion of Ethiopia, intervention in the Spanish Civil War, the Rome-Berlin Axis and the Pact of Steel. Italy entered the Second World War in June 1940 unprepared for the conflict that would destroy the regime.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. Why did the liberal order collapse in Italy between 1919 and 1922?
2. How did Mussolini consolidate his dictatorship between 1922 and 1926?
3. Evaluate the nature and effectiveness of the corporate state.
4. Examine the significance of the Lateran Pacts for the fascist regime.
5. To what extent was fascist Italy a totalitarian state?
6. Analyse the aims and consequences of Mussolini's foreign policy.

Timeline of Chapter 8

March 1919	Fasci Italiani di Combattimento founded
1919–1920	Biennio Rosso
27–28 October 1922	March on Rome
29 October 1922	Mussolini invited to form government
November 1923	Acerbo Law
June 1924	Murder of Matteotti. Aventine Secession
3 January 1925	Mussolini's speech accepting responsibility for fascist violence
1925–1926	Fascistissime laws. Creation of OVRA
1927	Charter of Labour. Quota Novanta

11 February 1929	Lateran Pacts
1933	Creation of IRI to rescue the banking system
October 1935 – May 1936	Invasion and conquest of Ethiopia
1936–1939	Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War
November 1936	Rome-Berlin Axis
1938	Racial laws
May 1939	Pact of Steel
10 June 1940	Italy enters the Second World War
25 July 1943	Fall of Mussolini

8.1 The Rise of Fascism

Post-War Crisis

Italy emerged from the First World War on the winning side but deeply dissatisfied. The concept of the "mutilated victory" (vittoria mutilata) –- the perception that Italy had been denied its promised territorial gains (particularly Fiume and Dalmatia) despite suffering approximately 600,000 military dead –- fuelled nationalist anger and contempt for the liberal parliamentary system.

The Biennio Rosso (1919–1920)

The "Two Red Years" saw a wave of socialist agitation: factory occupations in the industrial north (Turin, Milan), land seizures by peasants in the south, and widespread strikes. The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) proclaimed solidarity with the Russian Revolution and appeared, to the frightened middle and upper classes, to be on the verge of seizing power. In reality, the PSI was divided and incapable of revolution, but the perception of imminent Bolshevik upheaval was politically decisive.

Squadrismo and the March on Rome

Benito Mussolini, a former socialist journalist who had broken with the PSI over support for the war, founded the Fasci Italiani di Combattimento in March 1919. The early fascist programme was eclectic and radical, but the movement's defining characteristic became squadrismo –- paramilitary violence by blackshirt (camicie nere) squads against socialists, trade unionists, and local government opponents, particularly in the rural Po Valley. Landowners and industrialists funded and protected the squads.

By 1922, the fascist movement had grown from a fringe group to a mass movement with approximately 300,000 members. The March on Rome (27–28 October 1922) was more theatrical than military –- the blackshirts converged on the capital in disorganised columns, and the march could easily have been dispersed by the army. However, King Victor Emmanuel III refused to sign a decree of martial law, effectively handing power to Mussolini. On 29 October 1922, the King invited Mussolini to form a government. The "March" was as much a bluff as a putsch, but it succeeded because the liberal establishment chose to accommodate fascism rather than resist it.

8.2 Consolidation of Power (1922–1926)

Mussolini moved more gradually than Hitler to establish a dictatorship:

- Acerbo Law (November 1923): an electoral law stipulating that the party winning the most votes (with a minimum of 25%) would receive two-thirds of the seats in parliament. This guaranteed fascist dominance in subsequent elections
- Matteotti Crisis (June 1924): Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti publicly denounced fascist electoral violence. On 10 June 1924, he was kidnapped and murdered by a fascist squad. The murder provoked outrage and a crisis that nearly toppled Mussolini. The opposition withdrew from parliament in the Aventine Secession –- a principled but tactically disastrous move that left Mussolini in control of the chamber. On 3 January 1925, Mussolini delivered a defiant speech claiming personal responsibility for fascist violence and daring his opponents to impeach him. This is generally regarded as the moment the dictatorship began
- 1925–1926 "Fascistissime" laws: opposition parties banned, press freedom abolished, elected mayors replaced by appointed podestà, the secret police (OVRA) established, and the death penalty reintroduced for political offences

8.3 Domestic Policies

The Corporate State

Fascist Italy claimed to have created a revolutionary "third way" between capitalism and communism through corporatism –- the organisation of the economy into joint employer-worker corporations supervised by the state:

- Charter of Labour (1927): declared the right to work but banned strikes and lockouts
- 22 corporations were established by 1934, covering major sectors of the economy
- In practice, corporatism served employer interests: workers lost the right to organise independently, wages were cut, and the corporations functioned primarily as instruments of state control rather than genuine mediation

The Lateran Pacts (1929)

The Lateran Pacts (11 February 1929) between Mussolini and Pope Pius XI resolved the "Roman Question" that had persisted since Italian unification in 1870:

- The Vatican was recognised as an independent sovereign state
- Catholicism was confirmed as the state religion of Italy
- The Church received financial compensation for lost territories
- Religious education became compulsory in schools

The Pacts were arguably Mussolini's greatest domestic achievement, winning him the support of the Catholic Church and the approval of millions of Catholic Italians.

The "Battles"

Mussolini framed domestic policy in militaristic terms:

"Battle"	Goal	Outcome
Battle for Grain (Battaglia del Grano, 1925)	Achieve self-sufficiency in wheat	Wheat production approximately doubled by 1939, but at the expense of other crops (olive oil, citrus), raising food costs overall
Battle for Births (Battaglia della nascita)	Increase population from 40 million to 60 million	Failed: birth rates continued to decline throughout the period
Battle for the Lira (Quota Novanta, 1927)	Fix the lira at 90 to the pound sterling	Achieved, but the overvalued lira made Italian exports uncompetitive and contributed to deflation and unemployment

Education and Leisure

Giovanni Gentile's education reform (1923) restructured Italian schooling, emphasising philosophy, classics, and fascist values. The Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND) –- the "after-work" leisure organisation –- became one of fascism's most popular institutions, providing sports, cinema, excursions, and cultural activities to millions. By 1939, the OND had approximately 4 million members.

Depression, IRI and autarky

The Great Depression hit Italy later than most of Europe but deeply, and it forced a silent transformation of the fascist economy. The overvalued lira imposed in 1927 had already made Italian exports uncompetitive and contributed to rising unemployment even before the world crisis arrived. In 1931 and 1932 the three largest banks, namely Banca Commerciale Italiana, Credito Italiano and Banco di Roma, collapsed under the weight of bad industrial debt. Rather than permit a cascade of bankruptcies, Mussolini authorised the creation of the Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale, or IRI, in January 1933. The institute absorbed the distressed industrial shareholdings of the failing banks and, although conceived as a temporary rescue vehicle, became a permanent fixture of the Italian economy. By 1939 IRI controlled approximately half of Italian steel production, four fifths of shipbuilding, almost all of heavy engineering relevant to defence and extensive holdings in telecommunications. The result was a paradox. Fascism, which presented itself as the third way between capitalism and communism, produced a state capitalism more extensive than that of any other western European country, and the bureaucratic habits acquired inside IRI would shape the Italian industrial republic until privatisation in the 1990s.

Parallel to this hidden nationalisation came the deliberate drive for autarky after 1936. The Ethiopian sanctions, the strain of funding the Spanish Civil War commitment and the growing alignment with Germany all reinforced the argument that Italy had to reduce dependence on imported raw materials. The regime promoted substitute products such as lanital, a fibre made from milk casein, and pushed the development of hydroelectric power to compensate for the absence of domestic coal. Results fell far short of the rhetoric. Italian coal imports still covered the great majority of energy needs in 1939, the country remained dependent on imported oil that was almost entirely controlled by Anglo-American firms, and even the cereal production boosted by the Battle for Grain required imported fertiliser. Adam Tooze has observed in The Wages of Destruction that Italian economic weakness relative to its fascist ambitions was the structural reason why Mussolini's alliance with Hitler was never the partnership of equals it was imagined to be. When Italy entered the war in June 1940 its stocks of oil, rubber and steel were all measured in weeks of consumption, and the Pact of Steel rested on foundations that were already cracking.

8.4 The Nature of the Fascist State

A key historiographical question is whether Fascist Italy was genuinely totalitarian:

Mussolini himself coined the term "totalitarian" and proclaimed: "Everything within the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State." However, historians have noted the significant gap between aspiration and reality:

- The monarchy survived: King Victor Emmanuel III remained Head of State and retained the constitutional power to dismiss the prime minister (which he eventually exercised in July 1943)
- The Catholic Church remained an independent institution with enormous social influence
- The army was never fully fascistised: its officer corps remained loyal to the king, not to Mussolini personally
- The bureaucracy was not purged: pre-fascist civil servants continued to operate the state machinery
- There was no equivalent to the Holocaust: while Italy introduced racial laws in 1938 (under German pressure), these were less systematically enforced, and Italian-occupied territories generally offered Jews more protection than German-occupied areas

R.J.B. Bosworth describes Fascist Italy as an example of "incomplete totalitarianism" –- a regime that aspired to total control but lacked the institutional capacity or ideological consistency to achieve it. Emilio Gentile characterises fascism as a "political religion" –- complete with liturgy, rituals, symbols, and a cult of the leader –- but acknowledges the limits of its penetration into Italian society. Renzo De Felice, the most controversial Italian historian of fascism, argued that the regime genuinely enjoyed broad popular consent during the 1930s, a claim that remains fiercely debated.

For IB comparative purposes, Fascist Italy occupies a middle position: more authoritarian than Piłsudski's Poland, but less totalitarian than Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Soviet Union.

8.5 Foreign Policy

Mussolini's foreign policy was driven by the ambition to make Italy a great power and to recreate a Mediterranean empire:

Date	Event	Significance
Aug 1923	Corfu Incident	Italy bombarded and occupied the Greek island of Corfu after the murder of Italian officials; withdrew under League pressure but demonstrated aggressive intent
Oct 1935–May 1936	Invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia)	Italy conquered Ethiopia using modern weapons including poison gas against a poorly armed opponent; the League of Nations imposed sanctions but they were ineffective (no oil embargo); the conquest made Mussolini enormously popular at home
1936–1939	Spanish Civil War	Italy sent the Corpo Truppe Volontarie (CTV, approximately 75,000 troops) to support Franco; costly and not always militarily successful (defeat at Guadalajara, 1937)
Nov 1936	Rome-Berlin Axis	Mussolini coined the term "Axis" to describe the alignment with Nazi Germany
May 1939	Pact of Steel	Full military alliance with Germany; committed Italy to support Germany in war
Jun 1940	Entry into WWII	Italy declared war on France and Britain on 10 June 1940, after German victory seemed assured; Mussolini declared he needed "a few thousand dead" to sit at the peace table

The invasion of Abyssinia was the turning point of Italian foreign policy: it alienated Britain and France, drove Italy into dependence on Germany, and committed the regime to an aggressive trajectory that the Italian economy and military could not sustain.

The Ethiopian war in depth

The Italian conquest of Ethiopia between October 1935 and May 1936 deserves more attention than most textbooks give it, because it changed the strategic map of Europe as decisively as any event of the 1930s.

Mussolini's motivations were overlapping rather than single. There was the unresolved humiliation of Adowa in 1896, when an Ethiopian army had defeated an Italian expedition and established African independence as a symbolic victory that fascism was bound to avenge. There was the settler argument that Italy's demographic growth required colonial outlets at a time when emigration to the United States had been closed since 1924. There was the demonstration argument that a successful war would consolidate the personal authority of the Duce. And there was the strategic argument that Italian East Africa, linking Eritrea, Somalia and Abyssinia, would make Italy a power in the Red Sea corridor, threatening the British lifeline to India.

The campaign itself was conducted with overwhelming material superiority against an army that had almost no modern aviation. Italy committed roughly half a million troops, Fiat tanks, Caproni bombers and Savoia-Marchetti aircraft, and crucially, the large-scale use of mustard and phosgene gas, particularly after the initial advance under Marshal Emilio De Bono stalled and Mussolini replaced him with the more ruthless Pietro Badoglio. Ethiopian forces under Emperor Haile Selassie fought determinedly at Mai Ceu in March 1936 but could not match the combination of air power and chemical weapons. Addis Ababa fell on 5 May 1936, and on 9 May Mussolini announced from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia that the Italian empire had been reborn. Haile Selassie went into exile and addressed the League of Nations in Geneva in June, warning the assembly that "it is us today, it will be you tomorrow".

The League's response was the decisive political consequence. Sanctions voted in October 1935 omitted oil, steel and coal, which were the only materials whose withholding might actually have halted the Italian war machine. The Hoare-Laval Pact of December 1935, drawn up secretly between the British foreign secretary and the French prime minister, would have ceded two thirds of Ethiopia to Italy had it not been leaked to the press and disowned. Britain and France had tried to apply sanctions vigorous enough to satisfy their own public opinion and weak enough to keep Mussolini available as a potential partner against Hitler. The outcome satisfied no one. Mussolini accused the democracies of bad faith, moved toward Berlin, and signed the Rome-Berlin Axis in November 1936. The League of Nations was exposed as an instrument that could not enforce its own charter. For Paper 3 the significance of the Ethiopian war lies in its multiple effects. It demonstrated the futility of collective security, it drove fascist Italy into the German orbit, and it committed Mussolini to an imperial project that his economy was incapable of sustaining through a European war.

Historiography

Historian	Key Argument
Renzo De Felice (Mussolini biography, multiple volumes)	Controversial: argued that Fascism enjoyed genuine popular consent; distinguished between "Fascism-movement" (radical) and "Fascism-regime" (conservative); criticised for underplaying repression
Emilio Gentile (The Sacralisation of Politics in Fascist Italy)	Fascism as a "political religion" with its own liturgy, myths, and symbols; emphasises the regime's totalitarian aspirations
R.J.B. Bosworth (Mussolini's Italy)	"Incomplete totalitarianism"; the gap between fascist rhetoric and reality was enormous; Italian society resisted full fascistisation; emphasises continuities with the liberal period
Paul Corner (The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion)	Challenges the consent thesis; argues that compliance was based on fear, opportunism, and inertia rather than genuine ideological commitment

The De Felice controversy deserves a fuller treatment, because it has shaped the field for half a century. Renzo De Felice, professor at La Sapienza and author of a monumental seven-volume biography of Mussolini, argued

in the 1970s and 1980s that the years between the Lateran Pacts and the Ethiopian war, roughly 1929 to 1936, represented a phase of genuine popular consent in which the regime succeeded in integrating the Italian middle class and much of the working class into its project. De Felice distinguished between the revolutionary energy of Fascism-movement and the conservative compromises of Fascism-regime, and he argued that to understand Italian fascism one had to take seriously its own account of the Italian soul, rather than dismissing it as German Nazism with pasta. His work was attacked by the Italian left for normalising the regime, and by moderate historians for underplaying repression, censorship and the exile and imprisonment of opponents. The most important recent challenge comes from Paul Corner's The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy, published in 2012, which uses the reports of provincial prefects and party officials to argue that apparent consent was in fact a mixture of fear, opportunism and sullen inertia, and that the regime's popularity collapsed rapidly as soon as the economic costs of empire and war became visible. R.J.B. Bosworth's Mussolini's Italy stands in between, conceding that De Felice was right to see a phase of genuine popularity but insisting that the regime's totalitarian ambitions were always limited by its need to coexist with the monarchy, the Church, the army and the Confindustria. For Paper 3 purposes, candidates should be able to cite at least one historian on each side of the debate and to distinguish between the descriptive question of how much consent existed and the normative question of what that consent should be taken to mean.

Source-based exercise

> *Source A. Benito Mussolini, "The Doctrine of Fascism", 1932: "The Fascist conception of the State is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist State, the synthesis and unity of all values, interprets, develops and gives strength to the whole life of the people."*
> *Source B. Pius XI, encyclical Non Abbiamo Bisogno, 29 June 1931: "A conception of the State which makes the rising generations belong to it entirely, without any exception, from the tenderest years up to adult life, cannot be reconciled by a Catholic either with Catholic doctrine or with the natural rights of the family."*

(a) According to Source A, what is the relationship between the individual and the state in fascist thought? [3 marks] (b) Compare and contrast the visions of legitimate authority in Sources A and B. [6 marks] (c) Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess the extent to which fascist totalitarianism in Italy was limited by the continuing influence of the Church. [9 marks]

Chapter summary

Mussolini came to power through the March on Rome, which succeeded because the liberal establishment chose to compromise rather than resist. He consolidated his dictatorship more slowly than Hitler, surviving the Matteotti crisis of 1924 and completing the transition through the Fascistissime laws of 1925 and 1926. Domestic policy created the forms of a corporate state that was in practice a facade, pursued three battles over grain, births and the currency with mixed results, repaired relations with the Catholic Church through the Lateran Pacts and built a mass leisure organisation in the Dopolavoro. The Depression forced a silent transformation through the creation of IRI, which left the state as the dominant shareholder in Italian heavy industry. After 1935 the regime embarked on an imperial adventure in Ethiopia that alienated the democracies, drove Italy into the German orbit and committed Mussolini to a foreign policy that the Italian economy could not sustain. Fascist Italy was less totalitarian than Nazi Germany because the monarchy, the Church and the army survived as semi-independent centres of loyalty. It collapsed in July 1943 when those continuing centres combined to dismiss Mussolini after the Allied landings in Sicily.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Mutilated victory	The nationalist claim that Italy was denied its promised territorial gains after the First World War
Biennio Rosso	The two red years of 1919 to 1920, marked by factory occupations and peasant land seizures
Squadrismo	The organised paramilitary violence of the blackshirt squads against socialists and trade unionists
March on Rome	The October 1922 demonstration through which Mussolini was brought to the chancellorship
Acerbo Law	The 1923 electoral law guaranteeing two thirds of seats to the leading party
Aventine Secession	The 1924 withdrawal of the opposition from parliament in protest at the murder of Matteotti
Fascistissime laws	The 1925 to 1926 legislation that completed the legal framework of dictatorship
OVRA	The fascist secret police, smaller and less intrusive than the Gestapo
Corporate state	The fascist doctrine of organising the economy through joint employer-worker corporations, largely a facade
Lateran Pacts	The 1929 treaty and concordat with the Holy See that resolved the Roman Question
IRI	The Institute for Industrial Reconstruction, created in 1933 to rescue the banking system and ending as permanent state industrial holding
Autarky	The drive for national economic self-sufficiency, intensified after 1936
Rome-Berlin Axis	The 1936 alignment between Italy and Germany announced by Mussolini
Pact of Steel	The May 1939 full military alliance with Germany

Questions

1. Examine the reasons for Mussolini's rise to power between 1919 and 1922.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of fascist economic policy in Italy between 1922 and 1939.
3. "The Lateran Pacts were Mussolini's greatest domestic achievement." Discuss.
4. To what extent did Italy become a totalitarian state under Mussolini?
5. Analyse the reasons for the invasion of Ethiopia and the consequences of the war for Italian foreign policy.
6. Compare and contrast the methods used by Hitler and Mussolini to consolidate power.

Comparative Table: Interwar Authoritarian States

Feature	Poland (Sanacja)	Nazi Germany	Fascist Italy
Leader	Piłsudski (d. 1935), then "Colonels"	Hitler	Mussolini
Type of regime	Semi-authoritarian	Totalitarian	Aspiring totalitarian / "incomplete"
Mass party	No (BBWR was a loose bloc)	Yes (NSDAP, millions of members)	Yes (PNF, but less penetrating)
Ideology	Pragmatic "moral cleansing"	Racial, antisemitic, expansionist	Nationalist, corporatist, imperial
Opposition	Legal but harassed	Destroyed	Destroyed
Monarchy	Republic	Republic (after 1918)	Monarchy retained
Church	Independent, influential	Concordat 1933, but tension	Lateran Pacts 1929, significant influence
Secret police	Limited	Gestapo / SS (extensive terror)	OVRA (less extensive)
Racial policy	Growing antisemitism, no racial laws	Nuremberg Laws, Holocaust	Racial laws 1938, less enforcement
Economic model	Mixed; COP state-led	Rearmament-driven; Mefo bills	Corporatism (largely facade)
Fate	Destroyed by invasion (1939)	Destroyed by war (1945)	Overthrown internally (1943), then destroyed

IB Paper 3 Practice Questions

1. "To what extent was Piłsudski's May Coup of 1926 a result of the failures of Polish parliamentary democracy?"
2. "Evaluate the effectiveness of economic policies in interwar Poland."
3. "Compare and contrast the methods used to establish and maintain authoritarian rule in two interwar states."
4. "Discuss the challenges of nation-building in a multiethnic state with reference to one interwar state."
5. "'The Great Depression was the most important factor in the rise of authoritarian regimes in interwar Europe.' Discuss with reference to two states."
6. "To what extent did Nazi Germany achieve totalitarian control over German society?"
7. "Evaluate the claim that Fascist Italy was an example of 'incomplete totalitarianism.'"
8. "Compare the treatment of ethnic minorities in two interwar states."
9. "'Poland's interwar foreign policy was shaped more by geography than ideology.' Discuss."
10. "Examine the role of propaganda and ideology in maintaining power in one interwar authoritarian state."

PART II (continued): THE INTERWAR STATES – SPAIN, PORTUGAL AND FRANCE

Chapter 9: Spain — From Restoration to Franco (1898–1939)

Summary of events

Spain entered the twentieth century in the psychological shock of 1898, when the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines ended four centuries of empire and discredited the Restoration political system of turno pacífico and caciquismo. Between 1898 and 1923 the country was convulsed by the Tragic Week in Barcelona, the triple crisis of 1917, the military catastrophe of Annual in Morocco and the street war of pistolerismo. The military coup of Primo de Rivera in 1923 borrowed techniques from Mussolini but left no institutional legacy, and its collapse dragged the monarchy down with it. The Second Republic that began in April 1931 was the most ambitious attempt to modernise Spain, combining secular schooling, agrarian reform, regional autonomy for Catalonia, military reduction and female suffrage, but it polarised the country between a revolutionary left and a clerical, landowning and military right. The Popular Front victory of February 1936 was answered by a military conspiracy that broke out in July, plunging Spain into a three-year civil war in which foreign intervention was decisive. Franco unified the Nationalist zone under his personal command, while Republican unity was destroyed by the war within the war between communists and anarchists. The Nationalists won in April 1939. Franco's regime that followed was a conservative, Catholic, authoritarian dictatorship with fascist elements, particularly during the Axis years, which would last until the dictator's death in 1975.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. Why did the Spanish Restoration system collapse between 1898 and 1923?
2. Evaluate the reforms of the Second Republic between 1931 and 1933.
3. To what extent was the Spanish Civil War the product of long-term structural problems rather than the specific political crisis of 1936?
4. Analyse the reasons for Nationalist victory in the Civil War.
5. Examine the extent to which Franco's regime can be classified as fascist.

Timeline of Chapter 9

1898	Spanish-American War. Loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines
1909	Tragic Week in Barcelona
1910	Foundation of the CNT
1917	Triple crisis of military juntas, general strike and Catalan demands
1921	Battle of Annual. Army disaster in Morocco
September 1923	Primo de Rivera's coup
January 1930	Primo de Rivera resigns
August 1930	Pact of San Sebastián

14 April 1931	Proclamation of the Second Republic
December 1931	Republican Constitution adopted
August 1932	Sanjurjo coup fails
November 1933	Right-wing CEDA and Radicals win elections
October 1934	Asturias miners' rising crushed by Army of Africa
16 February 1936	Popular Front victory
13 July 1936	Assassination of Calvo Sotelo
17–18 July 1936	Military uprising begins in Morocco
September 1936	Franco named Generalissimo
26 April 1937	Bombing of Guernica
May 1937	Barcelona May Days. Suppression of POUM
July–November 1938	Battle of the Ebro
26 January 1939	Barcelona falls
28 March 1939	Madrid falls
1 April 1939	Franco declares the war over

9.1 The Restoration System and Its Crisis (1898–1930)

The starting point for understanding interwar Spain is the catastrophe of 1898. In the Spanish-American War, Spain lost Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam to the United States, ending four centuries of overseas empire. The psychological shock was enormous. A generation of intellectuals – the Generación del 98 – launched a movement known as regenerationism, demanding root-and-branch modernisation of a country they saw as backward, corrupt, and humiliated.

The political system they sought to reform was the Restoration monarchy, established in 1876. On paper it was a constitutional system; in practice it rested on two interconnected mechanisms. The first was the turno pacífico, by which the Liberal and Conservative parties alternated in power through managed elections. The second was caciquismo, the system of political bossism through which local bosses (caciques) in rural areas controlled voting through patronage, intimidation, and outright fraud. The result was a parliament that did not reflect popular will and a political class that excluded the growing forces of organised labour, Catalan and Basque regionalism, and republicanism.

Beneath this political surface, Spain's social structure was deeply fractured. In the south – Andalusia, Extremadura, La Mancha – the latifundia system concentrated land in the hands of absentee landlords, leaving millions of jornaleros (landless day labourers) in seasonal unemployment and grinding poverty. In the north, Catalonia and the Basque Country were industrialising, generating a militant working class. Spain's labour movement was distinctive in European terms: rather than socialism dominating, anarcho-syndicalism

was the most powerful current, especially through the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo), founded in 1910. The socialist UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores), linked to the PSOE, was strongest in Madrid, Asturias, and the Basque Country.

The period 1909–1923 saw escalating crises. The Tragic Week (Semana Trágica) in Barcelona in 1909 – anti-conscription riots, church burnings, brutal military suppression – exposed the depth of working-class anger and anticlerical sentiment. The triple crisis of 1917 (military juntas, a general strike, and Catalan autonomy demands) shook the Restoration to its foundations. In Morocco, the Battle of Annual (1921) saw over 8,000 Spanish soldiers killed in a catastrophic defeat by Rif tribesmen, provoking a political crisis over military incompetence. Between 1919 and 1923, Barcelona was convulsed by pistolerismo – a virtual street war between employers' gunmen and anarchist militants.

In September 1923, General Miguel Primo de Rivera seized power in a military coup with the tacit approval of Alfonso XIII. His dictatorship (1923–1930) borrowed elements from Mussolini's Italy: corporatism, infrastructure development (roads, railways, the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929), and suppression of the CNT. He ended the Rif War in partnership with France (the Alhucemas landing, 1925, where the young Francisco Franco distinguished himself). However, Primo de Rivera created no lasting institutions, had no coherent ideology, and his economic policies were undermined by the global downturn. He resigned in January 1930, exhausted and without support, and died shortly afterwards in Paris.

Primo de Rivera's dictatorship is significant for P3 in several ways: it demonstrated the army's willingness to govern; it showed that dictatorship without ideology or institutional foundations was inherently unstable; and it fatally compromised the monarchy by associating the Crown with authoritarian rule.

His departure was fatal for the monarchy. Alfonso XIII's association with the dictatorship had destroyed his legitimacy. The interim government of General Berenguer – mockingly called the dictablanda (soft dictatorship) – failed to restore confidence. In August 1930, republican, socialist, and Catalan parties signed the Pact of San Sebastián, committing to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic.

Key Dates: Restoration and Crisis	
1898	"The Disaster" – loss of Cuba, Philippines, Puerto Rico to USA
1909	Tragic Week, Barcelona
1910	CNT founded
1917	Triple crisis (military, labour, Catalan)
1921	Battle of Annual – 8,000+ killed in Morocco
Sep 1923	Primo de Rivera's coup
Jan 1930	Primo de Rivera resigns
Aug 1930	Pact of San Sebastián

9.2 The Second Republic (1931–1936)

On 12 April 1931, municipal elections produced overwhelming republican victories in Spain's major cities. Two days later, on 14 April, Alfonso XIII left Spain without formally abdicating, and the Second Republic was proclaimed. The transition was remarkably peaceful – and remarkably fast.

The Republic's Constitution, adopted in December 1931, was among the most progressive in Europe. It established a secular state with separation of Church and state, universal suffrage including women's right to vote, provisions for regional autonomy, labour rights, and a mandate for agrarian reform. Article 26 was especially contentious: it dissolved the Jesuits, banned religious orders from teaching, and laid the groundwork for the secularisation of education.

The reformist biennium (bienio reformista, 1931–1933) under Prime Minister Manuel Azaña attempted a comprehensive transformation of Spanish society:

- Church reform: dissolution of the Jesuits, secularisation of education, removal of crucifixes from schools, legalisation of civil marriage and divorce. These measures generated ferocious opposition from the Catholic hierarchy and millions of practising Catholics.
- Military reform: reduction of the bloated officer corps (Spain had one officer for every six soldiers), closure of the Zaragoza Military Academy (whose director was Francisco Franco). The aim was to professionalise and depoliticise the army; the effect was to create a reservoir of resentful officers.
- Agrarian reform: the Agrarian Reform Law (1932) aimed to redistribute latifundia land to landless labourers. Progress was agonisingly slow – by 1933, only approximately 12,000 families had been settled, against a target of tens of thousands. The reform was too threatening for landowners and too slow for the rural poor.
- Labour reform: under Labour Minister Francisco Largo Caballero (PSOE/UGT), jurados mixtos (mixed arbitration juries) gave workers new protections and bargaining power, alienating employers.
- Education: a massive school-building programme created approximately 10,000 new schools, and the Misiones Pedagogicas brought literacy and culture to rural communities.
- Regional autonomy: the Catalan Statute of Autonomy was granted in 1932.

The opposition was formidable. The Church hierarchy condemned the Republic as godless. Army officers resented their loss of privilege. Landowners saw agrarian reform as confiscation. General Sanjurjo attempted a coup (sanjurjada) in August 1932 – it failed, but it demonstrated that the right would not accept reform peacefully. On the left, the CNT's anarchists dismissed the Republic as bourgeois. In January 1933, the Casas Viejas incident – in which Civil Guards killed anarchist villagers in Cadiz province – became a major scandal that discredited Azaña's government among its own supporters.

The November 1933 elections brought the right to power. The largest party was CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas), a Catholic coalition led by José María Gil Robles, who admired the Austrian corporatist model of Dollfuss. The Radical Party of Alejandro Lerroux formed the government with CEDA support. The Bienio Negro ("Black Biennium", 1933–1935) saw a systematic reversal of the Republic's reforms: agrarian reform was halted, Church privileges were restored, labour protections were weakened, and landowners launched a counter-offensive against workers' rights.

The crisis came in October 1934. When CEDA ministers entered the government directly, the left saw this as the prelude to fascism on the Austrian model. The response was a general strike and, in Asturias, a full-scale miners' uprising. For two weeks, armed miners controlled much of the mining region before being crushed by the Army of Africa under the command of General Franco. An estimated 1,500–2,000 people were killed, and thousands were imprisoned. In Catalonia, President Lluis Companys declared a Catalan state within a "Spanish Federal Republic"; the revolt was swiftly crushed and Companys was arrested. The Asturias uprising of October 1934 is often described as a "dress rehearsal" for the Civil War: it hardened both sides, demonstrated the army's willingness to use colonial troops against Spanish civilians, and elevated Franco's reputation on the right.

Political radicalisation accelerated through 1935 and into 1936. Largo Caballero, once a moderate trade unionist, adopted revolutionary rhetoric and was dubbed "the Spanish Lenin." The Falange Española, the fascist movement founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera (son of the dictator) in 1933, grew in membership and violence. Military officers, led by General Emilio Mola ("the Director"), began planning a conspiracy.

The Popular Front – a coalition of left and centre-left parties (PSOE, PCE, Republican Left, Esquerra Republicana, and others, backed by the Comintern's anti-fascist strategy) – won the elections of 16 February 1936 by a narrow margin. Its programme was moderate: amnesty for political prisoners, resumption of reforms, no socialist revolution. But the victory terrified the right.

The "Spanish Spring" of March–July 1936 saw an explosion of political violence: land occupations, church burnings, political assassinations, and street battles. The government of President Azaña struggled to maintain order. On 13 July 1936, monarchist leader José Calvo Sotelo was assassinated by Republican Assault Guards in reprisal for the killing of a left-wing officer. His murder provided the immediate trigger for the military uprising.

9.3 The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)

On 17–18 July 1936, the military uprising began in Morocco and spread to garrisons across Spain. The coup partially succeeded and partially failed, leaving Spain divided. The Nationalists controlled much of the north and west (Old Castile, Navarre, Galicia, western Andalusia, parts of Aragon); the Republic held the east coast, Madrid, Catalonia, the Basque Country, and most of the south.

The Nationalist Zone was a coalition of forces united by opposition to the Republic: the professional army (including the battle-hardened Army of Africa with its Moorish Regulares and Spanish Foreign Legion), the Catholic Church, the Carlists of Navarre, the Falange, conservative monarchists, and landowners. In September 1936, Franco was named Generalissimo and Head of State, concentrating military and political authority. His leadership was methodical, cautious, and calculating. On 19 April 1937, the Decree of Unification merged the Falange and Carlists into a single movement – FET y de las JONS – under Franco's personal control, eliminating any rival power centre.

The Republican Zone was fatally divided. The legal government (led first by Giral, then by Largo Caballero, then by Juan Negrin) attempted to maintain conventional state authority, but alongside it a social revolution unfolded. In Catalonia and Aragon, the CNT and anarchists collectivised factories, land, and public services. The POUM (a dissident Marxist party) pursued its own revolutionary line. The PCE (Communist Party), strengthened by Soviet aid and Comintern support, demanded centralisation of the war effort and suppression of the revolution. The PSOE was split between moderates and Largo Caballero's radicals. This "war within the war" culminated in the Barcelona May Days of May 1937: street fighting between communists (PCE/PSUC) and anarchists/POUM militants. The communists prevailed, the POUM was suppressed (its leader Andres Nin was murdered, almost certainly by Soviet agents), and Negrin replaced Largo Caballero as Prime Minister. Republican unity never recovered.

The international dimension was decisive. Foreign intervention transformed a Spanish political crisis into a European ideological conflict:

Power	Side Supported	Contribution
Germany	Nationalists	Condor Legion (~19,000 rotated), Heinkel/Junkers aircraft, tanks, advisers; bombing of Guernica 26 Apr 1937
Italy	Nationalists	CTV (~75,000 troops), aircraft, submarines, naval support
Soviet Union	Republic	Military advisers, T-26 tanks, I-15/I-16 aircraft, organised International Brigades; political influence via PCE
International Brigades	Republic	~35,000–40,000 volunteers from 50+ countries (Jarama, Brunete, Ebro); withdrawn 1938
Britain & France	Non-Intervention	Non-Intervention Committee (London, Sep 1936) – a "farce" (Preston); denied Republic legal right to buy arms
Portugal	Nationalists	Transit routes, intelligence, Viriatos volunteers

The Non-Intervention Committee was, in the words of virtually every historian, a monumental hypocrisy. Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union intervened openly while the democracies enforced an arms embargo that disproportionately harmed the Republic – the legitimate, internationally recognised government of Spain.

The bombing of Guernica on 26 April 1937 became the war's most infamous atrocity. The Condor Legion attacked the Basque market town on a busy Monday, killing an estimated 200–300 civilians (figures remain disputed). Franco's forces initially denied responsibility, blaming the Basques themselves for destroying the town. Picasso's monumental painting, completed for the Paris World's Fair later that year, made Guernica a universal symbol of the horrors of modern warfare and the targeting of civilian populations.

Key military phases:

1. Siege of Madrid (autumn 1936): the Republic's defence of Madrid – "No pasaran!" – was the war's symbolic turning point. International Brigades and Soviet equipment helped hold the capital.
2. Jarama (Feb 1937) and Guadalajara (Mar 1937): the Italian CTV was defeated at Guadalajara, a rare Republican victory that exposed Italian military weaknesses.
3. Northern campaign (spring–autumn 1937): the fall of Bilbao (Jun) and Gijon (Oct) gave Franco control of the north's industry and mining.
4. Teruel (Jan–Feb 1938): a brief Republican success followed by devastating Nationalist counter-offensive.
5. Battle of the Ebro (Jul–Nov 1938): the war's largest and bloodiest engagement. The Republic threw its last reserves into a massive offensive that initially succeeded but was ground down over four months. The Ebro was the decisive battle: Republican military power was broken.
6. Barcelona fell on 26 January 1939; a mass exodus of refugees fled to France. Madrid fell on 28 March 1939. On 1 April 1939, Franco declared the war over.

9.4 Franco's Victory and the Nature of His Regime

Why did Franco win?

- Military unity: Franco achieved unified command over all Nationalist forces. The Decree of Unification eliminated political rivals. By contrast, the Republic never resolved its internal conflicts.
- Superior foreign aid: German and Italian support was larger in scale, more consistent, and less politically conditional than Soviet aid to the Republic.
- Republican divisions: the "war within the war" between communists, anarchists, socialists, and the POUM crippled the Republican war effort. The Barcelona May Days of 1937 symbolised this fatal disunity.
- Economic resources: the Nationalists controlled Spain's grain-producing regions and had access to international credit. The Republic lost the industrial north by late 1937 and faced chronic food shortages.
- Non-Intervention: the democracies' refusal to sell arms to the Republic denied it the means to match Nationalist firepower.

The human cost of the Civil War was immense. Estimates of total deaths range from 300,000 to 500,000, including battlefield casualties, bombing, disease, and political repression on both sides. Hundreds of thousands fled into exile – an estimated 450,000–500,000 crossed into France in early 1939. The economic destruction was devastating: industrial output collapsed, infrastructure was wrecked, and the "hungry years" (anos de hambre) of the 1940s brought famine-like conditions to much of Spain.

The White Terror: Nationalist repression was systematic and deliberate. Estimates of those killed in the Nationalist repression during and after the war range from 100,000 to 200,000 (Preston's research has pushed the figure upward). The Law of Political Responsibilities (1939) criminalised all support for the Republic retroactively. Prison camps, forced labour, executions, and cultural suppression (banning of Catalan, Basque, and Galician languages) characterised the post-war regime.

Was Franco's Spain fascist? This is one of the most important historiographical debates for P3:

Feature	Fascist Argument	Counter-Argument
Single party (FET y de las JONS)	Yes – modelled on fascist parties	The Falange was subordinated to Franco, not the other way around
Mass repression	Yes – comparable to Italy and Germany	Repression was reactionary, not revolutionary
Cult of personality ("Caudillo")	Yes – like Duce/Führer	Franco's style was cautious and bureaucratic, not charismatic
Alliance with Axis powers	Yes – clear ideological alignment	Franco kept Spain out of WWII (pragmatism)
National Catholicism	–	The Church, not the party, was the ideological core – unlike any fascist state
Mass mobilisation	–	Franco distrusted popular politics; no genuine mass movement
Revolutionary ideology	–	Franco's aims were conservative and restorationist, not transformative

Stanley Payne classifies Franco's regime as "authoritarian" rather than fascist, emphasising the absence of revolutionary ideology and genuine mass mobilisation. Paul Preston argues that fascist elements were significant, especially during the wartime period, and that the regime's repression exceeded anything that the label "authoritarian" adequately captures. The most defensible position for P3 essays is that Franco's Spain was a conservative-authoritarian regime with fascist elements, particularly during 1936–1945, which became progressively less fascist in character after the Axis defeat.

Historiography: Spain

Historian	Approach	Key Arguments
Hugh Thomas	Liberal, comprehensive narrative	The war as tragedy; failures of compromise on all sides; relatively balanced
Paul Preston	Left-critical, social-political	Structural causes; Republic's reforms were legitimate; Franco was ruthless; significant fascist characteristics; systematic Nationalist repression
Stanley Payne	Conservative-revisionist	Left-wing violence contributed to polarisation; Franco's regime was authoritarian, not fascist; the Falange was subordinated
Antony Beevor	Military-political	Best military account; emphasises Soviet role, Republican disunity, and the international dimension
Helen Graham	Social history, Republican perspective	Social revolution in Republican Spain; gender, culture, ordinary people; nuanced on Negrin's difficult choices

Source-based exercise

> *Source A. Manuel Azaña, speech to the Cortes, 13 October 1931 (paraphrased; verify wording): "Spain has ceased to be Catholic. The very fact of saying this suggests the enormous distance that separates Spain today from the country it was fifty years ago. To pretend otherwise is to deny the evidence of our own eyes." Source B. Francisco Franco, proclamation on taking power as Generalissimo, Burgos, 1 October 1936 (paraphrased; verify wording): "I shall assume with full sovereignty all the powers of the new state. In the person of the Head of State are concentrated all political powers and all the powers of direction of the armed forces. My government will proceed with calm firmness to the reconstruction of a great, free and Catholic Spain."*

(a) According to Source A, what is Azaña's argument about the role of Catholicism in contemporary Spain? [3 marks] (b) Compare and contrast the visions of Spain presented in Sources A and B. [6 marks] (c) Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess the argument that religious conflict was the deepest cause of the Spanish Civil War. [9 marks]

Chapter summary

Spain between 1898 and 1939 moved through the exhaustion of the Restoration system, the failure of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, the reformist ambition and polarising consequences of the Second Republic, and the three-year civil war that produced Franco's authoritarian regime. The Republic's achievements in women's suffrage, secular education, agrarian reform and Catalan autonomy were real but clashed with Spain's structural divisions of class, region and religion, and the polarisation of 1934 to 1936 culminated in the military rising of July 1936. Foreign intervention turned a domestic crisis into a European ideological war. Nationalist victory rested on unity of command, greater and more consistent foreign aid, the decisive fatal divisions inside the Republican camp and the non-intervention policy of Britain and France, which deprived the legitimate government of the means to defend itself. Franco's regime was a conservative authoritarian dictatorship with fascist elements whose character evolved after the Axis defeat of 1945.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Turno pacifico	The alternation in office of Liberals and Conservatives through managed elections in the Restoration period
Caciquismo	The system of local political bossism that delivered pre-arranged election results in rural Spain
CNT	The Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, the anarcho-syndicalist trade union, founded in 1910
UGT	The socialist Unión General de Trabajadores, linked to the PSOE
Tragic Week	The anti-conscription rising in Barcelona in July 1909
Bienio reformista	The reformist biennium of 1931 to 1933 under Azaña
Bienio negro	The conservative biennium of 1933 to 1935 under the Radicals and CEDA
Popular Front	The electoral coalition of left and centre-left parties that won the February 1936 elections
Falange	The fascist movement founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera in 1933
Army of Africa	The colonial army of the Moroccan protectorate whose transport across the Straits in July 1936 made the military rising viable
International Brigades	The volunteer units of approximately thirty-five to forty thousand foreigners who fought for the Republic
Non-Intervention Committee	The London-based body of 1936 that denied the Republic the legal right to buy arms
Decree of Unification	Franco's April 1937 decree merging the Falange and Carlists into FET y de las JONS under his command
National Catholicism	The fusion of Catholic identity with Spanish nationalism that served as the ideological core of Franco's regime

Questions

1. Evaluate the reasons for the failure of the Second Republic between 1931 and 1936.

2. To what extent was the Spanish Civil War decided by foreign intervention?
3. "The Republic was defeated by its own divisions rather than by Franco's military strength." Discuss.
4. Examine the significance of the Catholic Church in the politics of interwar Spain.
5. Compare and contrast the nature of Franco's regime with that of Mussolini's Italy.

Chapter 10: Portugal — Republic to Estado Novo (1910–1945)

Summary of events

Portugal followed an unusual path from parliamentary experiment to long-lived authoritarianism. The First Republic of 1910 to 1926 set a European record for political instability with forty-five governments in sixteen years, involvement in the First World War that drained the treasury and cost six thousand dead at Lys, and the assassination spree of the Bloody Night of October 1921. A military coup in May 1926 ended the Republic without resistance, but the officers who seized power could not govern, and in 1928 they turned for help to an austere professor of economics from the University of Coimbra. António de Oliveira Salazar stabilised the budget, won the confidence of conservative society and became prime minister in 1932, establishing the Estado Novo under the constitution of 1933. The new state drew on Catholic corporatism, integral nationalism and the traditions of Portuguese conservatism, and it ruled through the PVDE secret police, the União Nacional single non-party, rigid censorship, the Mocidade youth movement and the prison camp at Tarrafal. Salazar survived the fall of Mussolini, kept Portugal neutral during the Second World War by balancing the Anglo-Portuguese alliance with wolfram exports to Germany, and cultivated an image of austere technocratic competence that his regime projected to the end. The Estado Novo would last forty-one years, outlasting every other interwar authoritarian system in western Europe.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. Why did the First Portuguese Republic fail?
2. How did Salazar move from finance minister to head of government between 1928 and 1933?
3. Evaluate the instruments of control that sustained the Estado Novo.
4. To what extent should the Estado Novo be classified as fascist?
5. Examine Salazar's foreign policy during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

Timeline of Chapter 10

5 October 1910	Proclamation of the First Republic
1911	Separation of Church and State
1916	Portuguese entry into First World War
9 April 1918	Battle of Lys. Portuguese Expeditionary Corps destroyed
October 1921	Noite Sangrenta
28 May 1926	Military coup ends the First Republic
1928	Salazar appointed Minister of Finance
5 July 1932	Salazar becomes Prime Minister
1933	Constitution of the Estado Novo. Foundation of União Nacional

1934	Banning of the National Syndicalists under Rolão Preto
1936	Tarrafal concentration camp opened in Cape Verde
1936–1939	Portuguese support for Franco in the Spanish Civil War
1940	Concordat with the Holy See
1939–1945	Portuguese neutrality in the Second World War
1943	Britain invokes the fourteenth-century alliance. Allies granted use of the Azores

10.1 The First Republic (1910–1926)

Portugal's path to authoritarian rule began with a revolution. On 3–4 October 1910, a coalition of naval officers, Freemasons, and republicans overthrew the monarchy. The revolution was a surprisingly small-scale affair: perhaps 500 people under the leadership of Machado dos Santos, supported by naval mutineers and civilian republicans, toppled a regime that had lost the will to defend itself. The Republic was proclaimed on 5 October at 9 AM, and King Manuel II fled aboard the royal yacht Dona Amelia.

The First Republic (1910–1926) was one of the most turbulent democratic experiments in European history. In sixteen years it produced 45 governments – an average of one every four months. This chronic instability was rooted in structural problems: a fragmented party system, a weak executive dominated by a powerful but divided legislature, and a political class drawn from a narrow urban elite that had little connection with the overwhelmingly rural, illiterate, and deeply Catholic population. Golpismo – chronic coup-making – was endemic: military officers intervened repeatedly, and political assassination was not uncommon. The Noite Sangrenta ("Bloody Night") of October 1921, in which several prominent politicians were murdered, epitomised the Republic's dysfunction.

The Republic's democratic pretensions were undermined by its narrow social base. The republicans, Freemasons, and urban professionals who dominated the new political class represented a tiny fraction of Portuguese society. The overwhelming majority of the population – rural, illiterate, and devoutly Catholic – had little connection to the Republic's secular, modernising agenda. This disconnection between the republican elite and the mass of the population was a structural weakness from which the First Republic never recovered.

The Republic's anticlerical policies created powerful enemies. The Separation of Church and State (1911) – modelled on France's 1905 law – provoked intense resistance in a country where the overwhelming majority of the population, especially in the rural north, was devoutly Catholic. The Church and the army became the two pillars of opposition to the republican experiment.

Portugal's participation in World War I deepened the crisis. The Portuguese Expeditionary Corps (CEP, approximately 55,000 soldiers) was sent to the Western Front, where it suffered catastrophically at the Battle of Lys on 9 April 1918. Hundreds were killed and approximately 6,000 captured in a single day. Total Portuguese war dead reached approximately 6,232, with a casualty rate of roughly 35% among deployed forces. The war brought inflation, debt, social unrest, and a wave of disillusionment with the republic that had dragged Portugal into a conflict far beyond its means.

As historian Douglas Wheeler has argued, the Republic's chaos served as the "midwife for the longest-lived authoritarian system" in Western Europe. The analogy is apt: if 1910 was revolution, then 1926 was

counter-revolution.

10.2 Salazar's Rise to Power (1926–1933)

On 28 May 1926, a military coup led by General Gomes da Costa overthrew the First Republic. There was almost no resistance. The Military Dictatorship (Ditadura Militar, 1926–1933) that followed was itself unstable, cycling through several leaders before President Carmona (from 1928) established some continuity. The military officers who had seized power knew how to destroy a republic; they had no idea how to run a state.

Enter António de Oliveira Salazar. A professor of economics at the University of Coimbra, Salazar was appointed Finance Minister in 1928. He accepted the position on condition that he would have veto power over all government spending. Presenting himself as an "apolitical technocrat," Salazar proceeded to do what no Portuguese government had managed in a generation: he balanced the budget by 1929, accumulated gold reserves, stabilised the currency, and navigated Portugal through the global depression with minimal damage. This was his political legitimacy – not charisma, not ideology, but competence.

Salazar's accumulation of power was gradual and methodical. From Finance Minister he became the indispensable man of the regime. He was appointed Prime Minister on 5 July 1932. The Constitution of 1933 formally established the Estado Novo ("New State"), a corporatist, Catholic, authoritarian regime that would endure for 41 years – until the Carnation Revolution of 1974. It was the longest-lasting authoritarian regime in twentieth-century Western Europe.

10.3 The Estado Novo: Methods of Control

The Estado Novo rested on a sophisticated apparatus of control that combined repression with ideological legitimation:

- Secret police: the PVDE (later renamed PIDE) – the Policia de Vigilancia e Defesa do Estado – monitored, arrested, and tortured political opponents. Its network of informers penetrated every level of Portuguese society.
- Censorship: the press, radio, literature, and education were all subject to systematic censorship. Nothing was published without state approval.
- Political imprisonment: the Tarrafal concentration camp, established in Cape Verde in 1936, held political prisoners in brutal tropical conditions. Many did not survive.
- Single "non-party": the União Nacional (National Union) was the regime's sole legal political organisation, though Salazar was careful to describe it as a "non-party" – he distrusted the very concept of party politics.
- Youth and militia: the Mocidade Portuguesa (Portuguese Youth) and the Legião Portuguesa (Portuguese Legion) provided paramilitary and youth indoctrination structures.
- The Church: the Concordat of 1940 restored Church privileges that the republic had stripped away. Catholic social teaching became a pillar of the regime's ideology. The Church provided moral legitimacy, social infrastructure, and a conservative world-view that reinforced Salazar's vision of an ordered, hierarchical society.

The fascism debate is central to any P3 analysis of Portugal. The Estado Novo shared surface features with fascism: a single party, secret police, corporatism, youth movements, a militia. But the differences were fundamental:

Feature	Estado Novo	Fascist Regimes (Italy/Germany)
Mass mobilisation	Anti-mobilisation: Salazar distrusted popular politics	Central to regime identity
Ideology	Conservative Catholic traditionalism	Revolutionary nationalism
Expansionist war	None (colonial defence, not conquest)	Aggressive expansion
Attitude to fascists	Suppressed National Syndicalists (Rolão Preto, 1934)	Embraced radical elements
Leader's style	Austere, bureaucratic, professorial	Charismatic, theatrical

Salazar actively suppressed Portugal's own fascist movement – the National Syndicalists led by Rolão Preto – in 1934, banning their organisation and exiling their leader. This is powerful evidence that the Estado Novo was not fascist but rather a conservative-authoritarian regime that used some fascist tools while rejecting fascism's revolutionary core.

10.4 Domestic Policies: Economy, Society, and Empire

Economic policies were defined by financial orthodoxy: balanced budgets, low inflation, gold reserves, current account surpluses throughout the 1930s–1960s. The corporatist economic system organised labour relations through gremios (employer guilds) and sindicatos (state-controlled unions), suppressing independent trade unionism and strikes. Infrastructure improved – roads, ports, hydroelectric projects – but industrialisation remained limited until the 1950s.

The price of stability was stagnation. Portugal remained the poorest country in Western Europe. Approximately 50% of the population was illiterate in the 1930s. Rural poverty, especially in the south (Alentejo), was grinding. Emigration was a safety valve. The regime's social formula was captured in the sardonic phrase: "Fado, Fatima, Futebol" – folk music, religious devotion, and football as the opiates of the masses.

Colonial policy was central to the Estado Novo's identity. The Colonial Act of 1930 declared Portugal's African and Asian territories integral parts of the Portuguese nation. Salazar later adopted the concept of lusotropicalism – derived from Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre's theory that Portugal had a uniquely benign and racially harmonious relationship with its colonial subjects. In reality, the colonies were governed through exploitation, forced labour (chibalo), and resource extraction. The colonial empire provided raw materials, national prestige, and an ideological justification for the regime.

10.5 Foreign Policy: Spain, WWII, and Neutrality

Salazar's foreign policy was a masterclass in pragmatic survival.

During the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), Salazar supported Franco through supply lines, intelligence, and the Viriatos volunteer unit, while officially adhering to the Non-Intervention Committee. His motivation was straightforward: a communist or even a liberal-democratic Spain on Portugal's border was an existential threat to the Estado Novo.

During World War II, Portugal maintained neutrality – a remarkable balancing act. Salazar was ideologically sympathetic to the Axis (anti-communist, corporatist, authoritarian) but economically and strategically

dependent on Britain. The key to his survival was the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance – dating from 1373, the oldest alliance in the world – which Churchill invoked in 1943 to secure access to the Azores for Allied air and naval bases. Portugal profited from the wolfram (tungsten) trade, selling this strategically vital mineral to both sides. Lisbon became a hub for refugees, spies, and diplomacy – a neutral crossroads in a continent at war.

Neutrality preserved the regime, avoided war damage, and positioned Portugal as a Western anti-communist ally in the early Cold War. It was, as historians have noted, a triumph of Salazar's pragmatism over his ideological sympathies. The economic benefits were tangible: wolfram revenues enriched the treasury, no infrastructure was destroyed, and Portugal emerged from the war in better economic shape than most European states. Salazar's regime would outlast every other interwar authoritarian system, surviving until the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 – a total of 41 years in power.

Ideology: A Deeper Analysis

The Estado Novo's ideological foundations drew from several Portuguese intellectual traditions. Traditionalism – rooted in Catholic social teaching and rural conservatism – was the bedrock. Integral nationalism, influenced by Charles Maurras and Action Francaise in France, provided the anti-liberal, anti-democratic framework. Catholic nationalism fused religious identity with national identity. And a strand of messianism – echoing Portugal's centuries-old myth of Sebastianism (the belief in a returning saviour-king) – gave Salazar's rule a quasi-mystical dimension.

Salazarism was one possible configuration of Portuguese conservative thought, not a historical necessity. The Estado Novo was not an accident, but neither was it inevitable. It was a specific configuration of Portuguese conservatism, Catholic corporatism, and authoritarian statecraft, shaped by the failure of the Republic and the crisis of European liberalism.

Historiography: Portugal

Historian	Key Contribution
Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses	Authoritative biography of Salazar; balanced treatment of the man and the regime
Douglas Wheeler	The First Republic's failure and its connection to the authoritarian outcome
Tom Gallagher	Portugal in twentieth-century perspective; political and social analysis
David Raby	Resistance and opposition to the Estado Novo; left-wing perspective
Antonio Costa Pinto	Comparative analysis of Portuguese fascism/authoritarianism; the Blue Shirts and National Syndicalists

Chapter summary

The collapse of the First Portuguese Republic in 1926 produced an unstable military dictatorship that could not govern, and this opened the way for the technocratic ascent of Salazar. His legitimacy rested not on charisma but on solvent public accounts, and his regime was an unusual construction that combined the institutional forms of fascism, such as a single non-party, a secret police and a youth movement, with the substantive content of conservative Catholic authoritarianism. Salazar's suppression of the National Syndicalists in 1934 provides the clearest evidence that the Estado Novo was not fascist in its own self-understanding. Domestic policy prioritised financial orthodoxy, colonial control and social demobilisation rather than economic growth, and Portugal remained the poorest country of western Europe. Foreign policy combined open support for Franco with the preservation of the British alliance, allowing Salazar to sit out the Second World War while enriching the treasury through wolfram exports to both sides.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
First Republic	The Portuguese parliamentary regime of 1910 to 1926, destabilised by political violence and coup politics
Ditadura Militar	The military dictatorship of 1926 to 1933 that preceded the Estado Novo
Estado Novo	The new state formalised by the 1933 constitution, characterised by corporatism and Catholic authoritarianism
União Nacional	The regime's single non-party, the only legal political organisation
PVDE / PIDE	The Portuguese political police, responsible for surveillance, arrest and torture of opponents
Mocidade Portuguesa	The regime's youth movement, compulsory for the school-age population
Legião Portuguesa	The regime's militia organisation
Tarrafal	The concentration camp in the Cape Verde Islands where political prisoners were sent from 1936
Concordat of 1940	The agreement with the Holy See that restored clerical privileges
National Syndicalists	The Portuguese fascist movement of Rolão Preto, banned in 1934
Lusotropicalism	The ideology drawn from Gilberto Freyre that depicted Portuguese colonialism as uniquely harmonious
Anglo-Portuguese Alliance	The fourteenth-century treaty relationship Salazar used to protect Portuguese neutrality

Questions

1. Examine the reasons for the failure of the First Portuguese Republic.
2. Evaluate the methods used by Salazar to consolidate and maintain power.
3. "The Estado Novo was a conservative authoritarian regime, not a fascist state." Discuss.
4. To what extent was Salazar's foreign policy shaped by ideology rather than strategic necessity?
5. Compare the Estado Novo with one other interwar authoritarian regime.

Chapter 11: France — The Third Republic Under Pressure (1918–1940)

Summary of events

France won the First World War at a cost that its demography, its economy and its political culture could not fully bear. The interwar Third Republic swung between conservative coalitions and left-wing experiments, each punctured by financial instability and by the ideological polarisation of the 1930s. The Stavisky affair and the riot of 6 February 1934 brought France closer to a fascist seizure of power than at any other moment between the Commune and the fall of the Republic, and the Popular Front victory of 1936 under Léon Blum produced the Matignon Accords that transformed French labour relations without stabilising the governing coalition. Foreign policy rested on the Maginot Line, on alliances with eastern European states that France proved unable to defend, and on an appeasement that culminated at Munich in September 1938. The Republic fell in six weeks of German invasion in May and June 1940, and France was divided into an occupied north and a Vichy state in the south under Marshal Pétain.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. What were the long-term consequences of the First World War for France?
2. Why did the Third Republic face such acute polarisation in the 1930s?
3. Evaluate the achievements and limitations of the Popular Front.
4. Examine the reasons for French appeasement in the 1930s.
5. Analyse the causes of the fall of France in 1940.

Timeline of Chapter 11

1919	Treaty of Versailles. Bloc National wins November elections
January 1923	French occupation of the Ruhr
1924–1926	Cartel des Gauches
1929	Maginot Line construction begins
1931	Great Depression begins to bite in France
1934	Stavisky Affair
6 February 1934	Riot of the leagues at the Chamber of Deputies
1935	Franco-Soviet Pact
May 1936	Popular Front electoral victory
June 1936	Matignon Accords. Paid holidays and forty-hour week
7 March 1936	French inaction over remilitarisation of the Rhineland

June 1937	Fall of Blum
29–30 September 1938	Munich Agreement
3 September 1939	French declaration of war on Germany
10 May 1940	Fall Gelb launched. Ardennes breakthrough
14 June 1940	Paris falls
22 June 1940	Armistice at Compiegne

11.1 Post-WWI: A Pyrrhic Victory

France emerged from the Great War victorious – but shattered. The statistics are staggering: 1.4 million dead, 4.2 million wounded, and vast swathes of northern France – the industrial heartland – reduced to a devastated wasteland (régions dévastées). The demographic consequences were profound: the classes creuses ("hollow years") – the missing generation of young men – left France with a population deficit that shaped its politics, economy, and military planning for two decades.

At the Paris Peace Conference (1919), Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau – "the Tiger" – fought for French security. France wanted permanent guarantees against German aggression: occupation of the Rhineland, dismemberment of Germany, massive reparations. What Clemenceau got was a compromise: the Treaty of Versailles imposed reparations and territorial penalties on Germany but fell short of the permanent security France craved. The Anglo-American guarantee treaty that was supposed to compensate France for its concessions was never ratified by the US Senate. France was left, in its own perception, with a punitive peace it could not enforce and an alliance it could not rely on.

The expectation that "Germany will pay" for reconstruction shaped French policy throughout the early 1920s. When Germany defaulted on reparations, Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré ordered the occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923 – a gamble that achieved some short-term financial gains but alienated Britain and the United States and ultimately failed to solve France's security dilemma.

The Bloc National (1919–1924) – the conservative coalition known as the Chambre bleu horizon (after the colour of soldiers' uniforms) – governed France in these years. Its priorities were reconstruction, reparations, and security, but beneath the surface, France's political system was under strain.

11.2 Polarisation and Crisis (1924–1934)

The Third Republic's fundamental weakness was constitutional. Established in 1870 (originally as a provisional arrangement), it featured a weak executive and a powerful but deeply fragmented legislature. Governments rose and fell with bewildering frequency – not as chaotically as Portugal's First Republic, but with enough instability to undermine sustained policy-making.

The Cartel des Gauches (1924–1926) – a left-wing coalition under Édouard Herriot – came to power on a wave of disillusionment with the Bloc National but collapsed amid financial crisis and capital flight. Poincaré returned in 1926 and stabilised the currency – the "Poincaré franc" – restoring confidence through orthodox fiscal policy. But the underlying political fragmentation remained.

The Great Depression hit France later than most European countries but deeply, from 1931 onwards. Industrial production fell, unemployment rose, and the agricultural sector – still employing a large share of the population – suffered from falling prices. The delayed onset meant that France was still in depression when other countries were recovering, amplifying the sense of crisis.

The extreme right grew in strength and confidence. The principal movements were:

- Action Francaise (led by Charles Maurras): royalist, ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic, anti-democratic. The intellectual vanguard of the French far right.
- Croix de Feu (led by Colonel de la Rocque): a veterans' league that became the largest right-wing organisation in France. Whether it was genuinely fascist remains debated.
- Jeunesses Patriotes: a nationalist youth league.
- Francisme: an openly fascist movement, small but symbolically significant.

These ligues (leagues) represented a challenge to the Republic quite different from that posed by the organised left. They were anti-parliamentary, nationalist, and authoritarian in outlook, though whether they constituted a genuine French fascism remains one of the most contested questions in French historiography. Historian Rene Remond argued that the French right had deep roots in Bonapartism and Orleanism and was distinct from fascism; others, such as Zeev Sternhell, have argued that France was in fact the birthplace of fascist ideology.

The catalyst for crisis was the Stavisky Affair (1934). Alexandre Stavisky, a financier with connections to Radical Party politicians, was involved in a massive bond fraud. When he died in January 1934 – officially by suicide, widely believed to have been killed by police to prevent revelations – the scandal exploded. The right-wing press and leagues accused the Republic of systemic corruption.

On 6 February 1934, right-wing leagues marched on the Chamber of Deputies in a violent demonstration that came closer to overthrowing the Republic than anything since the Paris Commune. 15 were killed and approximately 1,500 injured in clashes with police. The Daladier government fell. It was the most serious threat to the Third Republic in the interwar period. Whether it constituted a genuine fascist coup attempt remains debated – the leagues were disorganised and lacked a unified plan – but its effect was electric: it demonstrated the fragility of French democracy and catalysed the formation of the anti-fascist Popular Front.

11.3 The Popular Front (1936–1938)

The shock of 6 February 1934 drove the French left to overcome its divisions. The Popular Front united three parties that had been bitter rivals: the PCF (French Communist Party, following the Comintern's new anti-fascist line), the SFIO (Section Francaise de l'Internationale Ouvriere – the Socialist Party), and the Radical Party (centre-left, the Third Republic's natural party of government).

The Popular Front won the 1936 elections decisively. Léon Blum became Prime Minister – the first socialist and the first Jewish head of government in French history. Both facts were significant: Blum represented everything the French right despised.

Even before Blum took office, a wave of factory occupations – spontaneous sit-in strikes by workers emboldened by the left's victory – swept across France. Blum responded with the Matignon Accords (June 1936), a landmark social agreement:

Matignon Accords – Key Provisions	
40-hour working week	Reduction from the standard 48 hours
Two weeks paid holidays (conges payes)	A revolutionary measure – workers at the beach for the first time
Collective bargaining rights	Mandatory employer-union negotiations
7–15% wage increases	Immediate improvement in living standards

The Matignon Accords transformed French labour relations and remain iconic in French social history. The conges payes – paid holidays – became a symbol of working-class dignity.

But the Popular Front faced fierce opposition. The right's slogan – "Better Hitler than Blum" (Plutot Hitler que Blum) – captured the depth of hostility, mixing class antagonism with anti-Semitism. Capital flight drained French reserves. Employers resisted implementation. Blum announced a "pause" in reforms in February 1937, effectively admitting that the Popular Front's social programme had run ahead of its economic capacity.

The Spanish Civil War posed an agonising dilemma. Blum's personal sympathies lay with the Spanish Republic, but domestic political pressure (from the right and from his own Radical allies), British opposition, and fear of provoking a European war led France to adopt the Non-Intervention policy – a decision that haunted the French left.

Blum fell in June 1937, replaced by the Radical Chautemps and then by Édouard Daladier. The Popular Front's political unity disintegrated. Its legacy was paradoxical: the labour rights it established endured and became permanent features of French social life; the political coalition that created them did not survive two years.

11.4 Foreign Policy: From Versailles to Munich

French foreign policy in the interwar period was dominated by the trauma of 1914–1918 and the search for security against a resurgent Germany.

The Maginot Line (constructed 1929–1938) was the physical embodiment of France's defensive mentality: a chain of fortifications along the Franco-German border, technically impressive but strategically flawed. It did not extend along the Belgian frontier or through the Ardennes forest – the precise route through which Germany would attack in 1940. The Maginot Line has become a symbol of strategic rigidity and the failure to anticipate new forms of warfare.

France pursued a network of alliances to contain Germany: the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia), the Franco-Soviet Pact (1935), and the Anglo-French relationship. But these alliances were undermined by mutual distrust, military weakness, and the democracies' unwillingness to confront aggression.

The Rhineland crisis of March 1936 was the turning point. When Hitler remilitarised the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles Treaty, France – which had the military capacity to respond – did nothing. Military unreadiness, political division, and British reluctance to act combined to produce paralysis. The failure to respond emboldened Hitler and discredited France's Eastern alliances.

At Munich in September 1938, Prime Minister Daladier and British Prime Minister Chamberlain agreed to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, sacrificing France's ally in the hope of preserving peace. Upon his return to Paris, Daladier was cheered by relieved crowds; he reportedly muttered "the fools" (les cons) –

understanding, even in the moment, that the agreement was a catastrophe.

Was French appeasement rational or cowardly? The answer is complex. France's pacifist culture – born of the slaughter of 1914–1918 and captured in the phrase plus jamais ça ("never again") – made the public profoundly reluctant to risk another war. The military was not confident of victory. Britain would not act. The domestic political situation was poisonous. Appeasement was not the product of moral failure alone but of structural constraints – though it was a strategic disaster nonetheless.

11.5 The Fall of France (1940)

The drôle de guerre ("Phoney War," September 1939 – May 1940) saw France and Britain formally at war with Germany but conducting no significant military operations. French confidence rested on the Maginot Line and the assumption that any German offensive would follow the pattern of 1914.

On 10 May 1940, Germany launched Fall Gelb (Case Yellow). The main thrust came through the Ardennes forest – terrain the French high command had dismissed as impassable for armoured forces. The Maginot Line was bypassed, not breached. German Panzer divisions, supported by close air support, broke through French lines at Sedan and raced for the Channel, cutting off Allied forces in Belgium. The Dunkirk evacuation (late May – early June) saved the British Expeditionary Force but left France to fight alone.

Paris fell on 14 June 1940. The government fled to Bordeaux. Prime Minister Paul Reynaud resigned. On 17 June, the 84-year-old Marshal Philippe Pétain – the hero of Verdun – broadcast to the French nation that he was seeking an armistice. The Armistice was signed on 22 June 1940 in the same railway carriage at Compiegne where Germany had surrendered in 1918. France was divided into an Occupied Zone (the north and Atlantic coast, under direct German control) and the nominally independent Vichy state in the south, under Pétain.

Why did France fall? The question has generated one of the most important historiographical debates in modern European history.

- Military factors: outdated doctrine that emphasised static defence over mobile warfare; poor communication between units; failure to concentrate armoured reserves; absence of close air support coordination.
- Political factors: twenty years of political instability, social division, and mutual suspicion between left and right had eroded national cohesion. The Popular Front era had left deep scars.
- Psychological factors: the trauma of 1914–1918 produced a profound reluctance to accept the costs of another major war. The plus jamais ça mentality contributed to the defensive posture and the willingness to seek an armistice rather than fight on.
- Structural factors: France's demographic weakness (the classes creuses), relative economic decline, and industrial lag behind Germany all contributed.

Marc Bloch, a medieval historian who served as an officer in 1940 (and was later executed by the Nazis as a member of the Resistance), wrote Strange Defeat (L'Etrange Defaite) in 1940 (published posthumously in 1946). It remains one of the most powerful contemporary analyses of the fall: a systematic indictment of France's military, political, and intellectual leadership. Bloch argued that the defeat was not merely military but reflected a profound systemic failure – a society that had lost the capacity for adaptation, initiative, and collective action.

Historiography: France

Historian/Work	Argument
William Shirer (The Collapse of the Third Republic)	The "decadence thesis": France was morally and politically rotten; the fall was the culmination of internal decay
Julian Jackson (France: The Dark Years; The Fall of France)	Revisionist: the defeat was structural and contingent, not inevitable; rejects the moral-decay narrative; emphasises military and strategic factors
Robert Young (France and the Origins of the Second World War)	Revisionist: French foreign policy was shaped by rational calculations of weakness, not cowardice; structural constraints explain appeasement
Marc Bloch (Strange Defeat, 1940/1946)	Contemporary witness: systemic failure across military, political, and intellectual elites – not just a military catastrophe
Eugen Weber (The Hollow Years)	Cultural history of 1930s France: explores the social and psychological dimensions of the crisis

The chronology of France's six-week defeat remains striking:

Date	Event
10 May 1940	Fall Gelb launched; Ardennes breakthrough begins
13 May	German forces cross the Meuse at Sedan
20 May	Panzers reach the Channel coast at Abbeville
26 May – 4 Jun	Dunkirk evacuation (~338,000 troops rescued)
10 Jun	Italy declares war on France
14 Jun	Paris falls; government flees to Bordeaux
17 Jun	Pétain's radio address seeking armistice
22 Jun	Armistice signed at Compiegne

The debate between Shirer's "decadence" thesis and the revisionist school of Jackson and Young is essential for P3 essays. Shirer's argument – that France was rotten from within – has a powerful narrative appeal but oversimplifies. Jackson and Young demonstrate that France's problems were structural (demographic weakness, economic constraints, alliance failures) and contingent (the specific military decisions of May 1940), not the product of some unique national moral failing. The fall of France was a catastrophe, but it was not inevitable.

Chapter summary

The Third Republic entered the interwar period as a society exhausted by the First World War, demographically thinned by the classes creuses and stripped of the American guarantee that was supposed to compensate for the diplomatic concessions made at Versailles. Political instability, financial crises and the rise of the leagues on the far right culminated in the riot of 6 February 1934, which drove the left into the Popular Front. Blum's government produced the Matignon Accords, transforming labour law and giving French workers their first paid holidays, but it could not hold together under capital flight, employer resistance and the divisions produced by the Spanish Civil War. Foreign policy rested on an alliance system too weak to protect eastern Europe and on a defensive doctrine that left the Ardennes unprotected. The fall of France in 1940 was not the product of moral decadence but of structural constraints and contingent military decisions, and the Republic died at Compiegne before it could attempt to recover.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Classes creuses	The hollow years of the missing generation of young men killed between 1914 and 1918
Bloc National	The conservative coalition that governed France from 1919 to 1924
Cartel des Gauches	The left-wing coalition of 1924 to 1926 under Herriot
Poincaré franc	The 1926 stabilisation of the currency that restored foreign confidence
Action Francaise	The royalist ultra-nationalist movement of Charles Maurras
Croix de Feu	The veterans' league of Colonel de la Rocque, the largest of the right-wing leagues
Stavisky Affair	The financial scandal of 1934 that triggered the riot of 6 February
6 February 1934	The right-wing riot at the Chamber of Deputies that brought down the Daladier government
Popular Front	The 1936 to 1938 coalition of PCF, SFIO and Radicals under Léon Blum
Matignon Accords	The June 1936 social agreement introducing the forty-hour week and paid holidays
Maginot Line	The defensive fortifications built from 1929 along the Franco-German border
Plus jamais ca	The "never again" mood of the generation that had fought the First World War
Drôle de guerre	The phoney war of September 1939 to May 1940
Fall Gelb	The German plan of attack through the Ardennes in May 1940

Questions

1. To what extent was the political instability of the Third Republic in the 1930s caused by the Great Depression?
2. Examine the achievements and limitations of the Popular Front.
3. "French foreign policy in the 1930s was the rational product of structural weakness, not cowardice." Discuss.
4. Evaluate the causes of the fall of France in 1940.

5. Compare and contrast the responses of France and Britain to the rise of Hitler.

Connections Across the Three Case Studies

Spain, Portugal, and France illuminate different trajectories within the same European crisis. Spain shows what happened when a democratic republic attempted radical reform in a deeply divided society and was destroyed by civil war. Portugal shows how republican failure could produce a long-lasting authoritarian alternative built on technocratic legitimacy, Catholic corporatism, and systematic demobilisation of society. France shows that democracy could survive – but only barely, and at the cost of foreign policy paralysis that contributed to the catastrophe of 1940. All three cases demonstrate the fragility of liberal democracy in the interwar period, the power of the Church as a political actor in Catholic countries, the role of the military as either guarantor or destroyer of civilian government, and the fatal consequences of social polarisation. For P3 purposes, these three case studies offer rich material for comparative essays on the origins of authoritarianism, the conditions under which democracy survives or fails, and the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy.

Comparative Table: Spain, Portugal, and France in the Interwar Period

Theme	Spain	Portugal	France
Pre-existing regime	Constitutional monarchy (Restoration)	Constitutional monarchy, then republic (1910)	Third Republic (1870–)
Key crisis	Civil War (1936–1939)	Republic's chaos (45 govts in 16 yrs)	6 February 1934; Fall of 1940
Outcome	Authoritarian state (Franco)	Authoritarian state (Salazar/Estado Novo)	Democracy survived until 1940, then Vichy
Regime type	Conservative-authoritarian with fascist elements	Conservative-authoritarian, corporatist	Parliamentary democracy (fragile)
Role of military	Central – pronunciamientos, Civil War, Franco	Central – 1926 coup, but Salazar was civilian	Limited – army loyal to Republic (until 1940)
Role of Church	National Catholicism – regime pillar	Concordat 1940 – regime pillar	Secular – Church peripheral to politics
Foreign policy	Civil War internationalised	Neutrality in WWII; supported Franco	Appeasement; defeated 1940
Key historian	Preston, Payne, Thomas, Beevor	Meneses, Wheeler, Pinto	Jackson, Young, Bloch

Key Exam Questions Across All Three Case Studies

1. "Compare and contrast the methods used by Franco and Salazar to establish and maintain authoritarian power."
2. "To what extent was foreign intervention the decisive factor in determining the outcome of the Spanish Civil War?"
3. "Evaluate the claim that the French Popular Front achieved more than the Spanish Second Republic."
4. "'The collapse of democracy in interwar Europe was inevitable.' Discuss with reference to two states you have studied."
5. "To what extent was the fall of France in 1940 the result of twenty years of political instability?"
6. "'Authoritarian regimes in interwar Europe were conservative, not fascist.' Discuss with reference to two states."
7. "Examine the role of the Catholic Church in sustaining authoritarian regimes in interwar Europe."
8. "To what extent was the Spanish Civil War a 'dress rehearsal' for the Second World War?"
9. "'Portugal's Estado Novo was the most successful authoritarian regime in interwar Europe.' Discuss."
10. "Compare the domestic reform programmes of the French Popular Front and the Spanish Second Republic. Which was more successful, and why?"

Chapter 11.5: Comparative Analysis of the Interwar States

Summary of events

The states covered in this second part of the book underwent remarkably different trajectories during the twenty years between the end of the First World War and the German attack on Poland in September 1939. Poland passed from parliamentary instability to the semi-authoritarian Sanacja regime. Germany moved from the fragile Weimar Republic to the totalitarian Nazi state. Italy turned Mussolini's March on Rome into a self-consciously totalitarian dictatorship that never quite matched its own rhetoric. Spain collapsed from a reformist Second Republic into a three-year civil war that produced Franco's conservative authoritarian regime. Portugal settled into the longest-lasting authoritarian state of western Europe under Salazar's Estado Novo. France survived as a parliamentary democracy until defeat in the field in 1940 produced Pétain's Vichy. Paper 3 privileges comparative essays, and this short chapter brings the six cases into a single analytical frame, organised around the five axes on which they can be most usefully compared.

Key comparative questions

1. What were the common conditions under which interwar democracies collapsed?
2. How did interwar regimes control their societies, and which instruments proved most effective?
3. What role did the Catholic Church play in stabilising or resisting authoritarian regimes?
4. How can interwar regimes be classified along the spectrum from conservative authoritarianism to totalitarianism?
5. Which economic models did the regimes adopt, and how successful were they?

11.5.1 The collapse of democracy

The starting point for a comparative essay on the interwar period is the observation that liberal democracy failed in most of continental Europe between 1919 and 1939. The question is why. Four preconditions recur across the cases. The first is a traumatic experience of the First World War or its immediate aftermath, including the mutilated victory in Italy, the demographic bloodletting in France, the combined defeat and revolution in Germany and the sense of national emergency in the new Polish state. The second is an economic crisis, whether the hyperinflation that shattered the German middle class in 1923, the global depression that destroyed Weimar after 1929 or the slower French crisis that deepened from 1931. The third is a system of proportional representation or otherwise fragmented politics that produced unstable coalition governments, seen most vividly in the forty-five Portuguese governments between 1910 and 1926 and the fourteen Polish governments between 1921 and 1926. The fourth is a cultural crisis in which substantial sections of educated opinion lost confidence in the very idea of parliamentary democracy, a condition particularly visible in France in the 1930s and in Weimar Germany throughout its existence. Where at least three of these four conditions were present, as in Italy by 1922, Germany by 1933 and Spain by 1936, democracy collapsed. Where fewer were present, as in Czechoslovakia until 1938 or in Britain and the Netherlands throughout, democracy survived.

11.5.2 Instruments of political control

Authoritarian and totalitarian regimes deployed a recurring toolkit that candidates need to be able to compare precisely. A single ruling party was central to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, while Poland's BBWR and Portugal's União Nacional were deliberately described by their founders as non-parties in order to distance the regime from the mass mobilisation of classical fascism, and Franco created FET y de las JONS only by decree of unification in April 1937, subordinating the Falange to his personal command. A secret police force operated everywhere, though with varying intensity, running from the Gestapo and SD at one extreme through the Soviet NKVD, the Italian OVRA, the Portuguese PVDE and down to the Polish defensywa, which was effective but small. Censorship and propaganda were universal features but differed in ambition, from Goebbels's saturation apparatus in Germany through Mussolini's cultural mobilisation to Salazar's austere stifling of public debate. Paramilitary organisations were central to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in their phase of conquest of the state and were then either tamed, as with the SA after June 1934, or co-opted, as with the Milizia in Italy. They were more marginal in Poland, Spain and Portugal after consolidation. Finally, the cult of the leader was at the heart of Nazi and fascist regimes, partially absorbed by Franco in the title of Caudillo and the parallels with Felipe II, downplayed by Salazar, who presented himself as an austere administrator, and entirely absent from Polish Sanacja after the death of Piłsudski in 1935.

11.5.3 The Catholic Church as political actor

In Catholic countries the Church was the crucial external reference point for any authoritarian regime, and interwar dictators took very different positions with respect to it. In Italy the Lateran Pacts of 1929 ended six decades of hostility and gave Mussolini the approval of millions of practising Catholics at the cost of restoring religious education and sacramental law. In Spain the alliance between the Nationalists and the Church during and after the Civil War defined the regime's identity as National Catholicism, fusing religious and national legitimacy. In Portugal the Concordat of 1940 formalised what had always been the implicit partnership between Salazar and a traditional Catholic hierarchy. In Poland the Church remained an independent and influential institution that the Sanacja treated with careful respect but never absorbed. In Germany the Concordat of July 1933 promised coexistence but was systematically violated, and the encyclical Mit brennender Sorge of March 1937 indicated that Pius XI understood the terms of the bargain had not been kept. In France the laicite of the Third Republic prevented the Church from becoming a systemic political actor. The lesson for comparative essays is that the Church sustained authoritarian regimes most effectively where the regime was conservative in its aims, as in Portugal and Spain, and least effectively where the regime's ideological core was revolutionary and racial, as in Germany.

11.5.4 Economic models

Interwar authoritarian economies varied more than their political forms. The German model was characterised by massive rearmament driven by Schacht's Mefo bills, the Four-Year Plan under Göring, the drive for autarky that never achieved self-sufficiency, and the continuous threat of war-financing collapse that Mason has described as the flight into war. The Italian model combined a corporatist rhetoric with the silent nationalisation of the banking and heavy industry sectors through IRI from 1933, leaving the state as the dominant shareholder in most large enterprises. The Polish model sought state-led development through the Central Industrial District launched by Kwiatkowski in 1936 and the construction of the port of Gdynia, consciously imitating French dirigisme. The Spanish Nationalist economy during the war depended on German and Italian aid, and after 1939 Franco pursued an inefficient autarky that produced the hungry years of the 1940s. The Portuguese model under Salazar was financially orthodox, obsessive about balanced budgets and consistently biased toward rural and colonial stability at the cost of growth. The French economy, constrained by the demographic weakness of the classes creuses, recovered slowly through the 1920s and then suffered a prolonged and delayed depression. A candidate asked to compare economic policy should structure the answer around four axes, namely the degree of state direction, the balance between rearmament and civilian investment, the openness to foreign trade, and the distributive consequences for workers, peasants and industrialists.

11.5.5 Classifying interwar regimes

The cleanest classification for Paper 3 essays distinguishes three regime types. Totalitarian dictatorships combine a single party and a charismatic leader with a revolutionary ideology, mass mobilisation, paramilitary violence and the aspiration to absorb every sphere of social life. Nazi Germany is the paradigm case, followed by Fascist Italy in aspiration if not always in execution. Stalin's Soviet Union belongs to the same category from a different ideological starting point, which is why Paper 3 questions on totalitarianism often invite Nazi-Soviet comparison even though the options cover different syllabus sections. Conservative authoritarian dictatorships restore a traditional order rather than seek to transform society. Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal and Horthy's Hungary fall into this category. Semi-authoritarian regimes preserve the forms of parliamentary life while hollowing out their substance. Polish Sanacja is the textbook example. Austrofascism under Dollfuss sits on the boundary between the second and third type. The distinction matters because it shapes the historical questions that can sensibly be asked about a regime. It makes no sense to ask how totalitarian Salazar aspired to be, because he explicitly rejected the ambition, and it makes no sense to ask how revolutionary Piłsudski's social programme was, because Sanacja never had one.

11.5.6 Comparative essay questions

1. Compare and contrast the methods used to consolidate authoritarian rule in two interwar states.
2. Evaluate the role of economic crisis in the collapse of democracy in two interwar states.
3. "In interwar Europe, the Catholic Church was a pillar of authoritarianism rather than an obstacle to it." Discuss with reference to two states you have studied.
4. To what extent did interwar authoritarian regimes succeed in mobilising the masses?
5. Compare the foreign policies of two interwar authoritarian states and assess the reasons for their eventual failure.
6. "Conservative authoritarianism was a more successful response to interwar crisis than totalitarianism." Discuss.

PART III: SOVIET UNION AND POST-SOVIET RUSSIA (1924–2000)

Chapter 12: Stalin's Rise and Rule (1924–1953)

Summary of events

Between Lenin's death in January 1924 and his own death in March 1953, Stalin transformed the Soviet Union from a war-weary peasant society into an industrialised superpower, at a human cost that remains the subject of intense historiographical argument. He outmanoeuvred his rivals in the late 1920s by controlling the Party Secretariat, defeated Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and finally Bukharin through a succession of tactical alliances, and by 1929 stood as effectively the sole leader. The First Five Year Plan and collectivisation followed, producing rapid industrial growth and the catastrophic famine of 1932 to 1933, especially in Ukraine. The Great Terror of 1936 to 1938 destroyed most of the remaining old Bolsheviks, decapitated the armed forces on the eve of the world war and institutionalised a climate of denunciation and fear. The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 bought time that was squandered through miscalculation in June 1941, but the subsequent Great Patriotic War united Soviet society around the regime and produced the victory that legitimated Stalinism for a generation. Late Stalinism combined the reconstruction of the devastated economy with renewed repression through the Zhdanovshchina and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. The dictator's death in March 1953, in the middle of the fabricated Doctors' Plot, opened a succession crisis that the following chapter will trace.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. How did Stalin defeat his rivals in the power struggle of the 1920s?
2. Evaluate the economic achievements and human costs of collectivisation and the Five Year Plans.
3. Examine the causes and consequences of the Great Terror.
4. To what extent did Soviet society change under Stalin?
5. Analyse Stalin's role in the victory of the Great Patriotic War.
6. How has the historiography of Stalinism evolved from the totalitarian school to the post-revisionist synthesis?

Timeline of Chapter 12

21 January 1924	Death of Lenin
1924–1925	Triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev against Trotsky
1925–1927	United Opposition. Defeat of Left
December 1927	Fifteenth Party Congress. Left expelled
1928	First Five Year Plan launched. Shakhty Trial
1929	Trotsky deported. Collectivisation begins in earnest
1932–1933	Ukrainian and Kazakh famine. Holodomor
1 December 1934	Assassination of Kirov
1935	Stakhanovite campaign

1936–1938	Show Trials. Great Terror. Yezhovshchina
1938	Beria replaces Yezhov as NKVD chief
23 August 1939	Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact
22 June 1941	Operation Barbarossa
July–August 1942	Order No. 227, Not a Step Back Battle of Stalingrad
August 1942 – February 1943	
1944	Deportations of Chechens, Crimean Tatars and others
May 1945	Victory in Europe
1946–1948	Zhdanovshchina
1949	Soviet atomic bomb tested. Leningrad Affair
1952	Nineteenth Party Congress
January 1953	Doctors' Plot announced
5 March 1953	Death of Stalin

The Power Struggle (1924–1929)

Lenin's death on 21 January 1924 opened a bitter struggle for succession. Despite Lenin's Testament warning against Stalin, the key contenders were:

Contender	Position	Vision	Fate
Leon Trotsky	Commissar of War	Permanent revolution; world revolution	Expelled 1929; exiled; murdered 1940
Grigory Zinoviev	Leningrad Party boss	Initially anti-Trotsky, then anti-Stalin	Show Trial 1936; executed
Lev Kamenev	Moscow Party boss	Allied with Zinoviev	Show Trial 1936; executed
Nikolai Bukharin	Editor of Pravda	NEP continuation; "enrich yourselves"	Show Trial 1938; executed
Joseph Stalin	General Secretary	Socialism in One Country	Won; ruled until 1953

Stalin's victory was achieved through bureaucratic manipulation — his position as General Secretary (from 1922) allowed him to appoint loyalists to key posts. He defeated his rivals in stages: first allying with Zinoviev and Kamenev against Trotsky (1924–25), then with Bukharin against the "Left Opposition" (1926–27), then turning against Bukharin's "Right Opposition" (1928–29).

The ideological debate between "Socialism in One Country" (Stalin — build socialism in the USSR first) and "Permanent Revolution" (Trotsky — spread revolution internationally) provided a theoretical framework for

what was essentially a power struggle.

Collectivisation and the Five Year Plans

Collectivisation (launched 1929) merged individual peasant farms into kolkhozy (collective farms):

- Dekulakisation: Wealthy peasants (kulaks) were expropriated, deported, or killed. An estimated 1.8 million kulaks were deported to Siberia and Central Asia
- Peasant resistance: grain hoarding, livestock slaughter (roughly half of all livestock was killed 1929–33)
- The Ukrainian Famine (Holodomor, 1932–33): Between 3.5 and 7.5 million deaths — the result of forced grain requisitioning from Ukraine. Historians debate whether it was deliberate genocide (Robert Conquest) or a catastrophic consequence of policy (R.W. Davies)

The Five Year Plans pursued rapid industrialisation:

Plan	Period	Focus	Results
First	1928–1932	Heavy industry (steel, coal, electricity)	Output tripled in some sectors; Magnitogorsk, Dneprostroi
Second	1933–1937	Consolidation; transport; some consumer goods	More realistic targets; output continued to grow
Third	1938–1941	Rearmament	Interrupted by German invasion (June 1941)

Key statistics: Steel production rose from 4M tonnes (1928) to 18M tonnes (1937). Coal from 35M to 128M tonnes. Industrial output grew ~400% in a decade. But at enormous human cost: forced labour (Gulag prisoners built major projects), appalling working conditions, and acute consumer goods shortages.

The Stakhanovite movement (from 1935, named after miner Alexei Stakhanov who allegedly produced 14 times his quota) combined genuine enthusiasm with coerced productivity targets.

The Great Terror (1936–1938)

The Show Trials (1936, 1937, 1938) publicly condemned former Bolshevik leaders — Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Rykov — on fabricated charges of treason, espionage, and sabotage. All confessed (under torture and threats to families) and were executed.

The purges extended far beyond the elite:

- ~750,000 people executed during the Great Terror (1937–38) — based on NKVD archives opened in the 1990s
- ~1.5 million arrested and sent to the Gulag
- The Red Army lost ~35,000 officers — including 3 of 5 marshals, 13 of 15 army commanders — catastrophically weakening military readiness on the eve of WWII
- The NKVD under Nikolai Yezhov (the "Yezhovshchina") implemented arrest quotas

Social and Cultural Policies

- Socialist realism became the only permitted artistic style (1934); art must serve the revolution
- Education: Massive expansion; literacy rose from ~50% (1926) to ~90% (1939)

- Women: Officially equal; entered workforce en masse; but double burden of work and domestic duties. Abortion banned (1936), divorce restricted
- Nationalities: Official policy of korenizatsiya (indigenisation) coexisted with deportation of entire ethnic groups (Chechens, Crimean Tatars) during WWII

Nationalities policy and the wartime deportations

The nationalities policy of Stalin's Soviet Union combined two contradictory practices throughout the 1930s and 1940s. On one hand the doctrine of korenizatsiya inherited from the 1920s survived in attenuated form, producing national languages, national theatres and the nominal autonomy of union republics and autonomous republics that in their constitutional architecture resembled those of a federal state. On the other hand, from the mid-1930s the regime treated certain ethnic groups as categories of collective suspicion, beginning with the Poles deported from the western border regions in 1935 and 1936, followed by the Koreans deported from the Far East to Central Asia in 1937 in anticipation of a Japanese war, and then in 1941 the Volga Germans, approximately eight hundred thousand of whom were moved from the Volga autonomous republic to Kazakhstan and Siberia within weeks of the German invasion.

The major wartime deportations came in 1943 and 1944. The Karachays were deported in October 1943. The Kalmyks followed in December. In February 1944, under an NKVD operation code-named Chechevitsa that took less than a week, almost the entire Chechen and Ingush population of the North Caucasus, approximately five hundred thousand people, was loaded onto cattle trucks and dispatched to Central Asia. The charge was collective collaboration with the German forces that had briefly reached the area in 1942, although in fact most Chechens had fought in the Red Army. The Crimean Tatars were deported in May 1944, emptying the peninsula of its indigenous population. The Meskhetian Turks followed in November. Mortality during the journeys and in the first year of resettlement is estimated at between a quarter and a third of the deported populations. The deported nations were not formally rehabilitated until after Stalin's death, and some, notably the Crimean Tatars, were not permitted to return to their homelands until the late 1980s. The wartime deportations are central to any serious assessment of Stalin's regime, because they demonstrate that the combination of arbitrary state power, secret police capability and ideological categorisation of whole populations as enemies produced atrocities distinct from, and in some ways independent of, the purges of the 1930s.

WWII and Late Stalinism (1941–1953)

The Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) defined Soviet identity. Key facts: ~27 million Soviet deaths (military and civilian); the Battle of Stalingrad (August 1942 – February 1943) as the turning point; the siege of Leningrad (872 days, ~1 million dead).

Post-war: reconstruction, renewed repression (Zhdanovshchina — cultural purges), the Cold War (Berlin Blockade, Soviet atomic bomb 1949, Korean War), and the Doctors' Plot (1953) — an anti-Semitic purge interrupted by Stalin's death on 5 March 1953.

Historiography

The historiography of Stalinism has passed through three clearly identifiable phases. The first was the totalitarian school of the 1950s and 1960s, developed by Robert Conquest in The Great Terror and extended by Richard Pipes and Leonard Schapiro, which argued that the Stalinist state was a centrally directed machine of terror in which policy flowed downward from the will of the dictator and in which Soviet society appeared as an atomised collection of victims. The second phase was the revisionism of the 1980s, developed by Sheila Fitzpatrick in Everyday Stalinism and by J. Arch Getty in Origins of the Great Purges, which shifted attention from the leader to the social dynamics of the period, stressing the degree of popular participation in denunciation, the role of career ambitions among local party officials and the ways in which the terror acquired a bureaucratic momentum of its own. The revisionist position was criticised for understating Stalin's personal direction of policy and for coming close to dissolving the question of responsibility. The third phase, sometimes described as post-revisionism or the archival synthesis, was made possible by the opening of Soviet archives after 1991. Stephen Kotkin, in the first two volumes of his projected biography of Stalin, and Oleg Khlevniuk, in Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator, have reconstructed in unprecedented detail Stalin's day-to-day direction of policy, including the specific quotas he approved during the Great Terror. The effect of their work has been to re-establish the central role of Stalin's personal authority while retaining the revisionist insights into the social dynamics of implementation. For Paper 3 candidates the strongest essay will treat the totalitarian, revisionist and post-revisionist positions as stages of a cumulative historical understanding rather than as competing alternatives, and will combine personal responsibility with institutional dynamics in assessing the terror.

Source-based exercise

> *Source A. Joseph Stalin, speech at the First All-Union Conference of Leading Personnel of Socialist Industry, 4 February 1931 (translation adapted; verify): "We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed."*
> *Source B. Soviet decree on the deportation of the Chechens and Ingush, 1944 (paraphrased; verify wording and date): "During the period of the Patriotic War, and especially during the operations of the German fascist forces in the Caucasus, many Chechens and Ingush betrayed the Motherland, joined bands organised by the Germans and rose against Soviet power. The Chechens and Ingush are to be resettled in other regions of the USSR. The territory of the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic is to be abolished."*

(a) According to Source A, why must the Soviet Union accelerate industrialisation? [3 marks] (b) Compare and contrast the reasoning for extraordinary state action in Sources A and B. [6 marks] (c) Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess the argument that Stalinism combined developmental goals with ethnic repression in a single political logic. [9 marks]

Chapter summary

Stalin inherited the Party Secretariat and used it to outmanoeuvre rivals who underestimated him, emerging by 1929 as the uncontested leader of the Soviet Union. The First Five Year Plan and collectivisation produced rapid industrial growth and agricultural catastrophe, with the Ukrainian famine of 1932 to 1933 killing millions and producing a debate over deliberate intent that divides historians to this day. The Great Terror of 1936 to 1938 destroyed the remaining old Bolsheviks, decapitated the Red Army and institutionalised a climate of fear. Nationalities policy combined the institutional forms of federalism with the wartime deportation of whole peoples, and the Great Patriotic War was both the supreme trauma of Soviet history and the supreme source of regime legitimacy. Late Stalinism combined economic reconstruction with renewed repression, and the dictator's death opened a succession crisis whose resolution produced the Khrushchev era described in the next chapter.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Socialism in One Country	Stalin's 1924 doctrine of building socialism within the Soviet Union without waiting for world revolution
Permanent revolution	Trotsky's doctrine that the Soviet state could not consolidate without revolutions in the advanced industrial countries
Collectivisation	The forced merger of peasant farms into state and collective farms from 1929
Kulak	A prosperous peasant, a category used to justify deportation and execution of rural opponents of collectivisation
Holodomor	The Ukrainian famine of 1932 to 1933 caused by forced grain requisitioning
Five Year Plan	The centrally directed programme of industrialisation introduced in 1928
Stakhanovism	The campaign from 1935 of exemplary shock-work associated with Alexei Stakhanov
NKVD	The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the security and police apparatus from 1934
Gulag	The network of forced labour camps administered by the NKVD
Show Trial	The public prosecution of former Bolshevik leaders on fabricated charges in 1936, 1937 and 1938
Yezhovshchina	The peak of the terror under NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov in 1937 and 1938
Korenizatsiya	The 1920s policy of indigenisation that promoted national languages and cadres within union republics
Chechevitsa	The NKVD code name for the February 1944 deportation of the Chechens and Ingush
Zhdanovshchina	The post-war cultural purge associated with Andrei Zhdanov
Doctors' Plot	The anti-Semitic fabrication of a conspiracy of Kremlin doctors, announced in January 1953

Questions

1. To what extent was Stalin's victory in the power struggle of the 1920s the result of his control of the Party apparatus?
2. Evaluate the human and economic consequences of collectivisation.
3. "The Great Terror was driven by bureaucratic dynamics rather than by Stalin's personal will." Discuss.
4. Examine the treatment of non-Russian nationalities under Stalin.
5. Compare and contrast the role of Stalin with the role of Hitler in shaping their respective states.

Chapter 13: Khrushchev and De-Stalinisation (1953–1964)

Summary of events

Stalin's death in March 1953 opened a power struggle from which Nikita Khrushchev emerged by 1957 as the uncontested leader of the Soviet Union. His signature act was the secret speech of 25 February 1956 at the Twentieth Party Congress, in which he denounced Stalin's cult of personality, the Terror and the wartime blunders, while carefully preserving the legitimacy of the October Revolution and the one-party system. The speech produced immediate reverberations across the Soviet bloc, contributing to the Polish crisis of October 1956 and the Hungarian Revolution that the Red Army crushed in November.

Khrushchev's domestic policy combined genuine liberalisation in culture, in housing and in the partial rehabilitation of deported nations with policy initiatives that his colleagues described as hare-brained, including the Virgin Lands Campaign, the splitting of the party apparatus into industrial and agricultural halves and the attempt to decentralise economic administration through regional economic councils. Foreign policy was equally ambitious, producing the missile crisis over Cuba in October 1962 that brought the superpowers closer to nuclear war than any other episode of the Cold War. Khrushchev was removed in a Politburo coup in October 1964, accused of voluntarism, and sent into retirement rather than exile or execution, a measure of how far Soviet political culture had already moved from the practices of the 1930s.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. How did Khrushchev emerge as the leading figure of the post-Stalin succession?
2. Evaluate the significance and limits of the secret speech of 1956.
3. Examine the successes and failures of Khrushchev's domestic reforms.
4. Analyse the aims and consequences of Khrushchev's foreign policy.
5. Why was Khrushchev removed from power in 1964?

Timeline of Chapter 13

5 March 1953	Death of Stalin
June 1953	Arrest and execution of Beria
1954	Virgin Lands Campaign launched
1955	Warsaw Pact established. Austrian State Treaty
25 February 1956	Secret Speech at Twentieth Party Congress
June 1956	Poznań riots in Poland
October 1956	Gomułka reinstated in Poland Hungarian Revolution crushed
October–November 1956	
1957	Sputnik launched. Defeat of the Anti-Party Group

1961	Yuri Gagarin first human in space. Berlin Wall built
October 1962	Cuban Missile Crisis
1963	Partial Test Ban Treaty
14 October 1964	Removal of Khrushchev by Politburo

Power Struggle After Stalin

After a brief collective leadership, Nikita Khrushchev emerged as leader by outmanoeuvring rivals: - Beria (secret police chief): arrested and executed, June 1953 - Malenkov (initial premier): sidelined by 1955 - "Anti-Party Group" (Molotov, Kaganev, Malenkov): defeated in 1957 with military support from Zhukov

The Secret Speech (25 February 1956)

At the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev delivered a bombshell "secret speech" denouncing Stalin's cult of personality, the purges, and his military blunders. The speech:

- Shattered the Stalin myth within the Party
- Triggered the Hungarian Revolution (October 1956) — crushed by Soviet tanks (~2,500 Hungarians killed)
- Opened space for cultural liberalisation (the "Thaw")
- BUT did NOT question the one-party system itself

Domestic Reforms

- Virgin Lands Campaign (1954): 36 million hectares of steppe cultivated in Kazakhstan — initially successful, then ecological disaster
- Housing programme: Massive construction of prefabricated apartment blocks (khrushchyovki) — millions rehoused
- Administrative decentralisation: sovnarkhozy (regional economic councils) replaced central ministries
- Space programme: Sputnik (1957) and Gagarin (1961) — enormous prestige victories

Agriculture, Virgin Lands and the limits of Khrushchev's economics

Agriculture was the area in which Khrushchev invested the greatest personal energy and accumulated the heaviest political damage. The starting point was the structural weakness of Soviet farming, with productivity levels that had barely recovered the level of 1928 and grain output consistently below the needs of an urbanising population. The Virgin Lands Campaign launched in 1954 aimed to open roughly thirty-six million hectares of previously uncultivated steppe, mainly in northern Kazakhstan and western Siberia, to large-scale mechanised agriculture. In the first years the campaign appeared to vindicate the policy. Grain output rose substantially, and by 1956 the harvest was the largest in Soviet history. Kazakhstan received massive infrastructure investment, hundreds of thousands of Komsomol volunteers and the demographic transformation of its northern oblasts into Russian and Ukrainian settler regions. The political dividend for Khrushchev was considerable.

The ecological and economic costs emerged gradually. Continuous cultivation of fragile soils without adequate rotation produced severe wind erosion from 1963, with dust storms that stripped topsoil from

millions of hectares and returned the region to near-desert conditions within a decade. Yields collapsed, and by 1963 the Soviet Union was forced to import grain from the United States, Canada and Australia, a humiliation for a regime that had promised to overtake the capitalist world in agricultural output. The costly failure of Khrushchev's agricultural experiment was compounded by his encouragement of maize cultivation across climates for which it was unsuitable, earning him the nickname kukuruznik among his critics. The deeper lesson of the campaign was that centrally driven campaigns imposed on an unreformed collective farm system could not solve the structural problem of Soviet agriculture, which was the absence of meaningful incentives for individual peasant effort. That lesson would be drawn not by Khrushchev but by his successors, and only partially by them.

Sputnik, Gagarin and the political economy of Soviet space

The Soviet space programme was not a scientific curiosity but a central instrument of Khrushchev's domestic legitimation and foreign policy. The launch of Sputnik 1 on 4 October 1957 produced a political shock in the United States out of all proportion to the technical achievement, because it demonstrated that Soviet rocketry was capable of delivering a payload into orbit, and by implication of delivering a nuclear warhead to the American mainland. The R-7 rocket that placed Sputnik in orbit was the world's first intercontinental ballistic missile, developed under Sergei Korolev at the Design Bureau OKB-1. President Eisenhower authorised a sweeping expansion of American science education through the National Defense Education Act of 1958, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration was created the same year. Khrushchev immediately grasped the propaganda value of Soviet firsts and pressed Korolev for more spectacular achievements. Laika, the dog, became the first living creature in orbit on Sputnik 2 in November 1957. The Luna 2 probe reached the moon in 1959. Yuri Gagarin became the first human in space on 12 April 1961, and Valentina Tereshkova the first woman in June 1963. Each of these achievements was deployed both at home, to demonstrate the superiority of the socialist system to its own citizens, and abroad, particularly to Asian and African states weighing their alignment in the Cold War.

The price paid for this propaganda success was a distortion of Soviet scientific priorities and a neglect of the civilian economic applications of space technology. The United States, under the political pressure of Sputnik, committed itself to the moon and funded the sustained programme that put Neil Armstrong on the lunar surface in July 1969, overtaking the Soviet Union decisively once the initial lead had been squandered. For Paper 3 candidates the significance of Sputnik and Gagarin lies in the way the space programme illustrated Khrushchev's political style. It combined a real attempt to demonstrate systemic superiority with an inflated rhetoric that his economic base could not indefinitely sustain.

Source-based exercise

> *Source A. Nikita Khrushchev, Secret Speech on the Cult of Personality, Twentieth Party Congress, 25 February 1956: "Stalin originated the concept 'enemy of the people'. This term automatically rendered it unnecessary that the ideological errors of a man or men engaged in a controversy be proven. It made possible the use of the most cruel repression, violating all norms of revolutionary legality, against anyone who in any way disagreed with Stalin, against those who were only suspected of hostile intent, against those who had bad reputations."*
> *Source B. Statement of the Central Committee on the removal of Khrushchev, 14 October 1964: "The October Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU has freed Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev from his duties as First Secretary and member of the Presidium of the Central Committee, in connection with his advanced age and the deterioration of his state of health."*

(a) According to Source A, what is Khrushchev's central accusation against Stalin? [3 marks] (b) Compare and contrast the explicit and implicit reasons for political change presented in Sources A and B. [6 marks] (c) Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess the extent to which de-Stalinisation transformed the Soviet political system. [9 marks]

Foreign Policy

- Hungarian Uprising (1956): Crushed by Soviet intervention
- Cuban Missile Crisis (October 1962): The closest the Cold War came to nuclear war; Khrushchev backed down
- Sino-Soviet Split: Ideological and strategic rivalry with Mao's China

Fall from Power

Khrushchev was removed by a Politburo coup on 14 October 1964, accused of "hare-brained scheming" (volyuntarizm) — erratic policy, the Cuban humiliation, agricultural failures, and alienation of Party officials.

Chapter summary

Khrushchev was the first Soviet leader to expose his predecessor's crimes in public, and the secret speech of February 1956 opened a reform space that would define Soviet politics for the rest of its history. His domestic policy combined real improvements in housing, agriculture and cultural openness with policy initiatives that alienated the Party apparatus. The Virgin Lands Campaign generated a few years of grain success followed by ecological disaster, and the space programme achieved brilliant propaganda successes at the cost of distorting scientific priorities. Foreign policy oscillated between peaceful coexistence and adventurism, culminating in the Cuban Missile Crisis that brought the world closer to nuclear war than at any other moment in the Cold War. Khrushchev's political style made him enemies he could not afford, and the October 1964 coup ended his tenure without bloodshed, a small but significant sign of the post-Stalin evolution of Soviet political norms.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Collective leadership	The principle of shared rule announced after Stalin's death in March 1953
Secret Speech	The denunciation of Stalin delivered by Khrushchev at the Twentieth Party Congress on 25 February 1956
Thaw	The period of cultural liberalisation after 1956, named after Ehrenburg's novel
Virgin Lands Campaign	The 1954 programme to cultivate thirty-six million hectares of steppe in Kazakhstan and Siberia
Khrushchyovka	The mass-produced prefabricated apartment blocks that rehoused millions of Soviet citizens
Sovnarkhozy	The regional economic councils introduced in 1957 to decentralise industrial administration
Anti-Party Group	The 1957 faction of Molotov, Malenkov and Kaganovich that tried to remove Khrushchev

Term	Meaning
Peaceful coexistence	The doctrine that capitalist and socialist systems could avoid war despite ideological rivalry
Sino-Soviet Split	The ideological and strategic rupture with Mao's China, visible from 1958 onwards
Cuban Missile Crisis	The October 1962 confrontation over Soviet missiles in Cuba
Voluntarism	The charge levelled against Khrushchev in 1964 of erratic, subjective policy-making

Questions

1. To what extent did the Secret Speech of 1956 change the nature of the Soviet system?
2. Evaluate the successes and failures of Khrushchev's domestic policies.
3. "Khrushchev's foreign policy did more to destabilise the Cold War than to end it." Discuss.
4. Examine the reasons for the removal of Khrushchev in October 1964.
5. Compare and contrast the leadership styles of Stalin and Khrushchev.

Chapter 14: The Brezhnev Era (1964–1982)

Summary of events

Leonid Brezhnev held the general secretaryship of the Communist Party from October 1964 until his death in November 1982. The political pattern of his rule was announced as stability of cadres, and it produced an administrative class that grew old in office and presided over a gradual decline in economic dynamism. Brezhnev's foreign policy combined détente in the west with the Brezhnev Doctrine in the socialist bloc, demonstrated most sharply by the crushing of the Prague Spring in August 1968 and by the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Economic growth rates fell steadily through the 1970s, and the regime responded with grain imports, rising oil revenues from the Samotlor and Siberian fields, and increased military spending that consumed between fifteen and twenty-five per cent of gross domestic product. The dissident movement took shape through Sakharov's human rights activism, Solzhenitsyn's literary work and a thickening network of samizdat publications, and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 gave dissidents an international charter that the regime could not simply repudiate. Brezhnev's last years were marked by his own physical incapacity and by a gerontocratic succession in which Andropov and Chernenko each ruled for less than two years before Gorbachev broke the pattern in 1985.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. What did stability of cadres mean, and what were its economic consequences?
2. Evaluate the successes and limitations of détente in Soviet foreign policy.
3. Examine the nature and impact of the dissident movement under Brezhnev.
4. To what extent did the Helsinki Accords shape Soviet domestic politics?
5. Why has the Brezhnev period been described as the era of stagnation, and how justified is the label?

Timeline of Chapter 14

October 1964	Brezhnev installed as First Secretary
1965	Kosygin economic reforms announced
August 1968	Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia
1968	Brezhnev Doctrine articulated
1970	Polish strikes on the Baltic coast
1972	Nixon in Moscow. SALT I and ABM Treaty signed
1973	Solzhenitsyn publishes The Gulag Archipelago in the west
1 August 1975	Helsinki Final Act signed by thirty-five states
1976	Moscow Helsinki Group founded by Yuri Orlov
1979	SALT II signed. Boat people Chinese border war
25 December 1979	Invasion of Afghanistan

1980	Moscow Olympics boycotted by the west
1980–1981	Solidarity crisis in Poland
November 1982	Death of Brezhnev. Andropov succeeds
February 1984	Death of Andropov. Chernenko succeeds
March 1985	Death of Chernenko. Gorbachev succeeds

The Era of Stagnation

Leonid Brezhnev (in power 1964–1982) represented a return to political conservatism and stability of cadres — no purges, no reforms, no innovation.

Economic decline: - Growth rates fell from ~5% (1960s) to ~2% (late 1970s) — eventually approaching zero - The technological gap with the West widened dramatically (particularly in computing and electronics) - Agriculture remained chronically inefficient: the USSR imported grain from the West - The military-industrial complex consumed an estimated 15–25% of GDP

Political stagnation: - The nomenklatura (party elite) entrenched privileges: special shops, dachas, healthcare - Corruption became endemic; the "shadow economy" grew - Ideological commitment hollowed out; cynicism pervaded society - Brezhnev himself became physically incapacitated in his final years (died November 1982)

The Brezhnev Doctrine

The Brezhnev Doctrine (1968) declared that the USSR would intervene militarily to prevent any socialist state from leaving the Soviet bloc. Its key manifestation:

- Prague Spring (August 1968): Alexander Dubček's "socialism with a human face" crushed by Warsaw Pact invasion (~500,000 troops)
- Détente (1969–1979): Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties (SALT I, 1972; Helsinki Accords, 1975)
- Afghanistan invasion (December 1979): Soviet "Vietnam" — a quagmire that lasted 10 years, killed ~15,000 Soviet soldiers, and ended détente

The dissident movement and Helsinki

The most creative opposition of the Brezhnev years arose not among the Party intelligentsia but among a small, heterogeneous and remarkably courageous group of individuals who came to be called dissidents. The prototype was Andrei Sakharov, the physicist who had led Soviet thermonuclear weapons research in the 1950s and who turned in the 1960s to human rights advocacy, publishing in 1968 the essay Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom. Sakharov co-founded the Human Rights Committee in 1970 and became the moral centre of a movement that the regime could neither ignore nor easily suppress because of his international fame. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975 and was exiled to Gorky without trial in January 1980 following his criticism of the invasion of Afghanistan. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the novelist whose work had appeared with Khrushchev's approval in the 1960s, became the most famous literary dissident after the publication of The Gulag Archipelago in Paris in 1973. He was stripped of his citizenship and expelled from the Soviet Union in February 1974, and The Gulag Archipelago began to be read across the communist bloc in samizdat editions that the KGB could never fully suppress.

The dissident movement was sustained by the technical ecology of samizdat, the self-publishing of typescripts passed hand to hand, and of tamizdat, the publishing of forbidden works abroad and their clandestine return to Soviet readers. Small circles of Moscow intellectuals compiled the Chronicle of Current Events, a samizdat periodical that documented arrests, trials and camp conditions with factual precision. The Jewish emigration movement, often identified with Natan Sharansky and the refuseniks denied permission to leave for Israel, combined human rights and national rights in ways that the regime found particularly difficult to manage.

The political horizon of the movement changed decisively with the Helsinki Final Act signed on 1 August 1975 by thirty-five states, including the Soviet Union and the United States. The agreement was, from the Soviet point of view, primarily a recognition of the post-war borders of Europe, and that acceptance was what Brezhnev had sought for a decade. The price was the third basket of commitments on human rights, freedom of movement and the free flow of information. These commitments were legally binding and publicly available, and dissidents quickly grasped that the regime had armed them with an international charter against its own behaviour. Yuri Orlov founded the Moscow Helsinki Group in May 1976, followed by sister groups in Ukraine, Lithuania, Georgia and Armenia. Arrests followed, but so did the institutional basis for the American Helsinki Watch and eventually Human Rights Watch, which sustained international pressure on Soviet practice through the 1980s.

The KGB under Yuri Andropov, who chaired it from 1967 until he succeeded Brezhnev in November 1982, responded to the dissident movement with a calibrated mixture of arrests, exile, forced emigration and the psychiatric abuse of hospitalisation in Serbsky and other institutions, a practice that led the World Psychiatric Association to suspend the Soviet association in 1983. Andropov's approach was not the terror of the 1930s. It was surveillance, intimidation and selective repression designed to contain rather than destroy. The paradox of his career was that the chief dissident-hunter of the 1970s was also, as general secretary from November 1982 to February 1984, the figure who promoted Gorbachev and a number of the reformers who would dismantle the system. Archie Brown has argued in The Rise and Fall of Communism that the link between Andropov and Gorbachev was not accidental, because Andropov understood, as few of his generation did, that a system unable to compete economically and unable to absorb its own critics was in deep trouble.

Brief Successors

Andropov (1982–1984): Former KGB chief; attempted anti-corruption campaign but died after 15 months. Chernenko (1984–1985): Elderly apparatchik; died after 13 months. Their rapid deaths highlighted the gerontocracy problem.

Historiographical debate on the era of stagnation

The phrase era of stagnation was coined by Gorbachev during perestroika as a polemical characterisation of the Brezhnev years, and it has dominated the historiography ever since. Western observers at the time often shared the assessment, with Timothy Colton and Seweryn Bialer writing in the early 1980s of a system in structural decline. The Brezhnev regime itself described its condition as developed socialism, the supposed transition phase between socialism and communism, and celebrated economic achievements such as nuclear parity with the United States, universal secondary education and a modest expansion of consumer welfare. More recent scholarship has complicated the stagnation narrative in two directions. On one hand, Stephen Kotkin and Mark Galeotti have emphasised the hidden institutional rot that Gorbachev inherited, including the exhaustion of the planning system, the systematic falsification of statistics, the penetration of the nomenklatura by corruption networks and the dependence of the civilian economy on oil revenues that collapsed after 1985. On the other hand, Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk in Substate Dictatorship have shown that the period also witnessed significant social modernisation, including large urbanisation, a growing cohort of university-educated professionals and the first genuine consumer society the Soviet Union had ever produced, however modest by Western standards. For Paper 3 candidates the honest summary is that the Brezhnev period combined real material improvements for the urban population with the accumulation of economic and political pathologies that made a systemic crisis inevitable once the oil price fell and Andropov's successors attempted reform.

Chapter summary

The Brezhnev era began as a conservative correction of Khrushchev's voluntarism and hardened over time into the gerontocracy of the late 1970s. Stability of cadres protected the nomenklatura and permitted the accumulation of corruption and rent-seeking networks that hollowed out the planning system. Détente produced real achievements in arms control but did not prevent the Brezhnev Doctrine from being demonstrated at Prague in 1968 and, in a very different context, by the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The dissident movement, led by Sakharov and given international protection by the Helsinki Act, kept alive the political and moral alternatives that would emerge into the open under Gorbachev. By 1982 the Soviet Union remained a superpower, but it was one whose economic foundations were eroding faster than its leadership was prepared to acknowledge.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Stability of cadres	Brezhnev's policy of leaving Party officials in place, ending the rotations that had unsettled Khrushchev's colleagues
Nomenklatura	The Party list of officials appointed to senior posts, the core of the Soviet governing class
Kosygin reforms	The 1965 attempt to introduce market-style incentives into Soviet industry, which was gradually rolled back after 1968
Prague Spring	The 1968 Czechoslovak reform movement under Alexander Dubček, crushed by Warsaw Pact invasion
Brezhnev Doctrine	The 1968 declaration that the Soviet Union could intervene to preserve socialism in other bloc states
Détente	The 1969 to 1979 relaxation of Cold War tensions, formalised in SALT I and Helsinki

Term	Meaning
Helsinki Final Act	The 1975 pan-European agreement whose third basket committed signatories to human rights standards
Samizdat	The self-publication of forbidden writings on typewriters, passed hand to hand
Tamizdat	The publication of forbidden Soviet writings abroad, with clandestine return
Refuseniks	Soviet Jews denied permission to emigrate, a rallying point for international human rights pressure
Era of stagnation	Gorbachev's polemical description of the Brezhnev years, adopted as historiographical shorthand
Developed socialism	The regime's self-description of the Brezhnev period as an advanced stage on the road to communism

Questions

1. To what extent does the phrase "era of stagnation" accurately describe the Brezhnev period?
2. Examine the causes and consequences of the Brezhnev Doctrine.
3. Evaluate the impact of the Helsinki Accords on Soviet domestic politics.
4. "The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union." Discuss.
5. Analyse the significance of the dissident movement in the decline of Soviet authority.

Chapter 15: Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR (1985–1991)

Summary of events

Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary on 11 March 1985, the day after Chernenko's death, and inherited a regime that his own sponsor Yuri Andropov had understood to be in crisis. His reform programme unfolded on three axes, namely the economic restructuring called perestroika, the cultural opening called glasnost and the political democratisation called demokratizatsiya. In foreign policy he articulated a New Political Thinking that treated the Soviet Union as a normal member of the international community, signed the INF Treaty with Reagan in December 1987 that abolished an entire class of nuclear weapons, and began the withdrawal from Afghanistan that was completed in February 1989. He also indicated to the leaders of Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania that the Brezhnev Doctrine no longer applied, and the revolutions of 1989 swept away the communist governments of Eastern Europe with almost no Soviet resistance. The German question was settled through unification and East Germany's absorption into the Federal Republic in October 1990. Inside the Soviet Union, glasnost unleashed historical revelation and nationalist mobilisation that the reformed institutions could not contain. The August coup of 1991 failed within three days, but it shattered the authority of the central government, and the Belavezha Accords of December 1991 dissolved the Union. On 25 December 1991 Gorbachev resigned and the Soviet flag came down over the Kremlin for the last time.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. Why did Gorbachev conclude in 1985 that reform was urgent?
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of perestroika as an economic programme.
3. Examine the impact of glasnost on Soviet society.
4. Analyse the reasons for the Soviet acceptance of the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe.
5. Why did the reform programme produce the collapse rather than the renewal of the Soviet Union?

Timeline of Chapter 15

11 March 1985	Gorbachev becomes General Secretary
April 1985	Plenum announces acceleration
February 1986	Twenty-seventh Party Congress
26 April 1986	Chernobyl disaster
December 1986	Sakharov released from Gorky
1987	Law on State Enterprises
8 December 1987	INF Treaty signed in Washington
February 1988	Decision to withdraw from Afghanistan

June 1988	Nineteenth Party Conference
15 February 1989	Last Soviet troops leave Afghanistan
March 1989	Congress of People's Deputies elections
4 June 1989	Partially free elections in Poland
November 1989	Fall of the Berlin Wall
December 1989	Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. Ceaușescu executed in Romania
February 1990	Article 6 of the Constitution repealed
May 1990	Yeltsin elected chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet
October 1990	German unification
June 1991	Yeltsin elected President of Russian SFSR
July 1991	START I signed
19–21 August 1991	August coup
8 December 1991	Belavezha Accords
25 December 1991	Gorbachev resigns

Perestroika: Economic Restructuring

Mikhail Gorbachev (General Secretary from March 1985) recognised that the Soviet system was in crisis. His economic reforms (perestroika) included:

- Law on State Enterprises (1987): Gave factories autonomy from central planning — but created chaos as old system broke down without a new one replacing it
- Law on Cooperatives (1988): Legalised small private businesses — the first legal private enterprise since NEP
- Results: Perestroika worsened the economic situation. By 1990, food shortages, inflation, and declining production plagued the USSR. GDP fell ~2% in 1990 and ~12% in 1991

Glasnost: Openness

Glasnost (from 1986) opened public discourse:

- Chernobyl (26 April 1986): Initially covered up, then revealed — becoming a symbol of the system's dishonesty
- Historical revelations: Stalin's crimes acknowledged; Bukharin rehabilitated (1988); Katyń massacre admitted
- Press freedom: Magazines like Ogonyok and Moscow News published once-forbidden material
- Cultural liberalisation: Films, literature, music previously banned

Demokratizatsiya: Political Reform

- Congress of People's Deputies elections (March 1989): First contested elections since 1917; televised debates captivated the nation
- Article 6 of the Constitution (guaranteeing the Communist Party's leading role) was repealed in February 1990
- Boris Yeltsin emerged as a populist challenger — elected President of the Russian SFSR in June 1991

New Political Thinking, INF and the end of the Cold War

Gorbachev's foreign policy marked a more decisive break with Soviet orthodoxy than perestroika or glasnost, and its consequences reshaped the international system. The core concept was Novoye myshleniye, the New Political Thinking articulated in his 1987 book Perestroika and in speeches to the Twenty-seventh Party Congress and the United Nations. Gorbachev argued that the traditional Marxist-Leninist categories of class struggle and imperial rivalry could not adequately address the global problems of the nuclear age, that interdependence required cooperation between systems, and that defensive sufficiency should replace the open-ended arms race. Eduard Shevardnadze, appointed foreign minister in July 1985, and Anatoly Chernyaev, his foreign policy adviser, translated this philosophical framework into a negotiating programme that astonished Western counterparts for its willingness to make asymmetric concessions.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty signed by Reagan and Gorbachev in Washington on 8 December 1987 was the first agreement to abolish an entire class of nuclear weapons, including the SS-20s deployed in eastern Europe and the Pershing II and cruise missiles that NATO had counter-deployed in western Europe from 1983. The treaty included intrusive verification measures that the Soviet Union had previously refused, and it set the pattern for the START process that produced the first strategic arms reduction in 1991. The decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, announced in February 1988 and completed on 15 February 1989 under the command of General Boris Gromov, ended a nine-year war that had killed approximately fifteen thousand Soviet soldiers and an estimated one million Afghans. Gorbachev's concluding comment, that the war had been a bleeding wound, acknowledged that the intervention had failed on its own terms and undermined the moral authority of the regime inside the Soviet Union as well as internationally.

1989 in Central Europe

The most consequential application of New Political Thinking was in Eastern Europe, where Gorbachev repeatedly signalled to local leaders that the Soviet Union would not intervene to preserve communist governments. The signal was explicit in private conversations from 1986 onwards and public by the summer of 1989, when Shevardnadze formally renounced the Brezhnev Doctrine in what became known as the Sinatra Doctrine, each state doing it its own way. The consequences unfolded with a speed that surprised even the reformers.

In Poland, the strikes of May and August 1988 forced the Jaruzelski government to open Round Table negotiations with Solidarity in February 1989. The Round Table Accords of April 1989 permitted partially free elections on 4 June in which Solidarity candidates won all but one of the seats for which they were allowed to stand. In August Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister in the Soviet bloc since 1948. In Hungary, reformist communists around Miklós Németh and Gyula Horn opened the country's border with Austria in May 1989 and then removed the barbed wire in a ceremony on 27 June, creating the physical breach through which tens of thousands of East Germans would cross into the West during the summer. The Hungarian Communist Party dissolved itself and reconstituted as the Socialist Party in October, and free elections in the spring of 1990 ended the communist monopoly.

In the German Democratic Republic, the regime of Erich Honecker attempted to resist the wave of reform and was engulfed by it. The mass demonstrations in Leipzig from September 1989 reached hundreds of thousands, the border crossings in Berlin were overwhelmed on the evening of 9 November, and within days the Berlin Wall was being dismantled by the public with pickaxes. In Czechoslovakia the Velvet Revolution began with a student demonstration on 17 November and ended with the installation of Václav Havel as president on 29 December. In Bulgaria the reformist wing of the Party removed Todor Zhivkov on 10 November. Only in Romania did the transition produce violence, with the revolution of 16 to 25 December 1989 culminating in the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu on Christmas Day.

The significance of 1989 for Paper 3 is that the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe was not imposed from outside but produced by the interaction of local pressure and Soviet non-intervention. Gorbachev's decision to refuse the Brezhnev Doctrine was the essential international condition for the transformations, but the specific forms they took were determined by local actors and local balances. The process also fed back into Soviet politics, because the spectacle of communist parties collapsing in neighbouring states accelerated the delegitimation of the Soviet system itself and encouraged the nationalist movements inside the union republics.

The Rise of Nationalism

Glasnost unleashed nationalist movements across the USSR:

- Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania formed popular fronts (1988); demanded independence
- Georgia: Tbilisi massacre (9 April 1989) — Soviet troops killed 21 protesters
- Armenia-Azerbaijan: Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (from 1988)
- Declarations of sovereignty: All 15 republics declared sovereignty by 1990

The Collapse (1991)

- August Coup (19–21 August 1991): Hardliners attempted to overthrow Gorbachev. Yeltsin rallied resistance from atop a tank outside the Russian parliament. The coup failed within three days
- Belavezha Accords (8 December 1991): Leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus declared the USSR "had ceased to exist" and created the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States)
- 25 December 1991: Gorbachev resigned; the Soviet flag was lowered over the Kremlin for the last time

Historiography

Archie Brown
(The Gorbachev Factor, 1996): Gorbachev was an "essential individual" — his personal choices drove reform. Without him, the system could have continued for years.

Stephen Kotkin
(Armageddon Averted, 2001): Structural economic decay made the system unsustainable. Any Soviet leader would have faced the same crisis; Gorbachev's choices merely determined the form of collapse.

Robert Service
(The End of the Cold War, 2015): International factors (Reagan's pressure, arms race costs) combined with internal decay.

Chapter summary

Gorbachev inherited a Soviet system whose underlying problems he diagnosed more honestly than any of his predecessors. Perestroika sought to restructure the planning system through market-style incentives and the partial legalisation of private enterprise, but the reforms destabilised the old system faster than they could build a new one. Glasnost opened public discussion of Soviet history and contemporary failings in ways that delegitimated the Party's historical narrative. Demokratizatsiya produced the first contested elections since 1917 and released nationalist movements in the republics that demanded first autonomy and then independence. Foreign policy achieved the most dramatic successes of the period, with the INF Treaty, the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the acceptance of the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe. The attempted coup of August 1991 failed but destroyed the authority of the central government, and the Belavezha Accords of December dissolved the Union. Gorbachev's personal achievement was to preside over a peaceful end of the Cold War. His tragedy was to lose control of the internal political process that his own reforms had set in motion.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Perestroika	The economic restructuring programme of market-oriented reform inside a socialist framework
Glasnost	The policy of openness in public discussion of Soviet history and current problems
Demokratizatsiya	The programme of introducing contested elections and reducing the Party's monopoly
Law on State Enterprises	The 1987 law granting Soviet enterprises autonomy from central planning
Law on Cooperatives	The 1988 law legalising small private businesses
Article 6	The constitutional clause guaranteeing the Party's leading role, repealed in February 1990
Congress of People's Deputies	The new legislature elected in March 1989 in the first contested elections since 1917
New Political Thinking	Gorbachev's foreign policy doctrine stressing interdependence and defensive sufficiency
INF Treaty	The 1987 agreement with the United States abolishing intermediate-range nuclear missiles
Sinatra Doctrine	The informal renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine in 1989
Round Table	The Polish negotiation format of February to April 1989 between the government and Solidarity
Velvet Revolution	The peaceful Czechoslovak transition of November and December 1989
Belavezha Accords	The December 1991 agreement dissolving the USSR and establishing the CIS

Questions

1. Evaluate the reasons for the failure of perestroika.
2. To what extent was Gorbachev responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union?
3. Examine the significance of the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe for the politics of the Soviet Union.

4. "The collapse of the Soviet Union was the result of structural decay, not of Gorbachev's errors." Discuss.
5. Compare the ways in which Khrushchev and Gorbachev tried to reform the Soviet system.

Chapter 16: Yeltsin and Post-Soviet Russia (1991–2000)

Summary of events

Boris Yeltsin took over from Gorbachev on 25 December 1991 as president of a new state, the Russian Federation, whose territory, resources and population he had wrested from the Soviet Union he was now formally leaving behind. The nine years of his presidency combined a brutal shock therapy that plunged a substantial fraction of the population into poverty, a violent constitutional crisis in October 1993 that ended with tank shells striking the parliament building, the first Chechen war that destroyed Grozny without defeating the guerrilla resistance, a privatisation programme that transferred the commanding heights of the Russian economy to a small group of oligarchs, a near-defeat in the 1996 presidential election rescued by the financial resources and the media control of those same oligarchs, the financial crisis of August 1998 that wiped out the savings of the Russian middle class, and the hand-over of power on 31 December 1999 to Vladimir Putin. The 1993 Constitution established a super-presidential system that Putin would inherit and perfect. The regime Yeltsin left behind preserved elections, political pluralism and a free press in ways that the Soviet Union had never permitted, but it also institutionalised oligarchic capitalism, executive dominance and the political use of security services that defined Russian politics long after his retirement.

Key questions addressed in this chapter

1. What were the aims, methods and consequences of shock therapy?
2. Examine the political significance of the October 1993 crisis.
3. Evaluate the causes and outcomes of the First Chechen War.
4. To what extent did loans-for-shares and the 1996 election shape the character of Russian democracy?
5. Analyse the reasons for the financial crisis of 1998 and the political transition to Putin.

Timeline of Chapter 16

25 December 1991	Gorbachev resigns. Yeltsin assumes power over the Russian Federation
2 January 1992	Shock therapy begins. Price liberalisation
1992	Voucher privatisation
21 September 1993	Yeltsin dissolves parliament by decree
3–4 October 1993	Shelling of the parliament building
12 December 1993	New Russian Constitution adopted in referendum
11 December 1994	First Chechen war begins
1995	Loans-for-shares scheme
1995	Budennovsk hospital siege by Shamil Basayev
June–July 1996	Yeltsin re-elected President

31 August 1996	Khasavyurt ceasefire
17 August 1998	Russian financial default and ruble collapse
9 August 1999	Putin appointed Prime Minister
September 1999	Apartment bombings. Second Chechen war begins
31 December 1999	Yeltsin resigns. Putin becomes Acting President

Shock Therapy (1992)

On 2 January 1992, acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar launched "shock therapy" — the overnight transition from a command to a market economy:

- Price liberalisation: Freed prices from state control → inflation of 2,500% in 1992
- Privatisation: State assets distributed through voucher privatisation — in practice, insiders acquired vast enterprises for kopecks
- Social impact: An estimated 140 million Russians fell below the poverty line. GDP fell ~40% between 1991 and 1998
- J.K. Galbraith's verdict: "All shock, no therapy."

The October 1993 Crisis

Conflict between Yeltsin and the Russian parliament (Supreme Soviet) over economic policy and constitutional powers escalated into violence:

- 21 September 1993: Yeltsin dissolved parliament — an unconstitutional act
- 3–4 October 1993: Armed standoff; Yeltsin ordered the army to shell the parliament building (the White House). Approximately 500 people killed
- December 1993: New constitution adopted — creating a super-presidential system with a weak Duma

> **Abbott Gleason**
> : The 1993 Constitution was "the turning point" — it "created a potential for the concentration of autocratic power in the presidency."

The First Chechen War (1994–1996)

The war in Chechnya deserves more than the bullet treatment it often receives in summary accounts, because it reveals more about the Yeltsin regime than any other single episode. The background lay in the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic followed the pattern of other autonomies in declaring sovereignty in November 1990 and then, under the leadership of the former Soviet air force general Dzhokhar Dudayev, proclaimed full independence in November 1991. Moscow initially ignored the declaration, distracted by the larger crises of the Union, but by late 1994 the combination of Dudayev's anti-Moscow rhetoric, the cross-border trade in stolen goods and the political calculation that a rapid military operation would boost Yeltsin's declining approval ratings produced the decision for war.

Russian forces crossed into Chechnya on 11 December 1994. The operation was badly planned, poorly equipped and catastrophically mismanaged. The assault on Grozny on New Year's Eve 1994 sent armoured columns into a city without adequate infantry support, and the Chechen defenders destroyed the lead tanks in a defile near the railway station that became the symbolic image of Russian military incompetence. The subsequent siege of Grozny destroyed the city through artillery and aerial bombardment, and the pattern was repeated in other Chechen urban centres. Civilian casualties were the overwhelming majority of the estimated fifty to one hundred thousand dead. The Russian army never achieved political control of the countryside, and the Chechen commander Aslan Maskhadov combined conventional defence with devastating raids, including the Budennovsk hospital siege of June 1995 under Shamil Basayev and the Pervomaiskoye raid of January 1996. Dudayev was killed by a Russian missile strike guided by his satellite phone in April 1996, but the war continued. In August 1996 Chechen fighters retook Grozny in a counter-offensive that humiliated the Russian garrison, and Alexander Lebed signed the Khasavyurt Accord on 31 August 1996 that postponed the question of independence for five years.

The political significance of the First Chechen War was twofold. First, it destroyed the reputation of the Russian army and exposed the collapse of state capacity that shock therapy and the 1993 crisis had produced. Second, it revealed the character of Yeltsin's presidency, combining brutal action against political challenges, contempt for parliamentary supervision, institutional improvisation and ultimately tactical flexibility when the costs became politically unsustainable. Vladimir Putin's decision in September 1999 to launch the second Chechen war following the apartment bombings attributed to Chechen militants can be understood only against the background of the first war, because it was both a revanche for the humiliation of 1996 and a political operation designed to consolidate a new leader around a popular cause. The two Chechen wars together shaped Russian political culture and Russian civil-military relations for a generation.

Loans-for-shares, the oligarchs and media power

The loans-for-shares scheme of 1995 was the decisive step in the creation of the Russian oligarchy, and its significance for the 1996 election and beyond requires a fuller treatment than the basic narrative allows. The scheme emerged from a convergence of interests between a group of ambitious financiers, chiefly Vladimir Potanin of Oneksim Bank, Mikhail Khodorkovsky of Menatep, Boris Berezovsky, whose interests ran from Logovaz car dealerships to television, Vladimir Gusinsky of Most-Bank, and Alexander Smolensky of SBS-Agro, and a government desperate for cash during a collapsing budgetary year. Under the scheme, approved by presidential decree in August 1995, the banks lent the federal government hundreds of millions of dollars and received in return the shares of major state-owned enterprises as collateral. When the government inevitably defaulted, the banks held rigged auctions at which they bought the shares for themselves at a fraction of their real value. In this way Khodorkovsky acquired Yukos, the oil major, for 309 million dollars, Potanin acquired Norilsk Nickel for 170 million, Roman Abramovich and Berezovsky together acquired Sibneft, and the commanding heights of the Russian economy passed into a small number of hands.

Media power was the other face of the same process. Berezovsky controlled ORT, which became Channel One in Russian broadcasting, a network whose coverage reached the entire country through former Soviet terrestrial infrastructure. Gusinsky controlled NTV, the most professional of the Russian television networks, and the magazine Itogi. Independent newspapers such as Kommersant were also consolidated under oligarch ownership. When Yeltsin's approval rating collapsed to approximately five per cent in January 1996 under the combined impact of shock therapy, the October 1993 crisis and the Chechen war, the oligarchs confronted the prospect that the communist candidate Gennadiy Zyuganov might be elected and initiate a process of renationalisation and criminal investigation that would threaten their acquisitions. Their response was to combine behind Yeltsin. They financed the campaign far beyond its legal limits, they coordinated

overwhelming media coverage through ORT and NTV that depicted Zyuganov as the return of Stalinism, and they secured a ten billion dollar IMF loan that allowed the government to pay wage and pension arrears in the weeks before the vote. Yeltsin won fifty-four per cent in the second round on 3 July 1996.

Lilia Shevtsova has called this episode the original sin of Russian democracy, because the election preserved the formal institutions of a democratic state while demonstrating that the outcome could be purchased by a narrow elite acting in combination with the executive. The oligarchs imagined that they had become the permanent partners of the presidency. The arrangement proved less stable than they thought. Gusinsky was pressured into selling NTV to Gazprom after Putin took power and emigrated in 2001. Berezovsky lost control of ORT in 2000 and went into exile in London. Khodorkovsky was arrested in October 2003 on tax and fraud charges and spent ten years in prison before his release in 2013. The structure of oligarchic capitalism combined with executive dominance that Yeltsin and the oligarchs built in the mid-1990s survived Putin's consolidation, but the specific set of individuals at the top of it did not.

The 1998 Financial Crisis and Putin's Rise

- 17 August 1998: Russia defaulted on its debt; the ruble collapsed (lost 75% of its value)
- Primakov (PM September 1998 – May 1999) stabilised the situation
- Vladimir Putin appointed PM in August 1999; launched the Second Chechen War (popularity soared)
- 31 December 1999: Yeltsin resigned, making Putin Acting President

Historiography

Lilia Shevtsova
(Yeltsin's Russia, 1999): Yeltsin created the institutional framework for future autocracy. The super-presidential constitution, the oligarchic economy, and the precedent of using force against parliament were his "original sin."

Michael McFaul
(Russia's Unfinished Revolution, 2001): Yeltsin was a "flawed democrat" — he preserved elections and press freedom but hollowed out democratic institutions.

Stephen Kotkin
(Armageddon Averted, 2001): The 1990s were not the failure of democracy but the chaotic birth of a new system — messy but not catastrophic by historical standards.

Chapter summary

Yeltsin inherited a state stripped of its Soviet apparatus and faced a task of economic transformation without precedent in modern history. Shock therapy launched by Gaidar in January 1992 liberalised prices, introduced voucher privatisation and destroyed the savings of the Russian middle class. The political conflict of 1993 was resolved by the shelling of the parliament, producing a constitution that concentrated power in the presidency. The First Chechen War demonstrated the hollowing out of Russian state capacity and concluded with the humiliating Khasavyurt Accord. Loans-for-shares created a small oligarchic class that rescued Yeltsin in 1996 and received in return a political system in which formal democracy coexisted with executive dominance and oligarchic influence. The 1998 financial crisis and the appointment of Putin in August 1999 completed the political sequence that ended in Yeltsin's resignation on the last day of 1999. The regime that emerged preserved more of the forms of pluralism than the Soviet Union had ever permitted, but it also institutionalised the structures that would underwrite authoritarian consolidation under his successor.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Shock therapy	The package of price liberalisation and privatisation introduced by Gaidar in January 1992
Voucher privatisation	The 1992 distribution of privatisation vouchers to every citizen, which insiders bought up for a fraction of their face value
October 1993 crisis	The armed confrontation between Yeltsin and the parliament, ended by the shelling of the White House
Super-presidential constitution	The 1993 constitution that gave the president dominant powers over parliament and government
First Chechen War	The 1994 to 1996 conflict between Russia and Chechen separatists
Loans-for-shares	The 1995 scheme through which a small group of bankers acquired the commanding heights of the economy
Oligarchs	The financial-industrial group including Berezovsky, Khodorkovsky, Gusinsky, Potanin and Abramovich that emerged from loans-for-shares
ORT and NTV	The television networks controlled respectively by Berezovsky and Gusinsky that dominated media coverage of the 1996 election
1998 default	The August 1998 Russian debt default and ruble collapse
Apartment bombings	The September 1999 bombings of apartment blocks in Moscow and other cities, attributed to Chechen militants
Khasavyurt Accord	The August 1996 ceasefire ending the First Chechen War

Questions

1. Evaluate the consequences of shock therapy for Russian society.
2. Examine the political significance of the October 1993 crisis.
3. "The 1993 Constitution laid the foundations for authoritarian consolidation under Putin." Discuss.
4. Analyse the role of the oligarchs in the politics of the 1990s.

5. To what extent did the First Chechen War reveal the weaknesses of the Yeltsin state?

End of Part III. Continue to Part IV: Exam Preparation.

PART IV: EXAM PREPARATION

Chapter 17: IB Command Terms Guide

Recognising the command term is the first thing you should do when you see an exam question. It determines the structure of your entire answer.

The Six Essential Command Terms

Command Term	Definition	Key Requirement	Essay Structure
Evaluate	Make an appraisal by weighing strengths and limitations	Reach a judgement	Strengths → Limitations → Judgement
To what extent	Measure the degree to which something is true	Establish a spectrum (fully/partially/minimally)	Named factor → Alternatives → Degree judgement
Discuss	Offer a considered and balanced review	Present multiple perspectives	Perspective A → Perspective B → Synthesis
Examine	Consider an argument, uncovering assumptions and interrelationships	Go beneath the surface	Assumption → Connections → Complexity
Analyse	Break down to identify essential elements and patterns	Decompose into parts	Element 1 → Element 2 → Relationships
Compare & contrast	Give account of similarities and differences	Use a running comparison	Theme 1 (both) → Theme 2 (both) → Theme 3 (both)

The Golden Rule

> **Always address the factor named in the question FIRST, then consider alternatives.**
> The IB examiner report consistently criticises candidates who ignore the named factor.

Common Mistakes

- "Evaluate" → Listing pros and cons without weighing them or reaching a judgement
- "Discuss" → Presenting only one side of the argument
- "Examine" → Writing a narrative instead of uncovering assumptions
- "To what extent" → Ignoring the named factor and jumping to "favourite" arguments
- "Compare & contrast" → Writing two separate descriptions instead of a running comparison

Worked PEEL paragraph examples by command term

The difference between a five-mark answer and a thirteen-mark answer rarely lies in the amount of factual knowledge that the candidate possesses. It usually lies in the candidate's ability to deploy that knowledge inside a paragraph that answers the command term. The following examples show what a well-constructed PEEL paragraph looks like for each of the six essential terms, using content drawn from the main chapters of this book.

Evaluate. Question: Evaluate the effectiveness of Nazi economic policy between 1933 and 1939. "Nazi economic policy achieved short-term success in eliminating unemployment but did so in ways that made long-term economic stability impossible. When Hitler came to power in January 1933, about six million Germans were registered as unemployed. By 1938, under the combination of Schacht's Mefo bills, rearmament spending, autobahn construction and conscription, that figure had fallen below three hundred thousand. The recovery was genuine and politically decisive, since it underwrote the regime's popular legitimacy and its claim to have solved problems that Weimar could not. However, the structure of the recovery was fiscally unsustainable. As Adam Tooze has shown in The Wages of Destruction, Mefo bills functioned as disguised deficit financing that would fall due in 1940, and the drive toward autarky failed to secure domestic supplies of oil and rubber that a prolonged war would require. The Four-Year Plan under Göring from 1936 accelerated this logic rather than mitigating it. Evaluated against the narrow criterion of unemployment, Nazi policy was a success. Evaluated against the broader criterion of an economy that could sustain peace, it was a failure that made war the regime's only financial exit."

To what extent. Question: To what extent was Hitler's appointment as chancellor the result of the Great Depression? "The Great Depression was the necessary, but not the sufficient, cause of Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933. Without the depression, the Nazi vote would not have risen from 2.6 per cent in May 1928 to 37.3 per cent in July 1932, because the economic catastrophe destroyed the political centre and drove voters to the extremes. Six million registered unemployed, the collapse of Muller's grand coalition in 1930 and the reliance on Article 48 decrees were all products of the depression. Yet none of these conditions made Hitler's appointment inevitable. The conservative politicians around Hindenburg, in particular Franz von Papen, still had to calculate that placing Hitler in a coalition cabinet with only three Nazi ministers would allow them to control him, a calculation that Ian Kershaw has called one of the greatest political miscalculations of the twentieth century. The depression explains why the Nazi Party was available as a mass movement. Von Papen's decision explains why the movement reached the chancellorship. To a significant extent the depression caused Hitler's appointment, but not entirely, and the residual explanatory weight belongs to the failure of elite judgement in the first weeks of 1933."

Compare and contrast. Question: Compare and contrast the methods used by Hitler and Mussolini to consolidate power. "Hitler and Mussolini used overlapping but distinct methods to transform initial appointments into personal dictatorships, and the differences are as revealing as the similarities. Both began from minority parliamentary positions that exploited constitutional mechanisms inherited from their predecessors, Hitler through the Reichstag Fire Decree and the Enabling Act of March 1933, Mussolini through the Acerbo Law of November 1923. Both used emergency legislation to ban rival parties and dissolve independent trade unions, with the Fascistissime laws of 1925 to 1926 corresponding to the successive Nazi prohibitions in the spring and summer of 1933. Yet the tempo and the targets differed. Hitler completed consolidation within eighteen months, culminating in the Night of the Long Knives and the oath of loyalty after Hindenburg's death in August 1934. Mussolini took nearly four years, moved more cautiously through the Matteotti crisis of 1924 and the speech of January 1925, and never eliminated the monarchy as a potential rival, a structural limitation that allowed Victor Emmanuel III to dismiss him in July 1943. Both leaders relied on paramilitary violence and charismatic authority, but Hitler's Germany moved faster and further toward

totalitarianism, while Mussolini's Italy accepted coexistence with the crown, the Church and the traditional army as the price of legitimacy. The comparison shows that the formal methods of fascist consolidation converged, while the underlying political constraints diverged."

These three examples share the same structure. A clear topic sentence that answers the question, followed by specific evidence with dates and names, followed by explanation that tells the examiner what the evidence means, followed by a concluding sentence that links back to the command term. Candidates who practise writing individual paragraphs to this standard before they attempt full essays will build the muscle memory that the examination demands.

Chapter 18: Essay Writing Technique

The 3-Part Introduction Formula

Every Paper 3 essay introduction should contain three elements in two to four sentences:

Element	Purpose	Example Starter
1. THESIS	A clear, arguable claim answering the question	"While X played a significant role…"
2. SCOPE	Define time period, region, examples	"…between 1926 and 1935 in Poland…"
3. SIGNPOST	Outline the argument structure	"…this essay will examine political, economic, and social factors."

Templates by Command Term

Evaluate: "While [topic] had clear [strengths], its [limitations] suggest that [judgement]. This essay will weigh [factor A] against [factor B], drawing on [scope]."

To what extent: "[Factor] was [to a great/limited extent] responsible for [outcome], though [alternatives] also played a role. This essay will argue that [degree]."

Discuss: "[Topic] has generated considerable debate. While [Perspective A argues…], [Perspective B contends…]. This essay will assess both positions."

Examine: "The question assumes that [assumption]. However, closer examination reveals [complexity]. This essay will uncover the interrelationships between [factors]."

Compare & contrast: "[Case A] and [Case B] shared [similarity] yet diverged in [difference]. Through a running comparison, this essay will argue that [judgement]."

PEEL Paragraph Structure

Letter	Element	What It Does
P	Point	Topic sentence answering the question
E	Evidence	Specific facts, dates, statistics, named individuals
E	Explanation	Analysis of WHY the evidence matters
L	Link	Connection back to the question / thesis

The 15-Mark Markbands

Band	Marks	Descriptor
5	13–15	Focused, analytical, well-structured. Relevant, accurate evidence. Awareness of historiographical debate. Clear argument throughout.
4	10–12	Mostly analytical with relevant evidence. Some awareness of different perspectives. Good structure.
3	7–9	Mix of analysis and narrative. Evidence present but not always well-deployed. Some structure.
2	4–6	Mostly descriptive. Limited evidence. Weak structure.
1	1–3	Very limited knowledge. No clear argument or structure.

Time Management

- Paper 3: 3 essays in 2 hours 30 minutes = about 50 minutes per essay
- Recommended split: 5–7 min plan → about 40 min write → 3 min review
- Plan structure: thesis + 3-4 paragraph topics + key evidence for each

Chapter 19: Practice Exam Questions

Section 12 — Imperial Russia (1853–1924)

1. "To what extent were Alexander II's reforms a response to the Crimean War?" Hint: Crimean War exposed weaknesses, but also consider internal pressures (serfdom, economic backwardness, intelligentsia criticism).
2. "Evaluate the claim that Alexander III's policies were entirely reactionary." Hint: Counter-reforms yes, but also Witte's industrialisation began under Alexander III.
3. "Examine the causes of the 1905 Revolution." Hint: Russo-Japanese War as trigger, but deeper causes — industrialisation, urban poverty, political opposition, Bloody Sunday.
4. "To what extent was World War I responsible for the February Revolution of 1917?" Hint: WWI was catalyst, but pre-war tensions (Stolypin's failure, Duma limitations, social unrest) were necessary conditions.
5. "Evaluate the role of Lenin in the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917." Hint: April Theses, tactical decisions, BUT also Trotsky's role, Provisional Government weakness, Kornilov Affair.
6. "Discuss the view that the Russian Civil War was won by Red strengths rather than White weaknesses." Hint: Red advantages (Trotsky, central position, discipline) vs White weaknesses (disunity, no programme, geography).
7. "To what extent did War Communism threaten Bolshevik power more than it secured it?" Hint: Economic collapse, Kronstadt, BUT also won the Civil War. NEP as admission of failure.
8. "Examine the significance of the NEP for the consolidation of Bolshevik rule." Hint: Economic recovery, BUT ideological retreat. "State capitalism." Set up succession debate (Left vs Right).

Section 14 — Interwar States

Poland: 1. "To what extent was Piłsudski's May Coup a result of the failures of parliamentary democracy?" 2. "Evaluate the effectiveness of economic policies in interwar Poland." 3. "Discuss the challenges of nation-building in a multiethnic state with reference to Poland." 4. "To what extent did the Sanacja regime represent a break with democratic governance?" 5. "'Poland's foreign policy was shaped more by geography than ideology.' Discuss." 6. "Examine the treatment of ethnic minorities in interwar Poland." 7. "Compare and contrast the methods used by Piłsudski and one other interwar authoritarian leader."

Germany: 1. "To what extent was the Great Depression responsible for Hitler's rise to power?" 2. "Evaluate the methods used by the Nazis to consolidate power in 1933–1934." 3. "Examine the nature of the Nazi state: was it totalitarian or chaotic?" 4. "To what extent were Nazi economic policies successful?" 5. "'The Holocaust was the inevitable outcome of Nazi ideology.' Discuss."

Italy: 1. "Evaluate the reasons for Mussolini's rise to power by 1925." 2. "To what extent was Fascist Italy a totalitarian state?" 3. "Examine the domestic policies of Mussolini's government." 4. "Discuss the view that the Lateran Pacts were Mussolini's greatest domestic achievement." 5. "Evaluate the effectiveness of Mussolini's foreign policy."

Spain: 1. "Examine the reasons for the failure of the Restoration system in Spain." 2. "To what extent was the Second Republic responsible for the outbreak of the Civil War?" 3. "Evaluate the significance of foreign intervention in the Spanish Civil War." 4. "Discuss the reasons for Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War." 5. "'Franco was a fascist.' To what extent do you agree?" 6. "Examine the impact of the Spanish Civil War on Spanish society." 7. "Compare and contrast the origins of authoritarianism in Spain and one other interwar state."

Portugal: 1. "To what extent was the collapse of the Portuguese First Republic inevitable?" 2. "Evaluate the methods used by Salazar to establish and maintain the Estado Novo." 3. "'Salazar was an authoritarian, not a fascist.' Discuss." 4. "To what extent were Salazar's economic policies successful in modernising Portugal?" 5. "Examine the role of the Catholic Church in sustaining the Estado Novo."

France: 1. "To what extent was France's interwar political instability a product of the Third Republic's design?" 2. "Evaluate the achievements and limitations of the Popular Front (1936–1938)." 3. "'6 February 1934 was the most serious threat to French democracy.' Discuss." 4. "To what extent was French foreign policy shaped by the experience of World War I?" 5. "Examine the reasons for the fall of France in 1940."

Section 16 — Soviet & Post-Soviet Russia (1924–2000)

1. "Evaluate Stalin's economic policies between 1928 and 1941." Hint: Industrialisation success vs human cost (collectivisation famine, Gulag labour). Weigh growth against suffering.
2. "To what extent was the Great Terror a product of Stalin's personality?" Hint: Intentionalist (Conquest) vs structuralist (Getty). Personality vs systemic factors.
3. "Examine the impact of World War II on Soviet society and politics." Hint: 27M dead, patriotic mobilisation, post-war Stalinism, Cold War, superpower status.
4. "Evaluate Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation programme." Hint: Secret Speech courage, BUT incomplete (didn't address system), Hungarian backlash.
5. "Discuss the view that the Brezhnev era was one of 'stagnation.'" Hint: Economic decline yes, BUT also stability, détente, space programme. "Stability of cadres."
6. "To what extent did Gorbachev's reforms cause the collapse of the USSR?" Hint: Perestroika/glasnost/demokratizatsiya unleashed forces, BUT structural economic decay was pre-existing.
7. "Evaluate the successes and failures of Yeltsin's rule, 1992–2000." Hint: Destroyed command economy, held elections, BUT poverty, October 1993, Chechnya, oligarchs.
8. "Discuss the view that the collapse of the USSR was inevitable." Hint: Structural arguments (economy, nationalities) vs contingent (Gorbachev's choices, coup failure).

Mapping practice questions to chapters

The questions above are most useful when a candidate returns from them to the relevant chapters of this book rather than attempting to answer from unstructured memory. The following table lists every practice question by its section and shows the chapters and sections in which the main evidence can be found. Used as a revision grid, it turns an apparently intimidating question bank into a cycle of focused reading and essay planning.

Question	Primary chapters and sections
Section 12 Q1 Alexander II reforms and Crimean War	Chapter 1 sections on the Crimean War and the Great Reforms, end-of-chapter historiography
Section 12 Q2 Alexander III reactionary	Chapter 2 on counter-reforms and on economic modernisation under Witte
Section 12 Q3 Causes of 1905	Chapter 3 on Witte's industrialisation, the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 Revolution
Section 12 Q4 First World War and February Revolution	Chapter 3 pre-war conditions, Chapter 4 sections on the impact of the war and the February Revolution
Section 12 Q5 Role of Lenin in October	Chapter 4 sections on dual power, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, road to October and October Revolution
Section 12 Q6 Civil War Red strengths or White weaknesses	Chapter 5 section on the Civil War
Section 12 Q7 War Communism	Chapter 5 sections on War Communism and Kronstadt
Section 12 Q8 NEP significance	Chapter 5 sections on NEP and Lenin's death
Section 14 Poland Q1 May Coup	Chapter 6 sections 6.2 and 6.3
Section 14 Poland Q2 economic policies	Chapter 6 section 6.4
Section 14 Poland Q3 nation-building	Chapter 6 sections 6.1 and 6.5
Section 14 Poland Q4 Sanacja break	Chapter 6 sections 6.3 and comparative table
Section 14 Poland Q5 foreign policy	Chapter 6 section 6.6
Section 14 Poland Q6 minorities	Chapter 6 section 6.5
Section 14 Poland Q7 comparison	Chapter 6 plus Chapter 11.5
Section 14 Germany Q1 Depression and Hitler's rise	Chapter 7 section 7.1 plus historiography
Section 14 Germany Q2 consolidation	Chapter 7 sections 7.1 and 7.2
Section 14 Germany Q3 totalitarian or chaotic	Chapter 7 sections 7.4 and 7.4 propaganda
Section 14 Germany Q4 economic policy	Chapter 7 section 7.3
Section 14 Germany Q5 Holocaust inevitability	Chapter 7 section 7.3 racial policy and historiography

Question	Primary chapters and sections
Section 14 Italy Q1 rise to power	Chapter 8 sections 8.1 and 8.2
Section 14 Italy Q2 totalitarian	Chapter 8 section 8.4
Section 14 Italy Q3 domestic policies	Chapter 8 sections 8.3 and IRI/autarky
Section 14 Italy Q4 Lateran Pacts	Chapter 8 section 8.3
Section 14 Italy Q5 foreign policy	Chapter 8 section 8.5 and Ethiopian War in depth
Section 14 Spain Q1 Restoration	Chapter 9 section 9.1
Section 14 Spain Q2 Second Republic responsible	Chapter 9 section 9.2
Section 14 Spain Q3 foreign intervention	Chapter 9 section 9.3
Section 14 Spain Q4 Franco's victory	Chapter 9 sections 9.3 and 9.4
Section 14 Spain Q5 Franco fascist	Chapter 9 section 9.4
Section 14 Spain Q6 Civil War impact	Chapter 9 section 9.4
Section 14 Spain Q7 comparison	Chapter 9 plus Chapter 11.5
Section 14 Portugal Q1 First Republic	Chapter 10 section 10.1
Section 14 Portugal Q2 Estado Novo methods	Chapter 10 section 10.3
Section 14 Portugal Q3 authoritarian not fascist	Chapter 10 section 10.3
Section 14 Portugal Q4 economic policies	Chapter 10 section 10.4
Section 14 Portugal Q5 Church	Chapter 10 sections 10.3 and 10.4
Section 14 France Q1 instability Third Republic design	Chapter 11 sections 11.1 and 11.2
Section 14 France Q2 Popular Front	Chapter 11 section 11.3
Section 14 France Q3 6 February 1934	Chapter 11 section 11.2

Question	Primary chapters and sections
Section 14 France Q4 foreign policy First World War	Chapter 11 sections 11.1 and 11.4
Section 14 France Q5 fall of France	Chapter 11 section 11.5
Section 16 Q1 Stalin economic policies	Chapter 12 sections on collectivisation and Five Year Plans
Section 16 Q2 Great Terror and personality	Chapter 12 sections on terror and historiography
Section 16 Q3 Second World War impact	Chapter 12 sections on war and late Stalinism, nationalities and deportations
Section 16 Q4 de-Stalinisation	Chapter 13 sections on Secret Speech and domestic reforms
Section 16 Q5 Brezhnev stagnation	Chapter 14 sections on stagnation and historiography
Section 16 Q6 Gorbachev collapse	Chapter 15 all sections
Section 16 Q7 Yeltsin success and failure	Chapter 16 all sections
Section 16 Q8 collapse inevitable	Chapter 15 historiography with Chapter 12 and 14 background

Chapter 20: Historiography Quick Reference

Section 12 — Imperial Russia

Historian	Key Work	Main Argument	Useful For
Orlando Figes	A People's Tragedy (1996)	Revolution as popular tragedy, not just elite politics	Social history of revolution
Richard Pipes	The Russian Revolution (1990)	Revolution as conspiracy by a ruthless minority	Intentionalist/conservative view
Sheila Fitzpatrick	The Russian Revolution (1982)	Revolution as social process with genuine popular support	Revisionist/social history
Robert Service	Lenin: A Biography (2000)	Lenin as pragmatic tactician, not pure ideologue	Balanced assessment of Lenin
E.H. Carr	The Bolshevik Revolution (1950-53)	Structural analysis of revolutionary transformation	Economic/institutional analysis
Edward Acton	Rethinking the Russian Revolution (1990)	Survey of historiographical debates	Understanding different interpretations

Section 14 — Interwar States

Historian	Key Work	Main Argument	Useful For
Norman Davies	God's Playground (1981)	Poland in European context; Sanacja as "grey zone"	Poland — balanced assessment
Antony Polonsky	Politics in Independent Poland (1972)	Critical of democratic failure; Brest trials as precedent	Poland — democratic breakdown
Ian Kershaw	Hitler (1998-2000)	"Working towards the Führer" — intentionalist/structuralist synthesis	Germany — nature of Nazi state
Martin Broszat	The Hitler State (1981)	Polycratic chaos, not totalitarian efficiency	Germany — structuralist view
R.J.B. Bosworth	Mussolini's Italy (2005)	Fascism as "incomplete totalitarianism"	Italy — limits of Fascist power

Historian	Key Work	Main Argument	Useful For
Renzo De Felice	Mussolini (1965-97)	Controversial rehabilitation; Fascism had genuine popular consent	Italy — consent debate
Paul Preston	The Spanish Civil War (2006)	Left-critical; Republic as progressive project destroyed by reaction	Spain — Republican perspective
Stanley Payne	The Collapse of the Spanish Republic (2006)	Conservative-revisionist; Republic's own failures contributed	Spain — balanced/conservative
Hugh Thomas	The Spanish Civil War (1961)	Classic liberal narrative; balanced military/political account	Spain — comprehensive overview
Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses	Salazar (2009)	Political biography; Salazar as pragmatic authoritarian	Portugal — Salazar's methods
Julian Jackson	The Fall of France (2003)	Revisionist: defeat was not inevitable; contingent factors	France — against "decadence" thesis
Marc Bloch	Strange Defeat (1940/1946)	Eyewitness historian; systemic failures, not just military	France — contemporary analysis

Section 16 — Soviet & Post-Soviet Russia

Historian	Key Work	Main Argument	Useful For
Robert Conquest	The Great Terror (1968)	Totalitarian school; Stalin personally directed mass murder	Stalin — intentionalist view
J. Arch Getty	Origins of the Great Purges (1985)	Revisionist; purges partly driven by bureaucratic chaos	Stalin — structuralist view
Archie Brown	The Gorbachev Factor (1996)	Gorbachev as essential reformer who chose change	Gorbachev — agency argument
Stephen Kotkin	Armageddon Averted (2001)	Structural economic decline made collapse likely regardless	USSR collapse — structural
Lilia Shevtsova	Yeltsin's Russia (1999)	Yeltsin built framework for future autocracy; "original sin"	Yeltsin — critical assessment
Michael McFaul	Russia's Unfinished Revolution (2001)	Yeltsin as flawed democrat; 1993 as turning point	Yeltsin — democratic perspective
William Taubman	Khrushchev (2003)	Comprehensive biography; man of contradictions	Khrushchev — balanced view

How to use historiography in a Paper 3 essay

The presence of historians' names is one of the clearest markers of a band five answer, but the examiner reports indicate that candidates often deploy historiography in ways that actually weaken their essays. The most common mistake is ornamental citation, the practice of writing "as Fitzpatrick has argued" without specifying what Fitzpatrick argued, or why that argument matters for the question being asked. A second mistake is the false choice, in which the candidate presents two historians as if they disagreed completely, so that choosing one means rejecting the other, when in fact their arguments operate at different levels or address different aspects of the same problem. A third mistake is the imported authority, citing a historian whose work has nothing to do with the question in the belief that any reference to a scholar will improve the mark.

The right way to use historiography is to treat it as a resource for argument. A useful historian tells you something non-obvious about the period, frames a question in a way that you can then adopt or contest, and enables you to distinguish your argument from a merely descriptive narrative. When you cite Kershaw on working towards the Führer, the citation is effective if you use it to explain a specific policy decision that illustrates the mechanism he describes. When you cite Preston on the Nationalist repression in Spain, the citation is effective if you deploy it to argue that a particular aspect of the regime cannot be adequately described by the word authoritarian. When you cite Shevtsova on the original sin of Russian democracy, the citation is effective if you use it to organise an analysis of the 1996 election around a specific institutional claim rather than as an atmospheric phrase.

The structure of an effective historiographical paragraph therefore looks like this. First, a topic sentence that answers the question. Second, specific evidence. Third, a historian's framing that makes that evidence mean something more than it means on its own. Fourth, a concluding sentence that takes a position on the historian's argument, whether by endorsing it, modifying it or contesting it. This structure forces you to do analytical work rather than to decorate your paragraph with names, and it is the structure that examiners reward in band five answers.

For revision purposes, a good discipline is to choose three historians per chapter whose arguments you can summarise in one sentence each and deploy in one paragraph each. The tables in this chapter give you the raw material. The paragraphs in the chapter historiography sections show you what deployment looks like when it is done well.

Chapter 21: Key Vocabulary Glossary

Term	Definition
Anarcho-syndicalism	Workers' movement seeking to abolish the state through trade union action and general strikes (significant in Spain)
Appeasement	Policy of making concessions to an aggressor to avoid conflict (particularly associated with Britain and France in the 1930s)
Autocracy	System of government in which one person holds absolute power (characteristic of Imperial Russia)
BBWR	Non-Partisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government — Piłsudski's political vehicle in interwar Poland
Bienio Negro	"Two Black Years" (1933–1935) — period of right-wing government in Spain's Second Republic
Bolsheviks	"Majority" faction of Russian Social Democrats led by Lenin; seized power in October 1917
Brest-Litovsk, Treaty of	March 1918 treaty ending Russia's participation in WWI; massive territorial losses
Caciquismo	System of political bosses controlling elections through patronage in Restoration Spain
Cheka	Bolshevik secret police (1917–1922); predecessor of GPU, OGPU, NKVD, KGB
Chibalo	Forced labour system in Portuguese African colonies
Collectivisation	Stalin's policy of merging individual farms into collective farms (kolkhozy) from 1929
Concordat	Formal agreement between a state and the Catholic Church (e.g., Lateran Pacts 1929, Portuguese Concordat 1940)
Congés payés	Paid holidays — iconic reform of France's Popular Front (1936)
COP	Central Industrial District (Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy) — Poland's 1936–1939 industrialisation programme
Corporatism	Economic system organising society into employer and worker corporations under state control (Italy, Portugal)
De-Stalinisation	Khrushchev's campaign to dismantle Stalin's cult of personality and worst excesses
Demokratizatsiya	"Democratisation" — Gorbachev's political reform introducing competitive elections
Drôle de guerre	"Phoney War" — period of inaction on the Western Front (September 1939 – May 1940)
Dual power	Situation in Russia (Feb–Oct 1917) where the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet shared authority
Emancipation	Liberation of the serfs by Alexander II in 1861
Endecja	National Democracy (ND) — Dmowski's right-wing ethnic nationalist movement in Poland

Term	Definition
Estado Novo	"New State" — Salazar's authoritarian regime in Portugal (1933–1974)
Étrange défaite	"Strange Defeat" — Marc Bloch's analysis of France's 1940 collapse
Falange	Spanish fascist movement founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera (1933); absorbed by Franco
Five Year Plans	Stalin's programme of rapid industrialisation (First Plan: 1928–1932)
Glasnost	"Openness" — Gorbachev's policy of cultural liberalisation and press freedom
Gleichschaltung	"Coordination" — Nazi process of bringing all institutions under party control (1933–1934)
Gulag	Soviet system of forced labour camps
Intermarium	Piłsudski's vision of a federation of states between the Baltic and Black Seas
KdF	Kraft durch Freude ("Strength Through Joy") — Nazi leisure organisation
Kolkhoz	Collective farm in the Soviet Union
Kronstadt	Naval base where sailors rebelled against Bolshevik rule in March 1921
Kulak	Prosperous peasant; targeted for elimination during collectivisation
Lateran Pacts	1929 agreement between Mussolini and the Vatican creating Vatican City State
Lusotropicalism	Theory that Portugal had a uniquely benign relationship with its colonies
Maginot Line	French defensive fortification along the German border (1929–1938)
March Constitution	Poland's democratic constitution of 17 March 1921
Matignon Accords	Labour agreements of June 1936 in France: 40-hour week, paid holidays, collective bargaining
Mensheviks	"Minority" faction of Russian Social Democrats; rivals of the Bolsheviks
Mocidade Portuguesa	Portuguese Youth — Estado Novo's youth organisation
Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact	Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact (August 1939) with secret protocol to partition Poland
NEP	New Economic Policy (1921–1928) — Lenin's partial return to market economics
Nomenklatura	Soviet system of Party-controlled appointments to key positions
Numerus clausus	Quota system limiting Jewish admission to universities in interwar Poland
October Manifesto	Nicholas II's 1905 concession promising civil liberties and an elected Duma
Okhrana	Tsarist secret police
Oligarch	Wealthy businessmen who gained enormous power in post-Soviet Russia through privatisation
OUN	Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists — sought Ukrainian independence from Poland
Pacification of Galicia	1930 Polish military campaign of collective punishment against Ukrainian villages
Perestroika	"Restructuring" — Gorbachev's economic reform programme

Term	Definition
PIDE	Portuguese secret police (successor to PVDE)
Popular Front	Alliance of left-wing parties against fascism (France 1936–38, Spain 1936)
PPS	Polish Socialist Party — Piłsudski's original political base
Provisional Government	Government formed after February Revolution 1917; overthrown in October
Sanacja	"Moral cleansing" — Piłsudski's political movement and regime after 1926
Sebastianism	Portuguese messianic tradition expecting the return of King Sebastian
Shock therapy	Rapid transition from command to market economy (Russia, January 1992)
Show Trials	Public political trials in the USSR (1936–1938) of former Bolshevik leaders
Soviet	Council of workers', soldiers', and peasants' deputies
Squadrismo	Fascist paramilitary violence in Italy (1919–1922)
Stagnation	Term describing the Brezhnev era's economic and political decline
Stolypin reforms	Agricultural reforms (1906–1911) aimed at creating a class of prosperous peasant landowners
Tarrafal	Portuguese concentration camp in Cape Verde for political prisoners (1936–1954)
Totalitarianism	System where the state seeks to control all aspects of public and private life
Turno pacífico	Peaceful rotation of power between Liberal and Conservative parties in Restoration Spain
União Nacional	National Union — the Estado Novo's single "non-party" party
Vichy France	Authoritarian French state under Pétain (1940–1944)
Volksgemeinschaft	"People's Community" — Nazi ideal of a racially unified German society
War Communism	Bolshevik economic policy during the Civil War (1918–1921): requisitioning, nationalisation
Wolfram	Tungsten — strategic mineral exported by neutral Portugal to both Axis and Allies
Zemstvo	Elected local government body introduced by Alexander II in 1864
Złoty	Polish currency introduced by Grabski in 1924, replacing three partition-era currencies

Appendix. Russia historiography. Figes, Pipes, Montefiore

This appendix adds three important voices from recent English-language scholarship to the historiographical frame used in the Russia chapters. They are often cited in IB essays, and it is worth knowing them well enough to refer to them in more than a superficial way. Orlando Figes, Richard Pipes and Simon Sebag Montefiore work with different methods and ask different questions, so their arguments do not cancel one another out. They widen a picture that remains underdeveloped in Conquest, Fitzpatrick or Kotkin.

A.1 Alexander II and the Great Reforms

Three main traditions meet in the historiography of Alexander II's reign. The first, the Anglo-American liberal tradition, goes back to the work of W. Bruce Lincoln, above all The Great Reforms (1990), in which Alexander II appears as the Tsar Liberator. The second, the British revisionist school represented by David Saunders in Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform (1992), stresses that the reforms were driven by the needs of the state and that their internal contradictions created the conditions for revolution. The third, the Soviet Marxist tradition represented by P. A. Zaionchkovsky, treated the reforms as a bourgeois revolution from above.

Richard Pipes, in Russia under the Old Regime (1974) and later in The Russian Revolution (1990), built an argument about the basic continuity of autocracy. His thesis of the patrimonial state treats Russian autocracy as a system in which the state and the person of the ruler cannot be told apart. Pipes argues that without a break with this pattern, which Alexander II never intended, modernisation was bound to remain technical rather than constitutional.

Orlando Figes, in A People's Tragedy (1996), extended this perspective to the level of the peasant masses. His analysis of the Emancipation of 1861 shows that the terms of the settlement, especially the redemption payments spread over forty-nine years and the collective ownership of land by the mir, produced a lasting sense of injustice that revived in 1905 and again in 1917. Figes treats the emancipation not as a single event of 1861 but as a social process whose unresolved contradictions took their revenge over the following six decades.

Simon Sebag Montefiore, in The Romanovs (2016), complements this view with a portrait of the dynasty. He shows that Alexander II in his private life, torn between his official empress and his mistress Catherine Dolgorukova, embodied the duality of Russian autocracy, which wanted to be modern and patriarchal at the same time. Montefiore also stresses that the Loris-Melikov proposals, which Alexander II approved on the day of his assassination, were far more modest than later apologists wished to see in them, since they did not introduce a parliament but only consultative commissions.

A.2 October 1917, coup or revolution

The dispute over the nature of October 1917 is one of the deepest debates in Russian historiography. The liberal Western position, most fully articulated by Richard Pipes in The Russian Revolution (1990), treats October as a coup d'état carried out by a disciplined minority exploiting chaos. Pipes stresses that the Bolsheviks were a party of roughly three hundred thousand members (verify) in October 1917 in a country of about a hundred and fifty million people, and that the decisive decision to rise was taken by a small leadership of a dozen or so, dominated by Lenin and Trotsky, despite the opposition of Zinoviev and Kamenev.

The revisionist position, represented by Sheila Fitzpatrick in The Russian Revolution (1982) and by Alexander Rabinowitch in The Bolsheviks Come to Power (1976) and the later The Bolsheviks in Power (2007), challenges this interpretation. Rabinowitch in particular shows, on the basis of Soviet sources and the records of the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee, that the Bolshevik victory was the result of a real disintegration of the Provisional Government and of genuine popular support in the capitals.

Orlando Figes, in A People's Tragedy, proposes a fourth perspective that combines elements of both earlier ones but gives priority to the tragic and social dimension. According to Figes, 1917 was not one revolution but four parallel ones, namely the peasants' struggle for land, the workers' struggle for control of the factories, the soldiers' struggle for peace, and the intelligentsia's political struggle over the form of the state. The Bolsheviks won because they were the only party ready to promise the immediate satisfaction of all four revolutions at once, while the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries tried to reconcile revolution with responsibility for the state.

Simon Sebag Montefiore, in his work on Stalin, treats October as the finale of a dynastic drama in which Lenin's personal qualities, his determination bordering on fanaticism, his ruthlessness towards former comrades and his talent for operational command, were what set the Bolsheviks apart from the Mensheviks in conditions where neither programme nor social base was sufficient. Montefiore, like Pipes, stresses the role of key individuals, but he does so without ideological orthodoxy.

A.3 Bolshevik consolidation of power, 1917 to 1924

The central question of the historiography of Bolshevik consolidation is whether authoritarianism flowed inevitably from the nature of Bolshevism itself, or whether it was forced on an originally democratic movement by the Civil War. The continuity thesis, defended most forcefully by Richard Pipes in the second volume of his trilogy, Russia under the Bolshevik Regime (1994), and by Martin Malia in The Soviet Tragedy (1994), treats Bolshevik ideology as inherently authoritarian and Lenin as a proto-Stalin. Pipes argues that Lenin's What Is to Be Done? of 1902 already contains the principles that lead in a straight line to the terror of the Cheka.

The discontinuity thesis, defended by Sheila Fitzpatrick and by Stephen Cohen in Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution (1973), holds that the Civil War and the counter-revolutionary threat radicalised the regime, and that Stalinism was not the inevitable outcome of Leninism. According to Cohen, the NEP of 1921 offered a real alternative path in which the market, voluntary peasant co-operation and pluralism inside the party could coexist with the party's political monopoly.

Orlando Figes, in A People's Tragedy, offers a synthesis that avoids both simple continuity and simple discontinuity. Figes shows that the Civil War did radicalise Bolshevism, but he also exposes the romanticisation of the NEP. In his view the NEP was not a liberal alternative but a strategic retreat that kept the full instruments of repression. The Cheka became the GPU in 1922 and was not dismantled. The trial of the Socialist Revolutionary Party in 1922, the expulsion of Russian philosophers on the "philosophers' ships" in 1922 and the ban on factions at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 show that the economic retreat did not mean a political one.

Simon Sebag Montefiore, in Young Stalin (2007), shows that the young Dzhugashvili was already in pre-revolutionary times not only a theorist but also a practitioner of party brutality, the organiser of the Tiflis bank robbery of 1907, in which about forty people died, carried out to raise funds for the party. Montefiore stresses that Stalinism was not a deviation from Bolshevism but its internally consistent radicalisation under particular historical conditions, while at the same time showing that Stalin's personal traits added to the Leninist inheritance something that was not contained in it from the start.

A.4 Stalin, and the totalitarian and revisionist debate

The dispute over the nature of Stalinism lies at the heart of Western Soviet historiography. The totalitarian school, whose fullest expression remains Robert Conquest's The Great Terror (1968) and The Harvest of Sorrow (1986), treats Stalinism as a system of personal tyranny. Conquest's original estimate of the victims of the Great Terror of the 1930s, a figure of the order of a million killed and several million arrested, was revised after the archives opened in the 1990s, but it remained accurate as to the scale of the phenomenon. NKVD figures made public by Memorial point to about 680,000 executions and nearly 1.5 million arrests in 1937 and 1938 alone (verify).

The revisionist school, represented by Sheila Fitzpatrick in Stalin's Peasants (1994) and by J. Arch Getty in Origins of the Great Purges (1985), did not deny the scale of the victimisation. It argued that the terror was also driven by bureaucratic chaos, local initiative and popular participation, and not only by central direction. Getty, using documents from the central party archive, showed that denunciations from below, factional struggle inside the party apparatus and local political dynamics played a real part in carrying out the terror.

The post-revisionist synthesis, whose most important representatives are Stephen Kotkin in Magnetic Mountain (1995) and in his three-volume biography of Stalin, of which the first two volumes appeared in 2014 and 2017, and Sheila Fitzpatrick in her later work, reconstructs Stalinism as a civilisation, a system of meanings which the population joined and actively reshaped. Kotkin shows that the workers of Magnitogorsk in the 1930s "spoke Bolshevik", that is, they used the regime's categories to express their own aspirations and grievances.

Simon Sebag Montefiore, in Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar (2003) and in Young Stalin, complements this perspective with a detailed portrait of Stalin's court, treating the dictatorship as a phenomenon as courtly as it was bureaucratic. Personal loyalties, the rituals of banquets at the Kuntsevo dacha, and the mutual bonds of fear and intimacy between Stalin and his closest associates were a real mechanism of government. Montefiore, drawing on declassified memoirs and letters, shows the terror as a process in which Stalin himself chose victims from lists, marking particular names with a pencil signature.

Orlando Figes, in The Whisperers (2007), based on hundreds of interviews with witnesses and their descendants collected in the Memorial archive, adds a human dimension that was missing from both the totalitarian and the revisionist historiography. Figes shows how the terror penetrated the most intimate areas of life, forcing people into silence in their own homes and destroying trust inside families across four generations. According to Figes, the most lasting damage of Stalinism was not the camps but the internalised fear that shaped a culture of silence lasting long after the dictator's death.

A.5 How to use these perspectives in a Paper 3 essay

Using these voices in an IB essay requires discipline. The examiner rewards the ability to build a historian's specific thesis into the argument of the essay, not decorative quotation. A good PEEL paragraph with a historiographical perspective looks like this. The Point, which the candidate states at the start of the paragraph, sets the thesis, for example that Stalin's terror did not stem from bureaucratic chaos but from the dictator's personal decision. The Evidence is a specific fact from the 1930s, for example the proscription lists signed personally by Stalin and Molotov, known as "Stalin's lists", which document the approval of death sentences for some forty thousand people between 1937 and 1938 (verify).

The Explanation shows why this fact supports the thesis. The proscription lists prove that the terror had a central author, because no bureaucratic chaos can explain a handwritten signature against a particular name. The Link returns to the question, connecting the point with the thesis of the whole essay. The Perspective brings in Montefiore, who in Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar reads the lists as evidence of a personal court,

and then contrasts him with Getty, for whom denunciations and local dynamics gave the terror room to develop independently of the dictator's will. The candidate closes the paragraph with the judgement that both perspectives are partly true, but that on the question of intention the view of Montefiore and Conquest is better supported by archival evidence than Getty's.

This paragraph model can be applied to any question about Russia in Paper 3. The key point is that the historian is not a decorative addition but a functional element of the argument. The examiner does not reward a list of historians' names at the end of a paragraph, but the sight of a candidate who understands where the historiography divides and why one view is better or worse supported by the evidence.