**“Conflicting views about the treatment of Germany were a major cause of the Cold War.” To what extent do you agree with this statement?**

Although the Berlin Blockade of 1949 would seem to suggest that Germany was the major cause of the Cold War, this essay will seek to demonstrate that in fact conflicting views about the treatment of Germany were not actually that significant. Whilst the issue of Germany bears consideration, the issue of Poland was more fundamentally divisive. Moreover, these territorial disputes themselves were merely the product of much deeper factors that have to be explained through reference to personalities, wartime tensions and ideological differences.

Indeed, in the short term it is striking how little, rather than how much, the views of the wartime allies conflicted over the issue of Germany. At the Yalta conference the issue of Germany was a central point of discussion and it was broadly agreed that the territory of Germany should be divided into zones of occupation. By the time of the Potsdam Conference the Soviets had taken control of Berlin and Hitler had surrendered. The zones of Germany were finalized and armies of occupation moved into them; similarly Berlin (deep in the Soviet zone) was divided in the same way. All of this was achieved not without negotiation and certain tension, but Germany was not a major source of conflict.

Nevertheless as time wore on it became clear that the agreements reached at Yalta and Potsdam were, in practice, untenable. In particular, the status of the Western zones of Berlin as a capitalist island in a communist sea was a source of immense irritation and embarrassment for Stalin: whilst the West poured Marshall Aid into the Western zones in a major process of reconstruction, the USSR stripped bare its zones of Germany and Berlin with the result that a gaping discrepancy emerged between conditions in the two areas. It was against this background that Stalin decided to blockade Berlin – more out of desperation than aggression, an attempt to force the West back to the negotiation table than out of any desire for ‘world revolution’. Although the blockade was a tense moment, it was primarily a result of Cold War tensions rather than a cause of them since by this time the Cold War was clearly established: the formation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact was the final military expression of the new alignment of the superpowers.

On this basis, the historian looking for a geographical answer to the question ‘Where did the Cold War begin?’ would be better advised to focus not in Germany but instead in Eastern Europe and in particular Poland: the country for whose freedom Britain had gone to war in 1939. The opening of the second front in Europe against the Nazis in 1944 was, in the view of Stalin, merely a cynical move by the West to ensure that the Soviet Union wasn’t able to conquer Europe single-handedly. It was to Churchill’s great fury that, at the Yalta Conference, Stalin had happily signed the ‘Declaration on Liberated Europe’ promising to respect Polish independence and democratic future, and yet by the time of Potsdam it was becoming abundantly clear that Stalin was not allowing free elections, was intimidating the democratic ‘London Poles’ and was instead ensuring the domination of the pro-Soviet ‘Lublin Poles’. As Stalin himself pointed out, the issue of Poland for Churchill was one of honour; but for the Soviet Union, invaded twice within 50 years through Poland, it was a matter not just of honour but also of security. Hence Stalin’s armies, dominant in Eastern Europe due to their relentless marches which had culminated in the defeat of the Nazis, proceeded to impose Stalin’s will, and the communist system, across the countries of Eastern Europe. For Stalin this was providing him with a buffer zone against the West; for Churchill it was of course an ‘Iron Curtain’ built step by step through Stalin’s perfidious ‘Salami tactics’. Combined with Stalin’s moves in Turkey and Greece, Truman saw this as evidence of ‘Domino Theory’.

However, whilst the issue of Poland and more widely Eastern Europe is a more sensible geographic focus for the historian studying Cold War Origins than a preoccupation with Germany and Berlin, it is even more profitable to focus not on geopolitics, but rather on personalities and ideology, to explain why the wartime alliance collapsed with such alarming rapidity after 1945. Firstly, the arguments between Churchill and Truman on the one side, and Stalin and Molotov on the other, can be seen as being as much to do with their conflicting personalities than the issues at hand in themselves. Indeed, it is notable that at Yalta, President Roosevelt worked smoothly with Stalin and was even able to bring Churchill and Stalin into a working partnership. However, with his moderating influence removed by the time of Potsdam, the hard-headed Harry Truman (“I am tired of babying the Soviets”) spectacularly alienated the USSR by berating Molotov (over the issue of Poland, again) to such a degree that Molotov replied “I have never been spoken to like that in my life”. In return Stalin, the psychopathic, paranoid dictator of the Soviet Union, was pathologically distrustful of Churchill, who he blamed for sending troops into Russia to defeat Lenin (“a plague virus”) during the Civil War, and for representing a country which had repeatedly refused to form a united bloc against Hitler in the 1930s through their spineless policy of appeasement.

Nevertheless, to analyse the origins of the Cold War through a “Great Man” approach is rather outmoded, just as a deep Annales-school geopolitical approach is too abstract. In the final analysis, the personality clashes which played out over such issues as Germany and more importantly Poland can only be explained through reference to historical and ideological factors. Churchill and Truman came from a capitalist world based broadly on the ideas of democracy; Stalin came from a communist mindset which operated by that point on dictatorship. Neither side felt that co-existence was a real possibility. For the West, communism stood fundamentally for world revolution, as was vigorously expressed in the Kennan Telegram. For its part, the USSR acknowledged that capitalism was perceived as a great evil which was inevitably going to collapse in the face of communist revolution, as well as divisions within its own ranks.

In conclusion, Germany – and more particularly Berlin – was a source of tension in the years that immediately followed World War Two. However, as many agreements as disagreements were reached on the issue of Germany and so a much more dangerous and significant area to consider is Poland and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the only reason why both sides clashed so vigorously over these issues was due to personality clashes which themselves merely reflected deep-seated historic differences which were in turn underpinned by ideological incomparability between two completely different world systems. On this basis what is perhaps most interesting of all is not that the Cold War occurred, but that it took so long to emerge as an established fact and that it never escalated – thankfully for us – into an outright nuclear conflict between East and West.

**Assess the role played by ideologies (Anita)**

Communism v. Capitalism – define in depth (Marx; World Revolution; Capitalist Monopoly; democracy v. dictatorship of the proletariat). Touch upon issues of

Historical results of this tension –

POLITICS – democracy defined differently re. Poland, creates problems (Yalta, Potsdam); Iron Curtain and Salami tactics clear evidence that peaceful co-existence impossible

PERSONALITIES – Truman the arch anti-communist (mention Kennan, Doctrine here); Stalin the communist dictator despot (Purges, COMINFORM)

ECONOMIC SYSTEMS – Bretton Woods; Marshall Aid v. Comecon; Zones of Berlin > Blockade

Military Outcomes – NATO v. WARSAW PACT

Conclusion / other idea – role of Nazism more important? Its success drove East v West apart; its failure created a vacuum that was difficult to fill peacefully.

**Assess role played by USA (Camille) – one approach could be a ‘who’ focus…**

Roosevelt – Yalta – too trusting of Stalin re. Poland

Truman – Potsdam – too arrogant, cocky > Encourages ‘Iron Curtain’ speech > Truman Doctrine

Kennan – Responsible for overstating the threat? > Telegram

Marshall – Precipitates crisis with Marshall Aid > Berlin problems / blockade > NATO

Final section – consideration that maybe Stalin, not USA, to blame – Salami tactics?