

Yalta Conference

The **Yalta Conference**, also known as the **Crimea conference** and code named the **Argonaut Conference**, held from February 4 to 11, 1945, was the World War II meeting of the heads of government of the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union for the purpose of discussing Germany and Europe's postwar reorganization. The three states were represented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Premier Joseph Stalin, respectively. The conference convened near Yalta in Crimea, Soviet Union within the Livadia, Yusupov, and Vorontsov Palaces.

The aim of the conference^[1] was to shape a post-war peace that represented not just a collective security order but a plan to give self-determination to the liberated peoples of post-Nazi Europe.

The meeting was intended mainly to discuss the re-establishment of the nations of war-torn Europe. However within a few short years, with the Cold War dividing the continent, Yalta became a subject of intense controversy.

Yalta was the second of three major wartime conferences among the Big Three. It was preceded by the Tehran Conference in November 1943, and was followed by the Potsdam Conference in July 1945. It was also preceded by a conference in Moscow in October 1944 (Moscow Conference (1944)), not attended by President Roosevelt, in which Churchill and Stalin had carved up Europe into Western and Soviet spheres of influence.^[2] ^[3] The Potsdam Conference was attended by Stalin, Churchill (who was replaced halfway through by the newly elected British Prime Minister Clement Attlee) and Harry S. Truman, Roosevelt's successor after his death.

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The "Big Three" at the Yalta Conference, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin. Behind them stand, from the left, Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Fleet Admiral Ernest King, Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, General of the Army George Marshall, Major General Laurence S. Kuter, General Aleksei Antonov, Vice Admiral Stepan Kucherov, and Admiral of the Fleet Nikolay Kuznetsov.

Host country	 Soviet Union
Date	February 4–11, 1945
Venue(s)	Livadia Palace
Cities	Yalta, Russian

Further reading

External links

Conference

By the time of the Yalta Conference, the Western forces consisting of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and the governments-in-exile of France and Belgium, led by British general Bernard Montgomery and American generals Dwight D. Eisenhower and Omar Bradley, had liberated all of France and Belgium and were advancing into Germany, leading to the Battle of the Bulge. In the east, Red Army Marshal Georgy Zhukov's forces were 65 km (40 mi) from Berlin, having already pushed back the Nazis from Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and most of Yugoslavia. By February, Germany only had loose control over the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Germany, Northern Italy, and Northern Yugoslavia.

Stalin, insisting that his doctors opposed any long trips, rejected Roosevelt's suggestion to meet at the Mediterranean.^[4] He offered instead to meet at the Black Sea resort of Yalta, in the Crimea. Stalin's fear of flying also was a contributing factor in this decision.^[5]

Each of the three leaders had their own agenda for post-war Germany and liberated Europe. Roosevelt wanted Soviet support in the U.S. Pacific War against Japan, specifically for the planned invasion of Japan (Operation August Storm), as well as Soviet participation in the United Nations; Churchill pressed for free elections and democratic governments in Eastern and Central Europe (specifically Poland); and Stalin demanded a Soviet sphere of political influence in Eastern and Central Europe as an essential aspect of the USSR's national security strategy. Stalin's position at the conference was one which he felt was so strong that he could dictate terms. According to U.S. delegation member and future Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, "it was not a question of what we would let the Russians do, but what we could get the Russians to do."^[6]

Poland was the first item on the Soviet agenda. Stalin stated that "For the Soviet government, the question of Poland was one of honor" and security because Poland had served as a historical corridor for forces attempting to invade Russia.^[7] In addition, Stalin stated regarding history that "because the Russians had greatly sinned against Poland", "the Soviet government was trying to atone for those sins."^[7] Stalin concluded that "Poland must be strong" and that "the Soviet Union is interested in the creation of a mighty, free and independent Poland." Accordingly, Stalin stipulated that Polish government-in-exile demands were not negotiable: the Soviet Union would keep the territory of eastern Poland they had already annexed in 1939, and Poland was to be compensated for that by extending its western borders at the expense of Germany. Contrasting with his prior statement, Stalin promised free elections in Poland despite the Soviet sponsored provisional government recently installed by him in Polish territories occupied by the Red Army.

Roosevelt wanted the USSR to enter the Pacific War with the Allies. One Soviet precondition for a declaration of war against Japan was an American official recognition of Mongolian independence from China (the Mongolian People's Republic had already been the Soviet satellite state from its own beginnings in 1924, through World War II), and a

SSR, USSR

Participants  Soviet Union
 United Kingdom
 United States

Follows Tehran Conference

Precedes Potsdam Conference



Yalta American Delegation in Livadia Palace from left to right: Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, Maj. Gen. L. S. Kuter, Admiral E. J. King, General George C. Marshall, Ambassador Averell Harriman, Admiral William Leahy, and President F. D. Roosevelt. Livadia Palace, Crimea, Russia

recognition of Soviet interests in the Manchurian railways and Port Arthur (but not asking the Chinese to lease), as well as deprivation of Japanese soil (such as Sakhalin and Kuril Islands) to return to Russian custody since the Treaty of Portsmouth; these were agreed without Chinese representation, consultation or consent, with the American desire to end war early thereby reducing American casualties. Stalin agreed that the Soviet Union would enter the Pacific War three months after the defeat of Germany. Stalin pledged to Truman to keep the nationality of the Korean Peninsula intact as Soviet Union entered the war against Japan.

Furthermore, the Soviets had agreed to join the United Nations, given the secret understanding of a voting formula with a veto power for permanent members of the Security Council, thus ensuring that each country could block unwanted decisions.

At the time, the Red Army had occupied Poland completely and held much of Eastern Europe with a military power three times greater than Allied forces in the West. The Declaration of Liberated Europe did little to dispel the sphere of influence agreements that had been incorporated into armistice agreements.

All three leaders ratified previous agreements about the post-war occupation zones for Germany: three zones of occupation, one for each of the three principal Allies: The Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They also agreed to give France a zone of occupation, carved out of the U.S. and UK zones.

Also, the Big Three agreed that all original governments would be restored to the invaded countries (with the exception of France, whose government was regarded as collaborationist; Romania and Bulgaria, where the Soviets had already liquidated most of the governments; and Poland whose government-in-exile was also excluded by Stalin) and that all civilians would be repatriated.



A Big Three meeting room

Declaration of Liberated Europe

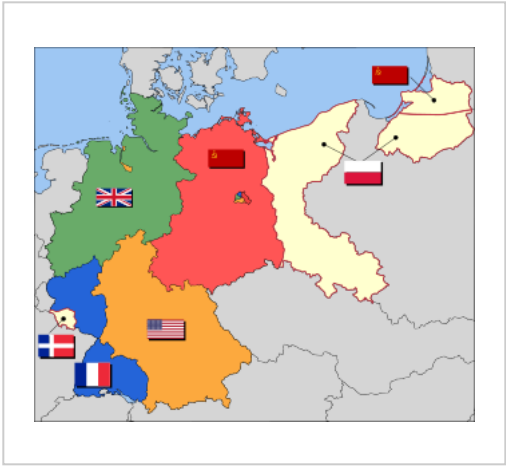
The Declaration of Liberated Europe is a declaration that was created by Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin during the Yalta Conference. It was a promise that allowed the people of Europe "to create democratic institutions of their own choice". The declaration pledged, "the earliest possible establishment through free elections governments responsive to the will of the people." This is similar to the statements of the Atlantic Charter, which says, "the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live." Stalin broke the pledge by encouraging Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and many more countries to construct a Communist government, instead of letting the people construct their own. The countries later became known as Stalin's Satellite Nations.^[8]

Key points

The key points of the meeting are as follows:

- Agreement to the priority of the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. After the war, Germany and Berlin would be split into four occupied zones.
- Stalin agreed that France would have a fourth occupation zone in Germany, but it would have to be formed out of the American and British zones.
- Germany would undergo demilitarization and denazification.
- German reparations were partly to be in the form of forced labour. (see also *Forced labor of Germans after World War II* and *Forced labor of Germans in the Soviet Union*). The forced labour was to be used to repair damage that Germany had inflicted on its victims.^[9]
- Creation of a reparation council which would be located in the Soviet Union.

- The status of Poland was discussed. It was agreed to reorganize the communist Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland that had been installed by the Soviet Union "on a broader democratic basis."^[10]
- The Polish eastern border would follow the Curzon Line, and Poland would receive territorial compensation in the west from Germany.
- Stalin pledged to permit free elections in Poland.
-
- Roosevelt obtained a commitment by Stalin to participate in the UN.
- Stalin requested that all of the 16 Soviet Socialist Republics would be granted UN membership. This was taken into consideration, but 14 republics were denied; Truman agreed to membership for Ukraine and Byelorussia while reserving the right, which was never exercised, to seek two more votes for the United States.^[11]
- Stalin agreed to enter the fight against the Empire of Japan "in two or three months after Germany has surrendered and the war in Europe is terminated," and that as a result, the Soviets would take possession of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, the port of Dalian would be internationalized, and the Soviet lease of Port Arthur would be restored, among other concessions.^[12]
- Nazi war criminals were to be found and put on trial.
- A "Committee on Dismemberment of Germany" was to be set up. Its purpose was to decide whether Germany was to be divided into six nations. Some examples of partition plans are shown below:



The eventual partition of Germany into Allied Occupation Zones:

- British zone
- French zone (two exclaves) and beginning in 1947, the Saar protectorate
- American zone
- Soviet zone, later the GDR
- Polish and Soviet annexed territory



Partition plan from Winston Churchill:

- North German state
- South German state, including modern Austria and Hungary
- West German state



Partition plan from Franklin D. Roosevelt:

- Hanover
- Prussia
- Hesse
- Saxony
- Bavaria
- International zone (two exclaves)
- Allied-administered Austria



Morgenthau Plan:

- North German state
- South German state
- International zone
- Territory lost from Germany (Saarland to France, Upper Silesia to Poland, East Prussia, partitioned between Poland and the Soviet Union)

Democratic elections

The Big Three further agreed that democracies would be established, all liberated European and former Axis satellite countries would hold free elections and that order would be restored.^[13] In that regard, they promised to rebuild occupied countries by processes that will allow them "to create democratic institutions of their own choice. This is a principle of the Atlantic Charter – the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live".^[13] The resulting

report stated that the three would assist occupied countries to form interim government that "pledged to the earliest possible establishment through free elections of the Governments responsive to the will of the people" and to "facilitate where necessary the holding of such elections."^[13]

The agreement called on signatories to "consult together on the measures necessary to discharge the joint responsibilities set forth in this declaration." During the Yalta discussions, Molotov inserted language that weakened the implication of enforcement of the declaration.^[14]

Regarding Poland, the Yalta report further stated that the provisional government should "be pledged to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot."^[13] The agreement could not conceal the importance of acceding to pro-Soviet short-term Lublin government control and of eliminating language calling for supervised elections.^[14]

According to President Roosevelt, "if we attempt to evade the fact that we placed somewhat more emphasis on the Lublin Poles than on the other two groups from which the new government is to be drawn I feel we will expose ourselves to the charges that we are attempting to go back on the Crimea decision." Roosevelt conceded that, in the words of Admiral William D. Leahy, the language of Yalta was so vague that the Soviets would be able to "stretch it all the way from Yalta to Washington without ever technically breaking it."^[15]

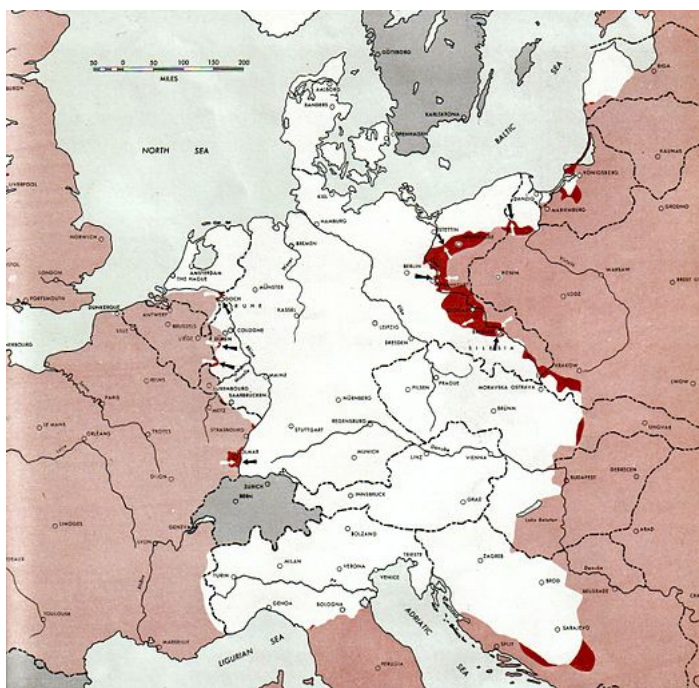
The final agreement stipulated that "the Provisional Government which is now functioning in Poland should therefore be reorganized on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland and from Poles abroad."^[13] The language of Yalta conceded predominance of the pro-Soviet Lublin Government in a provisional government, albeit a reorganized one.^[14]

Aftermath

Poland and the Eastern Bloc

Because of Stalin's strong promises and admission of guilt over Poland, Churchill believed that he would keep his word regarding Poland, remarking "Poor Neville Chamberlain believed he could trust Hitler. He was wrong. But I don't think I am wrong about Stalin."^[16]

At that time, over 200,000 soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West were serving under the high command of the British Army. Many of these men and women were originally from the Kresy region of eastern Poland including cities such as Lwów and Vilnius. They had been deported from Kresy to the eastern regions of Russia, or sent to Gulags when the USSR occupied this region of Poland in 1939. Two years later, when Churchill and Stalin formed an alliance against Hitler, the Kresy Poles were released from the Gulags in Siberia, formed the Anders Army and marched to Persia to create the II Corps (Poland) under British high command.



The military situation at the end of the conference

These Polish troops were instrumental to the Allied defeat of the Germans in North Africa and Italy, and hoped to return to their homes in Kresy in an independent and democratic Poland at the end of the War. But at Yalta, Roosevelt and Churchill largely acceded to Stalin's demands to annex^[17] the territory which in the Nazi-Soviet Pact he and Hitler had agreed to the Soviet Union controlling, including Kresy, and to carry out Polish population transfers (1944–1946). Consequently, they in effect agreed that tens of thousands of veteran Polish troops under British command should lose their Kresy homes to the Soviet Union. In reaction, thirty officers and men from the II Corps (Poland) committed suicide.^[18]

Churchill defended his actions at Yalta in a three-day Parliament army debate starting on February 27, which ended in a vote of confidence. During the debate many MPs criticised Churchill and expressed deep reservations about Yalta and support for Poland, with 25 drafting an amendment protesting the agreement.^[18] These members included: Arthur Greenwood; Sir Archibald Southby, 1st Baronet; Sir Alec Douglas-Home; James Heathcote-Drummond-Willoughby, 3rd Earl of Ancaster and Victor Raikes.^[18] After the failure of the amendment, Henry Strauss, 1st Baron Conesford, the Member of Parliament for Norwich, resigned his seat in protest at the British treatment of Poland.^[18]

When the Second World War ended, a Communist government was installed in Poland. Many Poles felt betrayed by their wartime allies. Many Polish soldiers refused to return to Poland, because of the Soviet repressions of Polish citizens (1939–1946), the Trial of the Sixteen and other executions of pro-Western Poles, particularly the former members of the AK (Armia Krajowa). The result was the Polish Resettlement Act 1947, Britain's first mass immigration law.

On March 1, Roosevelt assured Congress that "I come from the Crimea with a firm belief that we have made a start on the road to a world of peace."^[19] However, the Western Powers soon realized that Stalin would not honour his promise of free elections for Poland. After receiving considerable criticism in London following Yalta regarding the atrocities committed in Poland by Soviet troops, Churchill wrote Roosevelt a desperate letter referencing the wholesale deportations and liquidations of opposition Poles by the Soviets.^[19] On March 11, Roosevelt responded to Churchill, writing, "I most certainly agree that we must stand firm on a correct interpretation of the Crimean decision. You are quite correct in assuming that neither the Government nor the people of this country will support participation in a fraud or a mere whitewash of the Lublin government and the solution must be as we envisaged it in Yalta."^[20]

By March 21, Roosevelt's Ambassador to the USSR Averell Harriman cabled Roosevelt that "we must come clearly to realize that the Soviet program is the establishment of totalitarianism, ending personal liberty and democracy as we know it."^[21] Two days later, Roosevelt began to admit that his view of Stalin had been excessively optimistic and that "Averell is right."^[21]

Four days later, on March 27, the Soviet Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) arrested 16 Polish opposition political leaders that had been invited to participate in provisional government negotiations.^[21] The arrests were part of a trick employed by the NKVD, which flew the leaders to Moscow for a later show trial followed by sentencing to a



Poland's old and new borders, 1945 - Kresy in light blue

gulag.^{[21][22]} Churchill thereafter argued to Roosevelt that it was "as plain as a pike staff" that Moscow's tactics were to drag out the period for holding free elections "while the Lublin Committee consolidate their power."^[21] The Polish elections, held on January 16, 1947, resulted in Poland's official transformation to a communist state by 1949.

Following Yalta, in Russia, when Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov expressed worry that the Yalta Agreement's wording might impede Stalin's plans, Stalin responded "Never mind. We'll do it our own way later."^[16] While the Soviet Union had already annexed several occupied countries as (or into) Soviet Socialist Republics,^{[23][24][25]} other countries in eastern Europe that it occupied were converted into Soviet-controlled satellite states, such as the People's Republic of Poland, the People's Republic of Hungary,^[26] the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic,^[27] the People's Republic of Romania, the People's Republic of Bulgaria, the People's Republic of Albania,^[28] and later East Germany from the Soviet zone of German occupation.^[29] Eventually the United States and the United Kingdom made concessions in recognizing the then Communist-dominated regions, sacrificing the substance of the Yalta Declaration, while it remained in form.^[30]

Aborted enforcement plans

At some point of Spring 1945, Churchill had commissioned a contingency military enforcement operation plan (war on the Soviet Union) to obtain "square deal for Poland" (Operation Unthinkable), which resulted in a May 22 report stating unfavorable success odds.^[31] The report's arguments included geostrategic issues (possible Soviet-Japanese alliance resulting in moving of Japanese troops from continent to Home Islands, threat to Iran/Iraq) and uncertainties concerning land battles in Europe.^[32]

Potsdam and the atomic bomb

The Potsdam Conference was held from July to August 1945, which included the participation of Clement Attlee (who had replaced Churchill as Prime Minister)^{[33][34]} and President Harry S Truman (representing the United States after Roosevelt's death).^[35] At Potsdam, the Soviets denied claims that they were interfering in the affairs of Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary.^[30] The conference resulted in (1) the Potsdam Declaration regarding the surrender of Japan,^[36] and (2) the Potsdam Agreement regarding the Soviet annexation of former Polish territory east of the Curzon Line, and, provisions, to be addressed in an eventual Final Treaty ending World War II, for the annexation of parts of Germany east of the Oder-Neisse line into Poland, and northern East Prussia into the Soviet Union.

Four months after the death of Roosevelt, President Truman ordered the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

Gallery



Taken by War Office official photographer,
United Kingdom



From left to right: Winston Churchill,
Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin.
Also present are Soviet Foreign Minister
Vyacheslav Molotov (far left); Field
Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Admiral of the
Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, RN,
Marshal of the RAF Sir Charles Portal,
RAF, (standing behind Churchill);
General George C. Marshall, Chief of
Staff of the United States Army, and
Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, USN,
(standing behind Roosevelt)

See also

- Eastern Bloc
- List of World War II conferences
- List of Soviet Union–United States summits
- Percentages agreement
- Plan Totality
- Repatriation of Cossacks after World War II
- Western betrayal
- *World War II Behind Closed Doors: Stalin, the Nazis and the West*

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External links

- Minutes of the conference (<http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll8/id/3687>) Combined Arms Research Library
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