

The Origins of the Cold War, 1945-1950

1 The Yalta Conference, February 1945

During World War II, despite ideological differences and mutual distrust, the Soviet Union and the Western powers cooperated in a Grand Alliance to defeat Nazi Germany. From 1941 to 1944 the Soviets bore the brunt of this struggle, halting and reversing the German onslaught while the British and Americans, who were also fighting Japan without Soviet help, delayed opening a second front in the west—much to Moscow's dismay. Not until June of 1944 did they finally launch their "D-Day" invasion of Nazi-occupied France.

In February of 1945 the "Big Three" leaders—U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt, British prime minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet premier Joseph Stalin—convened in the resort city of Yalta on the Crimean peninsula in the USSR. By this time the Anglo-American forces had driven the Germans out of France, the Soviets had occupied Poland, and German defeat was in sight. The war against Japan, however, appeared to be far from over. Anxious to secure Soviet cooperation in this conflict, Roosevelt was willing to concede Russian dominance in Poland, which was already occupied by the Red Army and administered by a Soviet-sponsored provisional government. He and Churchill tried to get the best bargain they could, but the final agreement on Poland, regardless of its language, would be implemented by the occupying Soviets. Later, as the communists assumed full control, the Western leaders would be accused of having sold out the Poles.

The Yalta agreements on Poland and Japan are reproduced below. The statement on Poland was released at the end of the conference, but the secret agreement on Japan was not made public until several years later.

A. DECLARATION ON POLAND

A new situation has been created in Poland as a result of her complete liberation by the Red Army. This calls for the establishment of a Polish Provisional Government which can be more broadly based than was possible before the recent liberation of the Western part of Poland. 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 itself and from Poles abroad. This new government should then be called the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity.

M. Molotov, Mr. Harriman, and Sir A. Clark Kerr are authorized as a mission to consult in the first instance in Moscow with members of the present Provisional Government and with other Polish democratic leaders from within Poland and from abroad, with a view to the reorganization of the present Government along the above lines. This Polish Provisional Government of National Unity shall be pledged to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot. In these elections all democratic and anti-Nazi parties shall have the right to take part and to put forward candidates.

When a Polish Provisional Government of National Unity has been properly formed in conformity with the above, the Government of the USSR, which now maintains diplomatic relations with the present Provisional Government of Poland, and the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the U.S.A. will establish diplomatic relations with the new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity, and will exchange Ambassadors by whose reports the respective Governments will be kept informed about the situation in Poland.

The three Heads of Government consider that the Eastern frontier of Poland should follow the Curzon Line with digressions from it in some regions of five to eight kilometers in favor of Poland. They recognize that Poland must receive substantial accessions of territory in the north and west. They feel that the opinion of the new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity should be sought in due course on the extent of these accessions and that the final delimitation of the Western frontier of Poland should thereafter await the peace conference.

B. AGREEMENT REGARDING SOVIET ENTRY INTO THE WAR AGAINST JAPAN

The leaders of the three great powers—the Soviet Union, the United States of America, and Great Britain—have agreed that in two or three months after Germany has surrendered and the war in Europe has terminated the Soviet Union shall enter into the war against Japan on the side of the Allies on condition that:

1. The status quo in Outer Mongolia (The Mongolian People's Republic) shall be preserved,

2. The former rights of Russia violated by the treacherous attack of Japan in 1904 shall be restored, viz.:

- (A) the southern part of Sakhalin, as well as all the islands adjacent to it, shall be returned to the Soviet Union,

- (B) the commercial port of Dairen shall be internationalized, the pre-eminent

interests of the Soviet Union in this port being safeguarded and the lease of Port Arthur as a naval base of the USSR restored,

(C) the Chinese-Eastern Railroad and the South-Manchurian Railroad which provides an outlet to Dairen shall be jointly operated by the establishment of a joint Soviet-Chinese Company, it being understood that the pre-eminent interests of the Soviet Union shall be safeguarded and that China shall retain full sovereignty in Manchuria;

3. The Kurile islands shall be handed over to the Soviet Union.

It is understood, that the agreement concerning Outer Mongolia and the ports and railroads referred to above will require concurrence of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. The President will take measures in order to obtain this concurrence on advice from Marshal Stalin.

The heads of the three great powers have agreed that these claims of the Soviet Union shall be unquestionably fulfilled after Japan has been defeated.

For its part the Soviet Union expresses its readiness to conclude with the National Government of China a pact of friendship and alliance between the USSR and China in order to render assistance to China with its armed forces for the purpose of liberating China from the Japanese yoke.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Roosevelt and Churchill agree to allow the Soviet-sponsored Provisional Government to continue in power in Poland?
2. Why did they want it reorganized to include democratic leaders and committed to "free and unfettered" elections?
3. What factors would make it possible for the Soviets to establish communist control in Poland, despite these provisions?
4. Why did the conference assert that Poland should receive substantial accessions of territory in the north and west?
5. Why did the agreement on Japan promise the Soviet Union so much territory in East Asia?
6. Why would many Americans have been disappointed with the Yalta agreements?
7. To what extent were Roosevelt and Churchill guilty of having "sold out" Poland at Yalta? What other choice did they have?

2 The Potsdam Conference, July-August 1945

Germany's surrender in May 1945 was followed by the division of that country into zones of occupation, with the Soviets in the east and the other Allies in the west, and by the another major conference of Allied leaders. From July 17th through August 2nd, 1945, at the city of Potsdam near the German capital of Berlin, Stalin met again with western leaders—but they were not the same ones he had dealt with at Yalta. Roosevelt's death in April meant that a new president, Harry Truman, would represent the United States. Churchill was present at the

start of the conference, but he and his cabinet were soon turned out of power as the result of elections which had been held in early July, and he was replaced at Potsdam by a new prime minister, Clement Attlee.

The conference saw hard bargaining on both sides of the increasingly contentious relationship between Moscow and Washington. The result, however, appeared to be a reasonable compromise: the Soviet Union would take the \$10 billion in reparations it demanded from Germany from its occupation zone alone, rather than from the entire country. In return, the Americans would agree to the new Polish-German borders favored by Moscow and would grant the Soviets a percentage of capital equipment from the western-occupied zones. As the conference closed on August 2nd, it was clear that the Grand Alliance was functioning less smoothly now that Germany had been defeated, but at this stage no government was talking about Cold War.

EXCERPTS FROM THE BERLIN (POTSDAM) CONFERENCE REPORT, AUGUST 2, 1945

III. GERMANY

The Political and Economic Principles to Govern the Treatment of Germany in the Initial Control Period

A. Political Principles

1. In accordance with the Agreement on Control Machinery in Germany, supreme authority in Germany is exercised, on instructions from their respective Governments, by the Commanders-in-Chief of the armed forces of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the French Republic, each in his own zone of occupation, and also jointly, in matters affecting Germany as a whole, in their capacity as members of the Control Council....

B. Economic Principles

11. In order to eliminate Germany's war potential, the production of arms, ammunitions and implements of war as well as all types of aircraft and sea-going ships shall be prohibited and prevented. Production of metals, chemicals, machinery and other items that are directly necessary to a war economy shall be rigidly controlled and restricted....

IV. REPARATIONS FROM GERMANY

1. Reparation claims of the USSR shall be met by removals from the zone of Germany occupied by the USSR, and from appropriate German external assets.

2. The USSR undertakes to settle the reparation claims of Poland from its own share of reparations.

3. The reparation claims of the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries entitled to reparations shall be met from the Western Zones and from appropriate German external assets.

4. In addition to the reparations to be taken by the USSR from its own zone of occupation, the USSR shall receive additionally from the Western zones:

(a) 15 percent of such usable and complete industrial capital equipment, in the first place from the metallurgical, chemical and machine manufacturing industries as is unnecessary for the German peace economy and should be removed from the Western zones of Germany, in exchange for an equivalent value of food, coal, potash, zinc, timber, clay products, petroleum products, and such other commodities as may be agreed upon.

(b) 10 percent of such industrial capital equipment as is unnecessary for the German peace economy and should be removed from the Western Zones, to be transferred to the Soviet Government on reparations account without payment or exchange of any kind in return.

Removals of equipment as provided in (a) and (b) above shall be made simultaneously....

8. The Soviet Government renounces all claims in respect of reparations to shares of German enterprises which are located in the Western Zones of occupation in Germany as well as to German foreign assets in all countries except those specified in paragraph 9 below.

9. The Governments of the UK and USA renounce their claims in respect of reparations to shares of German enterprises which are located in the Eastern Zone of occupation in Germany, as well as to German foreign assets in Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Rumania and Eastern Austria....

IX. POLAND

A. We have taken note with pleasure of the agreement reached among representative Poles from Poland and abroad which has made possible the formation, in accordance with the decisions reached at the Crimea Conference, of a Polish Provisional Government of National Unity recognized by the Three Powers. The establishment by the British and the United States Governments of diplomatic relations with the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity has resulted in the withdrawal of their recognition from the former Polish Government in London, which no longer exists.

The British and United States Governments have taken measures to protect the interest of the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity as the recognized government of the Polish State in the property belonging to the Polish State located in their territories and under their control, whatever the form of this property may be....

The Three Powers note that the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity, in accordance with the decisions of the Crimea Conference, has agreed to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot in which all democratic and anti-Nazi parties shall have the right to take part and to put forward candidates, and that the representatives of the Allied press shall enjoy full freedom to report to the world upon developments in Poland before and during the elections.

B. The following agreement was reached on the western frontier of Poland:

In conformity with the agreement on Poland reached at the Crimea Conference the Three Heads of Government have sought the opinion of the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity in regard to the accession of territory in the north and west which Poland should receive. The President of the National Council of Poland and members of the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity

have been received at the Conference and have fully presented their views. The Three Heads of Government reaffirm their opinion that the final delimitation of the western frontier of Poland should await the peace settlement.

The Three Heads of Government agree that, pending the final determination of Poland's western frontier, the former German territories east of a line running from the Baltic Sea immediately west of Swinamunde, and thence along the Oder River to the confluence of the western Neisse River and along the western Neisse to the Czechoslovak frontier, including that portion of East Prussia not placed under the administration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in accordance with the understanding reached at this conference and including the area of the former free city of Danzig, shall be under the administration of the Polish State and for such purposes should not be considered as part of the Soviet zone of occupation in Germany....

XIII. ORDERLY TRANSFER OF GERMAN POPULATIONS

The Three Governments, having considered the question in all its aspects, recognize that the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, will have to be undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner....

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What factors might have encouraged the members of the Grand Alliance to continue working together at Potsdam despite their differences?
2. Who was assigned supreme authority in occupied Germany? Why was this done?
3. Why were the Soviets so interested in receiving industrial reparations from defeated Germany?
4. Why did the Americans insist that the USSR could take reparations only from the Soviet-occupied zone, and not from the rest of Germany?
5. Why did the Western leaders agree to the new Polish-German borders favored by Moscow?
6. Why did they agree to transfer to Germany the German populations remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary?
7. In what ways did the Potsdam agreements set the stage for the future division of Europe into Eastern and Western Blocs?