

REPORT OF THE YALTA (CRIMEA) CONFERENCE

TREATY AT A GLANCE

Completed

February 11, 1945, at Yalta, Crimea, USSR (present-day Ukraine)

Signatories

Great Britain, United States, and the Soviet Union

Overview

The results of the Yalta Conference (February 4–11, 1945; see YALTA AGREEMENT) between the Big Three Allied leaders were published in a report containing their consensus on the conduct of the closing months of World War II and on the organization of the postwar world. Since the strains among the Allies were becoming evident, the conference and report not only laid the groundwork for the establishment of the United Nations but also presaged the coming cold war.

Historical Background

During the summer of 1944, Churchill, who had early on cast a critical eye on the Bolsheviks and had no great love for his putative ally Joseph Stalin, lobbied for an Italian campaign in the European theater of the war in hopes that the Western powers among the Allies would reach the Danube before the Red Army. Representing a Britain that was the weakest of the Big Three powers in the alliance (the other two of course being the United States and the Soviet Union), Churchill was interested in restoring a balance of power in Europe that might keep England competitive with its old imperial rival Russia. Toward that end, he preempted President Franklin Delano Roosevelt by meeting with Stalin in October to make a deal on their respective nations' spheres of influence in the postwar world.

Roosevelt seemed hardly to mind. Not only was he ill and growing sicker, but American war aims in general were nebulous at best and pretty much nonexistent except for a reaffirmation of Woodrow Wilson's post-World War I internationalism. Stalin, for his part, was perfectly willing to barter. He planned ultimately only to honor those arrangements he was forced to honor. Like Churchill, Stalin realized Roosevelt's unwillingness to strain the alliance was helping the Soviet leader to undermine Churchill's ministers' diplomatic goals. In fact, Roosevelt's pliant attitude toward Stalin made the British prime minister gloomy

about his country's postwar prospects. Heading for the last summit conference of the war, he warned colleagues that this world conflict might prove even more disappointing than the last one.

When a dying Roosevelt arrived at Yalta on the Crimean peninsula in February 1945, he was completely exhausted from the strenuous journey. If Churchill saw Yalta as the final opportunity for the British and Americans to take a firm stand against Soviet control of eastern Europe, Roosevelt probably viewed it as the last chance to forestall the disintegration of the alliance upon what everyone knew was the coming victory. Certainly, the U.S. position showed little evidence of economic motives. Indeed, Roosevelt seemed not even to have a contingency plan for the breakdown of relations with an increasingly assertive USSR. What he feared more than that, evidently, was a retreat at home into American isolationism, which would scuttle his Wilsonian vision of a great power postwar condominium housed in an effective United Nations organization.

Wishing for Soviet participation in a postwar U.N., Roosevelt was prepared in both word (at the Yalta Conference) and deed (in the allied advance across Europe) to assure Stalin that the Anglo-Saxons were not ganging up on him. But Stalin, for all his former revolutionary zeal, proved as old-fashioned a European as Churchill: he sought postwar security through military and political control of eastern Europe, control that would create a buffer for Russia against the liberal

democracies and the kind of ideas that might threaten even his iron control over the varied peoples of the USSR.

At length, the Big Three were able to maintain their unity at the Yalta Conference only by resorting to vague language or by postponing the more explosive issues that divided them.

Terms

The Yalta Conference and report reaffirmed earlier agreements to accept nothing less than unconditional surrender of the Axis powers. Inviting the Free French to join them, the Big Three decided to divide the defeated Germany into zones of occupation, with the French zone carved out of lands held by the Americans and British, while the Soviet zone would extend to the Elbe. The German capital, Berlin, would also be divided into four zones, although it would be surrounded by Soviet-held territory. Overall, the occupation would be run by a joint European Advisory Commission.

Even though the Western powers rejected the extreme plans, discussed earlier at Quebec, to turn Germany into a pastoral nation and pushed for revitalized German industry under Allied control, Stalin continued to insist on reparations, on stripping the vanquished foe of some \$20 billion in industrial machinery and raw materials. The conference meekly assigned the question to a reparations commission. Stalin also revived earlier talk about breaking up Germany into small states, but here at least the Americans heeded British warnings about further Balkanization in central Europe in the face of the newly powerful Soviet behemoth, and this too they left for additional study.

For the past eight days Winston S. Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain, Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, and Marshal J.V. Stalin, Chairmen of the Council of People's Commissars of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, have met with the Foreign Secretaries, Chiefs of Staff and other advisers in the Crimea. . . .

The following statement is made by the Prime Minister of Great Britain, the President of the United States of America, and the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on the results of the Crimea Conference.

I. THE DEFEAT OF GERMANY

We have considered and determined the military plans of the three Allied Powers for the final defeat of the common enemy. The military staffs of the three Allied nations have met in daily meetings throughout the Conference. These meetings have been most satisfactory from every point of view and have resulted in

closer coordination of the military effort of the three Allies than ever before. The fullest information has been interchanged. The timing, scope and coordination of new and even more powerful blows to be launched by our armies and air forces into the heart of Germany from the East, West, North, and South have been fully agreed and planned in detail.

Our combined military plans will be made known only as we execute them, but we believe that the very close working partnership among the three staffs attained at this Conference will result in shortening the war. Meetings of the three staffs will be continued in the future whenever the need arises.

Nazi Germany is doomed. The German people will only make the cost of their defeat heavier to themselves by attempting to continue a hopeless resistance.

II. THE OCCUPATION AND CONTROL OF GERMANY

We have agreed on common politics and plans for enforcing the unconditional surrender terms which we shall impose together on Nazi Germany after German armed resistance has been finally crushed. These terms will not be made known until the final defeat of Germany has been accomplished. Under the agreed plan, the forces of the Three Powers will each occupy a separate zone of Germany. Coordinated administration and control has been provided for under the plan through a central Control Commission consisting of the Supreme Commanders of the Three Powers with headquarters in Berlin. It has been agreed that France should be invited by the Three Powers, if she should so desire, to take over a zone of occupation, and to participate as a fourth member of the Control Commission. The limits of the French zone will be agreed by the four Governments concerned through their representatives on the European Advisory Commission.

It is our inflexible purpose to destroy German militarism and Nazism and to ensure that Germany will never again be able to disturb the peace of the world. We are determined to disarm and disband all German armed forces; break up for all time the German General Staff that has repeatedly contrived the resurgence of German militarism; remove or destroy all German military equipment; eliminate or control all German industry that could be used for military production; bring all war criminals to just and swift punishment and exact reparation in kind for the destruction wrought by the Germans; wipe out the Nazi party, Nazi laws, organizations and institutions, remove all Nazi and militarist influences from public office and from the cultural and economic life of the German people; and take in harmony such other measures in Germany as may be necessary to the future peace and safety of the world. It is not our purpose to destroy the people of Germany, but only when Nazism and militarism have been extirpated, will there be hope for a decent life for Germans, and a place for them in the comity of nations.

III. REPARATION BY GERMANY

We have considered the question of the damage caused by Germany to the Allied nations in this war and recognized it as just that Germany be obliged to make compensation for this damage in kind to the greatest extent possible. A Commission for the Compensation of Damage will be established. The Commission will be instructed to consider the question of the extent and methods for compensating damage caused by Germany to the Allied countries. The Commission will work in Moscow.

Stalin was more conciliatory when the rest of the Allies wished to issue a call—pursuant to proposals made at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference back in August through October of 1944—for a Conference of United Nations to be held in San Francisco on April 25, 1945. He nevertheless demanded that all 16 of the republics that made up the USSR be represented. Although the United States might have made a similar argument for its 48 individual states, it did not. Stalin's rationale again owed something to Russia's ages-long competition with the British Empire: he needed such representation, so he claimed, to balance all the nations of that empire, which would naturally vote with London. The Soviets also demanded that the permanent members of the Security Council, which of course included Russia, retain a veto on all issues instead of merely on questions involving sanctions and threats to the collective peace.

In light of concessions elsewhere, however, Stalin settled for three members in the General Assembly and a limited veto. A relieved Roosevelt declared, "The Russians have given in so much at the conference that I don't think we should let them down." Like Wilson, Roosevelt put much—and as it turned out—too much stock in international peacekeeping organizations.

IV. UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE

We are resolved upon the earliest possible establishment with our Allies of a general international organization to maintain peace and security. We believe that this is essential, both to prevent aggression and to remove the political, economic and social causes of war through the close and continuing collaboration of all peace-loving peoples.

The foundations were laid at Dumbarton Oaks. On the important question of voting procedure, however, agreement was not there reached. The present Conference has been able to resolve this difficulty.

We have agreed that a Conference of United Nations should be called to meet at San Francisco in the United States on the 25th April 1945, to prepare the charter of such an organization, along the lines proposed in the informal conversations at Dumbarton Oaks.

The Government of China and the Provisional Government of France will be immediately consulted and invited to sponsor invitations to the Conference

jointly with the Governments of the United States, Great Britain and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. As soon as the consultation with China and France has been completed, the text of the proposals on voting procedure will be made public.

The Americans also put great stock—and as it turned out, too much stock—in free elections. Roosevelt proposed a Declaration on Liberated Europe, by which the Big Three committed to help all liberated peoples to solve their pressing political and economic problems "by democratic means" and endorsed free elections of governments "responsive to the will of the people." To Bolshevik ears—for whom the lexicon of democracy meant something quite different from what it did for Americans—this may well have sounded like more Wilsonian rhetoric, perhaps meant by FDR for domestic consumption to keep his nation from once again isolating itself from European affairs. Since Roosevelt announced, much to Churchill's dismay, that the United States intended to withdraw its troops from Europe within two years, Stalin would feel perfectly comfortable that he could, if he wished, soon simply ignore the declaration.

V. DECLARATION ON LIBERATED EUROPE

We have drawn up and subscribed to a Declaration on Liberated Europe. This Declaration provides for concerting the policies of the Three Powers and for joint action by them in meeting the political and economic problems of liberated Europe in accordance with democratic principles. The text of the Declaration is as follows:

The Premier of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and the President of the United States of America have consulted with each other in the common interests of the peoples of their countries and those of liberated Europe. They jointly declare their mutual agreement to concert during the temporary period of instability in liberated Europe the policies of their three Governments in assisting the peoples liberated from the domination of Nazi Germany and the peoples of the former Axis satellite States of Europe to solve by democratic means their pressing political and economic problems.

The establishment of order in Europe and the rebuilding of national economic life must be achieved by processes which will enable the liberated peoples to destroy the last vestiges of Nazism and Fascism and 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—the restoration of sovereign rights and self-government to those peoples who have been forcibly deprived of them by the aggressor nations.

To foster the conditions in which the liberated peoples may exercise those rights, the three Governments will jointly assist the people in any European liberated State or former Axis satellite State in Europe where in

their judgement conditions require: (a) to establish conditions of internal peace; (b) to carry out emergency measures for the relief of distressed peoples; (c) to form interim governmental authorities broadly representative of all democratic elements in the population and pledged to the earliest possible establishment through free elections of Governments responsive to the will of the people; and (d) to facilitate where necessary the holding of such elections.

The three Governments will consult the other United Nations and provisional authorities or other Governments in Europe when matters of direct interest to them are under consideration.

When, in the opinion of the three Governments, conditions in any European liberated State or any former Axis satellite State in Europe make such action necessary, they will immediately consult together on the measures necessary to discharge the joint responsibilities set forth in this Declaration.

By this Declaration we reaffirm our faith in the principles of the Atlantic Charter, our pledge in the Declaration by the United Nations, and our determination to build in cooperation with other peace-loving nations a world order under law, dedicated to peace, security, freedom and the general well-being of all mankind.

In issuing this Declaration, the Three Powers express the hope that the Provisional Government of the French Republic may be associated with them in the procedure suggested.

Poland, as always with the Soviets, proved the biggest sticking point at Yalta. The British and Americans wanted to keep the Curzon Line, agreed to in Tehran, as the Soviet-Polish border and even to modify that line slightly in Poland's favor. Churchill, however, objected to assigning 2.7 million Germans to Poland in the west, to—as he put it—stuffing “the Polish goose so full of Germans that it died of indigestion.” So, once again the three leaders put off the question; it would be resolved, they declared, at a peace conference come war's end. Roosevelt, with Churchill's stout backing, secured a promise from Stalin to permit free elections among “non-Fascist elements” within a month of that peace. But it was a vague promise, and Stalin reserved for himself the sole right to determine who exactly was “Fascist” while at the same time rejecting international supervision of the elections.

VI. POLAND

We came to the Crimea Conference resolved to settle our differences about Poland. We discussed fully all aspects of the question. We reaffirm our common desire to see established a strong, free independent and democratic Poland. As a result of our discussions we have agreed on the conditions in which a new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity may be formed in such a manner as to command recognition by the three major Powers.

The agreement reached is as follows:

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 western 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 Commission 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 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which now maintains diplomatic relations with the present Provisional Government of Poland, and the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the United States will establish diplomatic relations with the new Polish Government of National Unity, and will exchange Ambassadors by whose report 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 5 to 8 kilometres in favour 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.

The conference took up the question of Yugoslavia, once again trying to yoke the future interests of communists and democrats, and then arranged for the foreign secretaries of each power to keep in closer contact for the duration of the war.

VII. YUGOSLAVIA

We have agreed to recommend to Marshal Tito and Dr Subasić that the Agreement between them should be put into effect immediately, and that a new Government should be formed on the basis of that Agreement.

We also recommend that as soon as the new Government has been formed it should declare that:

(i) The Anti-Fascist Assembly of National Liberation (Avnoj) should be extended to include members of the last Yugoslav Parliament (Skupshtina) who have not compromised themselves by collaboration with the enemy, thus forming a body to be known as a temporary Parliament; and

(ii) Legislative acts passed by the Assembly of National Liberation will be subject to subsequent ratification by a Constituent Assembly.

There was also a general review of other Balkan questions.

VIII. MEETINGS OF FOREIGN SECRETARIES

Throughout the Conference, besides the daily meetings of the Heads of Governments, and the Foreign Secretaries, separate meetings of the three Foreign Secretaries, and their advisers, have also been held daily.

These meetings have proved of the utmost value and the Conference agreed that permanent machinery should be set up for regular consultation between the three Foreign Secretaries. They will, therefore, meet as often as may be necessary, probably about every three or four months. These meetings will be held in rotation in the three capitals, the first meeting being held in London, after the United Nations Conference on World Organization.

IX. UNITY FOR PEACE AS FOR WAR

Our meeting here in the Crimea has reaffirmed our common determination to maintain and strengthen in the peace to come that unity of purpose and of action which has made victory possible and certain for the United Nations in this war. We believe that this is a sacred obligation which our Governments owe to our peoples and to all the peoples of the world.

Only with continuing and growing cooperation and understanding among our three countries, and among all the peace-loving nations, can the highest aspiration of humanity be realized—a secure and lasting peace which will, in the words of the Atlantic Charter 'Afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want'.

Victory in this war and establishment of the proposed international organization will provide the greatest opportunity in all history to create in the years to come the essential conditions of such a peace.

[Signed]

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
J.V. STALIN
11th February 1945

Finally, Roosevelt at Yalta obtained from the USSR a promise to declare war against Japan "two to three months" after the surrender of Germany, in return for U.S. support of the Soviet acquisition of territories lost in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 and Soviet dominance in Outer Mongolia and Manchuria—all the

objectives of the old imperial Russia in East Asia (see YALTA AGREEMENT).

Consequences

Within a month it became clear that Russia had no intention of meeting the expectations raised at Yalta. Molotov announced on March 23 that most of the London Poles, whom the United States and Great Britain had fought so hard to include in the provisional "unity" government, were being disqualified by the Russians from Polish elections. Similar news of general Soviet foot-dragging and bad faith had been reaching Roosevelt and Churchill from all the various commissions the conference had set up.

When he heard Molotov had disqualified the London Poles, Roosevelt banged his fist on the arm of his wheelchair and barked, "We can't do business with Stalin. He has broken every one of the promises he made at Yalta." Angry and disillusioned, FDR retreated to Warm Springs, Georgia, and died on April 12. In the coming years he would be attacked for attending the conference in the first place, for his eagerness to placate Stalin, and for including in his entourage Alger Hiss, who later was exposed as a communist agent.

Whether Roosevelt was duped at Yalta and sold out eastern Europe to the Bolsheviks, as his right-wing American critics charged, the conference would certainly have turned out differently if the United States had listened more carefully to Churchill's advice. The atmosphere of trust might well have been replaced with the hard-nosed Old World haggling more typical of European peace conferences in the past, but even then there would have been little Churchill and Roosevelt could have done to stop Stalin other than threatening Russia, whose Red Army was just then engaged in soundly defeating the common enemy, with a new world war. Short of that, Roosevelt would certainly have been expected to give up some of the recently liberated states in his (and Churchill's) haggling with Stalin, which he could hardly have done without turning his back on the very principles for which he claimed to be fighting the war and alienating millions of U.S. voters.

On the other hand, Roosevelt was facing a costly campaign against Japan in East Asia, so purchasing Soviet help was both realistic and, in terms of American lives saved, humane. FDR could no more have predicted that the atomic bomb would render Soviet aid useless than he could have known that the young, aristocratic Hiss was in reality a sinister spy. After all, the scientists of the Manhattan Project had their doubts about "the gadget" right up to the moment it exploded in the desert around Alamogordo at 0529:45

on July 16, 1945. And even after Richard Nixon exposed him, Hiss was only convicted of perjury, never of espionage. Millions of people continued to consider him not only innocent but a martyr to right-wing fanaticism until some 50 years later, when the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening of its state archives lent more credence to the charges.

The Yalta Report itself was a noble statement and set important goals. If it was rightly criticized for failing to establish any specific plan for achieving these goals, the report at least presented a facade of unity

among the Allies, which was important at that moment. While it is true that the report's ultimate vagueness, most evident in the broad provision for the four-power occupation of Germany, resolved fewer issues than it left unresolved, only when the document is read in the full context of subsequent events does it seem clear that the sharp ideological differences unofficially motivating the Western Allies and the Soviet Union were narrowly overcome by their common need to defeat Nazi Germany.