



World History

World War II Reconciliation

Name: _____
Section: _____
Score: _____ /5

Directions: Read the information about the Yalta Conference and the Potsdam Conference and then answer the questions below.

The Yalta Conference, 1945

The Yalta Conference took place in a Russian resort town in the Crimea from February 4–11, 1945, during World War Two. At Yalta, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin made important decisions regarding the future progress of the war and the postwar world.

The Allied leaders came to Yalta knowing that an Allied victory in Europe was practically inevitable but less convinced that the Pacific war was nearing an end. Recognizing that a victory over Japan might require a protracted fight, the United States and Great Britain saw a major strategic advantage to Soviet participation in the Pacific theater. At Yalta, Roosevelt and Churchill discussed with Stalin the conditions under which the Soviet Union would enter the war against Japan and all three agreed that, in exchange for potentially crucial Soviet participation in the Pacific theater, the Soviets would be granted a sphere of influence in Manchuria following Japan's surrender. This included the southern portion of Sakhalin, a lease at Port Arthur (now Lushunkou), a share in the operation of the Manchurian railroads, and the Kurile Islands. This agreement was the major concrete accomplishment of the Yalta Conference.

The Allied leaders also discussed the future of Germany, Eastern Europe and the United Nations. Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin agreed not only to include France in the postwar governing of Germany, but also that Germany should assume some, but not all, responsibility for reparations following the war. The Americans and the British generally agreed that future governments of the Eastern European nations bordering the Soviet Union should be "friendly" to the Soviet regime while the Soviets pledged to allow free elections in all territories liberated from Nazi Germany. Negotiators also released a declaration on Poland, providing for the inclusion of Communists in the postwar national government. In discussions regarding the future of the United Nations, all parties agreed to an American plan concerning voting procedures in the Security Council, which had been expanded to five permanent members following the inclusion of France. Each of these permanent members was to hold a veto on decisions before the Security Council.

Initial reaction to the Yalta agreements was celebratory. Roosevelt and many other Americans viewed it as proof that the spirit of U.S.-Soviet wartime cooperation would carry over into the postwar period. This sentiment, however, was short lived. With the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, Harry S. Truman became the thirty-third president of the United States. By the end of April, the new administration clashed with the Soviets over their influence in Eastern Europe, and over the United Nations. Alarmed at the perceived lack of cooperation on the part of the Soviets, many Americans began to criticize Roosevelt's handling of the Yalta negotiations. To this day, many of Roosevelt's most vehement detractors accuse him of "handing over" Eastern Europe and Northeast Asia to the Soviet Union at Yalta despite the fact that the Soviets did make many substantial concessions.



World Leaders at the Yalta Conference

The Potsdam Conference, 1945

The Big Three—Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (replaced on July 26 by Prime Minister Clement Attlee), and U.S. President Harry Truman—met in Potsdam, Germany, from July 17 to August 2, 1945, to negotiate terms for the end of World War II. After the Yalta Conference of February 1945, Stalin, Churchill, and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had agreed to meet following the surrender of Germany to determine the postwar borders in Europe. Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945, and the Allied leaders agreed to meet over the summer at Potsdam to continue the discussions that had begun at Yalta. Although the Allies remained committed to fighting a joint war in the Pacific, the lack of a common enemy in Europe led to difficulties reaching consensus concerning postwar reconstruction on the European continent.

The major issue at Potsdam was the question of how to handle Germany. At Yalta, the Soviets had pressed for heavy postwar reparations from Germany, half of which would go to the Soviet Union. While Roosevelt had acceded to such demands, Truman and his Secretary of State, James Byrnes, were determined to mitigate the treatment of Germany by allowing the occupying nations to exact reparations only from their own zone of occupation. Truman and Byrnes encouraged this position because they wanted to avoid a repetition of the situation created by the Treaty of Versailles, which had exacted high reparations payments from Germany following World War One. Many experts agreed that the harsh reparations imposed by the Versailles Treaty had handicapped the German economy and fueled the rise of the Nazis.

Despite numerous disagreements, the Allied leaders did manage to conclude some agreements at Potsdam. For example, the negotiators confirmed the status of a demilitarized and disarmed Germany under four zones of Allied occupation. According to the Protocol of the Conference, there was to be “a complete disarmament and demilitarization of Germany”; all aspects of German industry that could be utilized for military purposes were to be dismantled; all German military and paramilitary forces were to be eliminated; and the production of all military hardware in Germany was forbidden. Furthermore, German society was to be remade along democratic lines by repeal of all discriminatory laws from the Nazi era and by the arrest and trial of those Germans deemed to be “war criminals.” The German educational and judicial systems were to be purged of any authoritarian influences, and democratic political parties would be encouraged to participate in the administration of Germany at the local and state level. The reconstitution of a national German Government was, however, postponed indefinitely, and the Allied Control Commission (which was comprised of four occupying powers, the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union) would run the country during the interregnum.

One of the most controversial matters addressed at the Potsdam Conference dealt with the revision of the German-Soviet-Polish borders and the expulsion of several million Germans from the disputed territories. In exchange for the territory it lost to the Soviet Union following the readjustment of the Soviet-Polish border, Poland received a large swath of German territory and began to deport the German residents of the territories in question, as did other nations that were host to large German minority populations. The negotiators at Potsdam were well-aware of the situation, and even though the British and Americans feared that a mass exodus of Germans into the western occupation zones would destabilize them, they took no action other than to declare that “any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner” and to request that the Poles, Czechoslovaks and Hungarians temporarily suspend additional deportations.

In addition to settling matters related to Germany and Poland, the Potsdam negotiators approved the formation of a Council of Foreign Ministers that would act on behalf of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China to draft peace treaties with Germany’s former allies. Conference participants also agreed to revise the 1936 Montreux Convention, which gave Turkey sole control over the Turkish Straits. Furthermore, the United States, Great Britain, and China released the “Potsdam Declaration,” which threatened Japan with “prompt and utter destruction” if it did not immediately surrender (the Soviet Union did not sign the declaration because it had yet to declare war on Japan).



Soviet Leader Joseph Stalin and President Harry Truman

The Potsdam Conference is perhaps best known for President Truman's July 24, 1945 conversation with Stalin, during which time the President informed the Soviet leader that the United States had successfully detonated the first atomic bomb on July 16, 1945. Historians have often interpreted Truman's somewhat firm stance during negotiations to the U.S. negotiating team's belief that U.S. nuclear capability would enhance its bargaining power. Stalin, however, was already well-informed about the U.S. nuclear program thanks to the Soviet intelligence network; so he also held firm in his positions. This situation made negotiations challenging. The leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, who, despite their differences, had remained allies throughout the war, never met again collectively to discuss cooperation in postwar reconstruction.

"The Potsdam Conference, 1945." US Department of State. Office of the Historian, n.d. Web. 04 May 2015.
<<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/potsdam-conf>>.

Thought Questions:

1. What important decisions about the end of the war and post-war world were made at the Yalta Conference? List and explain 3
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. What important decisions about the post-war world were made at the Potsdam Conference? List and explain 3.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. How was the treatment of the defeated nations different at the end of World War II than their treatment at the end of World War I? Defend your answer using the assertion, reasoning, evidence method.