

## 'The Potsdam Conference' from Le Monde (14 July 1945)

**Caption:** On 14 July 1945, the French daily newspaper Le Monde outlines the political and territorial implications of the Potsdam Conference.

**Source:** Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 14.07.1945, n° 181; 2e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La Conférence de Potsdam", p. 1.

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## The Potsdam Conference

The Conference that opens in Potsdam early next week is the follow-up to the Yalta Conference.

Last February, when President Roosevelt met Mr Churchill and Marshal Stalin, the war was still raging in Europe, and the United Nations Conference had not yet taken place. Problems had a totally different complexion than they have now.

There is still one more decision that remains to be taken, and it is a major one. It concerns the Far East. Will the USSR go to war against Japan, or will it give some form of assistance to the Allies other than the troops that are holding back Japanese forces in Manchuria? Apart from this issue, the status of Europe will be the focus of the talks between the 'Big Three'.

They will have to agree on a common policy towards Germany. There is no need to elaborate on the difficulties that this issue raises. The events of the past two months have sufficiently highlighted them. They result mainly from differing, if not totally opposite, political viewpoints and will not be resolved by a verbal or written agreement. Potsdam will have to be judged on the basis of how the decisions taken there are implemented.

The fate of the liberated countries encounters similar problems. As *The Times* points out, it is not so much a question of Russia's age-old ambitions, nor of its desire that neighbouring countries adopt 'a domestic policy midway between the Soviet system and Western democracies', as of a different understanding of what constitutes democracy. Is not the reconstruction of Europe, as agreed in Yalta, based on a misunderstanding, and is not our continent exposed to 'the latent threat of a physical and psychological division into two camps'?

For the time being, these possible outcomes will be overshadowed by more urgent issues, such as the demarcation of new borders. We know that there are calls for many changes, not only at the expense of Germany and Italy but also between some countries in the Balkans. Solutions can only be sketched out in Potsdam. The question is whether the final settlement will be made at a peace conference, postponed until next year, or, as Washington says, during direct talks with the countries concerned. Such talks are possible only in certain cases and not on issues affecting Germany, since it does not currently exist as a sovereign State. Will the 'Big Three' make it their prerogative to act as referees? A number of American statements lead us to that conclusion. They want Potsdam to be to the future peace conference what Dumbarton Oaks was to the meeting in San Francisco.

The comparison is perhaps not perfect. San Francisco was about a general organisation to which all countries will submit voluntarily, even if they do not agree with every single aspect of it. The peace settlement individual interests which cannot be addressed without the support of the parties concerned. The French view has always been that no lasting peace is possible unless it enjoys everyone's support. France can only hope that the 'Big Three' will not lose sight of this principle, which experience has so often shown to be true, and that, while exercising their authority to establish peace, they remember that it cannot be maintained by force alone.