

‘Decisions taken by "the Big Three"' from Le Figaro (14 February 1945)

Caption: On 14 February 1945, in an article published in the French Conservative daily newspaper Le Figaro, the journalist and diplomat Wladimir d’Ormesson makes an initial assessment of the results of the Yalta Conference.

Source: Le Figaro. dir. de publ. Brisson, Pierre. 14.02.1945, n° 154; 119e année. Paris: Le Figaro. "La décision des "Trois"", auteur:D’Ormesson, Wladimir , p. 1.

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Decisions taken by ‘the Big Three’

There are always two parts to the declarations issued at the end of major conferences: the facts and the rhetoric. The latter is, perforce, more inflated than the former and, at the same time, less significant.

A number of facts emerge from the declaration issued yesterday. They are particularly reassuring with regard to the Allies’ military intentions, and that is what matters most, since the war is not over. We can tell from the tone of the statement that the three major Allied powers’ decisions and intentions are plain and non-negotiable. The war will continue until German military might is utterly destroyed. The enemy will be hit harder and harder in the east, west, north and south. Either Germany will immediately capitulate, because it has no other way out, thereby sparing itself additional suffering, or it will persist in a futile struggle. It will be its own fault if it prolongs the suffering which will become more agonising with each passing day. There is not the slightest chance of any kind of negotiation. This was already quite clear, but it is still reassuring to have it formally confirmed in the current context.

The ‘Big Three’ have established the principles that will govern the occupation of Germany. It is interesting that the statement says nothing about the future of the German Reich itself. There is no reference, even in passing, to the internal structure of the German State or States, to the possible creation of an autonomous Westphalia-Rhine State, to the Rhine as a border, or to southern Germany, etc. The only reference of this nature concerns territorial compensation for Poland in the ‘north and east’. This deliberate reserve is the right approach. There is no point in revealing plans ahead of time. That does not mean that we should not already know what we intend to do, i.e. what we want and what we do not want. We cannot just make things up as we go along.

With regard to the Polish question and Yugoslavia, the ‘Big Three’ appear to have come up with the only viable formulae. It is, clearly, a compromise between external forces influencing the two countries, but, most of all, it is a compromise between the various camps within those countries. However, these agreements will be judged on the way in which they are implemented.

Those are the main hard facts that emerge from the Yalta Declaration. The rest is just international political verbiage. At issue are the principles that should govern the maintenance of peace, security arrangements and the return to a normal state of affairs in a liberated Europe. Those principles are wise and sound, but they are, necessarily, only theories. For the past 26 years, the world has gorged itself on sound principles and wise theories, but they have all resulted in such calamitous failure that there is a certain feeling that we have had more than enough of them.

It will be quite easy to guarantee security in the immediate aftermath of war, but that task will become more difficult in the decades to come. When that time comes, we must not be so foolish as to mistake mere words for security. From now on, we must be careful not to sow the seeds of such threats.

One question remains, one which is of direct concern to us. The declaration by the ‘Big Three’ states that France, ‘if it so wishes’, will be invited to take part in the occupation of the German Reich and that it will be given a region and a seat on the Central Control Commission in Berlin. It also states that we, along with China, will be invited to attend the conference scheduled to be held on 25 April in San Francisco in order to complete the work begun in Dumbarton Oaks. France will certainly accept these kind invitations.

It is, furthermore, too great a country to have to indulge in rhetoric.

Wladimir d’ORMESSON