

The Yalta Conference

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The Yalta Conference

From 4 to 11 February 1945, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt met in Yalta, in the Crimea on the Black Sea, to settle the questions raised by the inevitable German defeat. Roosevelt was particularly anxious to secure the cooperation of Stalin, while Churchill was apprehensive of the Soviet power. He wanted to avoid the Red Army exerting too widespread an influence over Central Europe. At this time, the Soviet troops had already reached the centre of Europe, whereas the British and Americans had not yet crossed the Rhine.

The three Great Powers first of all agreed on the arrangements for the occupation of Germany: the country would be divided into four zones of occupation, with France allocated a zone of occupation to be carved out in part from the British and US zones. Berlin, situated in the Soviet zone, would also be divided into four sectors.

The USSR secured the extension of the eastern German border to the Oder-Neisse line, placing nearly all of Silesia, part of Pomerania, part of eastern Brandenburg and a small area of Saxony within Poland. The northern part of East Prussia, around the city of Königsberg (renamed Kaliningrad), was incorporated into the USSR. Stalin managed to secure use of the Curzon line as the eastern border of Poland, thereby keeping all Ukrainian and Belorussian territories within Moscow's sphere of influence. The three Heads of Government also signed a 'Declaration on the policy to be followed in the liberated regions', a text which envisaged free elections being held and democratic governments taking office.

The United States obtained the USSR's agreement to enter the fight against Japan, and Roosevelt saw the successful conclusion of his plan for the formation of a United Nations organisation, which was to be created on 25 April 1945.

Yalta seemed to be the final attempt to reorganise the world on a basis of cooperation and agreement. The world was not yet divided into two hemispheres of influence, but the Western Powers were obliged to accept Stalin's role in the territories liberated by Soviet tanks. Central and Eastern Europe were henceforth under the exclusive control of the Red Army.