

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.



World Leaders at the Yalta Conference

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 Lüshunkou), 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.