



From Yalta to Potsdam: Two Men's Idea's That Changed the World
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Abstract

The Yalta and Potsdam Conferences are interesting to look at because of the similarities and differences that occurred. At each meeting, different leaders attended, leading to different outcomes and goals for the future. At Yalta, where Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt met to discuss the end of the war in Europe and the future in Asia, concluded pretty successfully in the public's view.

This included the creation of the United Nations and trying resolve who would have spheres of influence in certain places. At Potsdam, where Truman, Stalin, and Atlee met to discuss how the allies would end the war in Asia; concluded not so well for the Allies. This was much in part due to the development of the atomic bomb. Both meetings had a common goal in mind, but each had to work out problems and differences that the different leader wanted.

Looking at primary source documents, the issues become clear on who had certain mindsets entering the conferences. Yalta was seen as a success to the public following its conclusion, but Potsdam on the other hand seemed like a failure to come to a conclusion. Roosevelt was able to keep the relationship between Stalin and the United States under control, while under Truman the relationship buckled into a long lasting struggle between the United State and the Soviet Union, the Cold War.

Introduction

Yalta was seen as success to the public according to Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, "A survey of public reaction, conducted by the State Department during the last week of February, revealed that the American people considered the Yalta Conference a success." Each member of the "Big Three" had their own political visions entering the conference and each wanted different outcomes.

Roosevelt wanted to keep the "Big Three" together in order to form the United Nations, a concept first derived from President Woodrow Wilson following the end of World War I, calling for a League of Nations to solve problems before they escalate into war. Roosevelt also called for a second front from the Soviet Union on Japan.

Churchill was looking for free elections in Eastern and Central Europe and to keep its empire intact. Stalin was looking for a buffer zone to protect itself from another invasion. The Yalta Conference would be the last time the "Big Three" would meet together.

A few months later, the Potsdam Conference would be held, and two of the three members would be different from that of Yalta. Despite the "Big Three's" success at Yalta to work together and agree on issues following the war in Europe; Potsdam is seen as a failure to make a peace treaty and resolve the issues that were still left undecided at Yalta. One of the leading issues, the United Nations, was a big victory for Roosevelt at Yalta; he was able to convince Stalin to join the United Nations.

In addition to the United Nations, spheres of influence were a major factor for the "Big Three"; each leader was concerned on the amount of influence each would have over lesser countries around the world. As a final point, the atomic bomb was a huge factor at Potsdam for President Harry Truman and his negotiations with Stalin over the war in Asia. At Potsdam, Stalin would attend, but Roosevelt and Churchill would not. Roosevelt died during his fourth term shortly after the Yalta Conference and Churchill lost his reelection bid to Clement R. Attlee.

Potsdam was seen as a failure to the public's eye because they did not sign the peace agreement that the press had anticipated. According to Charles L. Mee Jr., "At the end of the conference, they did not write the peace agreement the press had anticipated; rather, they signed what amounted to a tripartite declaration of the Cold War." At Potsdam, Truman was aware of the successful testing of the atomic bomb. Henry Stimson, who was the Secretary of War, saw a new confidence in Truman entering Potsdam which may have been a major factor in the negotiations. Truman had a very different political vision entering Potsdam than Roosevelt did at Yalta. Before Yalta there were two other conferences that were held at Cairo and Tehran.



Results and Discussion

The Yalta Conference was seen as a success for the "Big Three". They were able to work together to figure out a plan for Japan, the creation of the United Nations, and addressing the spheres of influence issue that was concerning all of Europe. Roosevelt had made his gains outside of Europe with the creation of the United Nations and getting Stalin to join.

Stalin made his gains in Eastern Europe and creating a buffer zone. Churchill had scored his gains in Western Europe, getting French membership in the Allied Control Council to help him balance the Soviet Union after the expected departure of the United States from Europe. At Potsdam, the struggle against Germany ended and the struggle over Germany began.

Potsdam, the last of the "Big Three" summits, projected a united Germany but left a divided one. It projected Allied cooperation but reflected Allied division. Potsdam left a rift between the United State and the Soviet Union for many years. Encouraging growth and development, but leaving the fear of total destruction from an atomic bomb relevant.

Roosevelt and Truman had very different ideas going into the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences. Roosevelt wanting to work more with the Soviets and using the United Nations and spheres of influence to work together to solve issues. Truman was unwilling to work with the Soviets. Truman, knowing he had the atomic bomb, knew he did not need to work with the Soviets to defeat Japan. The relationship between Truman and Stalin created a drift between the United States and the Soviet Union which lasted nearly half a century.

Acknowledgements & References

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