

## The Big Three Conference in Yalta 4-11 February 1945

*He who holds territory imposes his own system on it. Each side imposes its system on that area occupied by its armies.*

Joseph Stalin

The conference at Yalta in the Crimean Peninsula on the Black Sea was the second of conferences held by leaders of the so-called Big Three (USA, Soviet Union, Great Britain) after the November-December conference in Tehran 1943 (Iran). It preceded, in turn, the meeting in Potsdam (Germany) in July-August 1945, which the Allies held already after the end of the Second World War. The Yalta conference received the cryptonym *Argonaut* used by the Big Three leaders in official messages. It was coined by Winston Churchill, who drew it from the Greek myth of the Golden Fleece and related it to the hazardous journey of Roosevelt and Churchill on the Black Sea in search of the elusive prize, a just settlement of the war in Europe.

The Yalta conference was attended by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The heads of state were accompanied by ministers of foreign affairs, chiefs of staff and high-ranking advisors. The American delegation, for example, flew into Crimea on 25 airplanes with more than 200 people on board. This was the last large conference with the participation of President Roosevelt. The ill US president died two months after it ended - on 12 April 1945.

Decisions reached in Yalta actually constituted a specification and approval of agreements already debated in Tehran. The overriding goal of the Yalta conference was to determine the fate of Germany after the end of wartime hostilities, as well as spheres of influence in East-Central Europe after the defeat of Hitler. Metaphorically, the Yalta conference can be characterised as a certain type of poker game between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill in which the Soviet leader held the best cards.

Key issues discussed at the Yalta conference were:

- review of the military situation in Europe
- inclusion of Russia in the war against Japan
- agreements on creation of the United Nations (UN)
- unconditional surrender, demilitarisation and division of Germany into occupation zones
- incarceration of war criminals and war reparations
- borders of post-war Poland and nature of the Polish government

### Military situation at the turn of 1944-45

It was already clear at the start of 1945 that Germany's defeat was inevitable. In June 1944, Western Allies created a second front in France in operation "Overlord" (sea and airborne landing of 160,000 Allied soldiers in Normandy). The Red Army found itself on Polish territory already in July 1944. In January 1945, the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes

in Belgium, aimed at repelling Allied armies encroaching from the West from German borders, failed. In this fighting Germany lost 100,000 killed and wounded soldiers, as well as 600 tanks and 1,600 aircraft. The Germans were never able to again supplement these losses, thus practically sealing the fate of the German army. It was in constant retreat since the collapse of the offensive in the Ardennes.

Already in February 1945, the Red Army was able to reach the Oder River line and occupy part of the Silesian industrial region. The crushing superiority of the Red Army in manpower and equipment allowed Soviet forces to surge forward at a lightning pace, covering a distance of nearly 500 km in barely 18 days. At the start of 1945, the Soviets had 6 million soldiers fighting the Germans, who were divided into nine so-called fronts. The Soviet army at that time was only 70 km away from Berlin. Meanwhile, British and American armies still had a distance of 500 km to cover. The Russians therefore gained an enormous strategic and psychological advantage over the Western Allies in the “race” to Berlin.

In light of this development of events on fronts in Europe, the Soviet Union began to gain the status of a superpower. It became increasingly clear that a final settlement of the fate of the post-war world would depend on the development of relations between the US and the Soviet Union. Winston Churchill was aware of this fact, when he wrote after the conference in Tehran: “[...] for the first time I realized what a small nation we are. I sat there with the great Russian bear on one side and the great American buffalo on the other; between them sat a poor English donkey.”

Such an arrangement of forces with two main players in the form of the US and USSR had fundamental significance for the power structure during Yalta deliberations. There is even mention of a certain alliance between US President Roosevelt (who had high hopes of involving Russia in the US-Japanese war) and Joseph Stalin at the expense of a marginalised Great Britain. The British themselves had no great power of persuasion if they had no unanimous voice with the Americans. This was frequently not possible given the different interests guiding Roosevelt and Churchill.

The crushing tactical-military advantage of the Soviets at the end of 1944 and at the start of 1945 gave Stalin a strong negotiating position in Yalta that he scrupulously exploited in talks, strictly executing his plan for the countries of East-Central Europe, also including Poland.

During their military campaign the coalition partners had a common goal, common enemy and common task – to defeat Adolf Hitler. The declaration ending talks in Tehran in 1943 stressed that the USSR, USA and Great Britain “will work together during the time of war, as well as afterward in peacetime.” Nevertheless, as the end of the war neared, the difference of opinions between individual Great Three leaders over the post-war division of the world grew. After the war ended, these animosities soon transformed into the so-called Cold War (division of Germany into two states, erection of the Berlin wall, the arms race and the struggle over influence in various regions of the world). In fact, Churchill appeared to witness this situation when he wrote to Roosevelt prior to his arrival in Yalta, “I presently feel that the end of the war may bring even greater disappointment than the end of the previous one.”

## Yalta Conference

In being aware of the advantage that Stalin gained by occupying most of Polish territory, Churchill and Roosevelt knew that they had to most urgently resolve vital issues of dispute over the creation of a new post-war order in Europe. Winston Churchill particularly feared a situation in which Soviet armies would occupy large swathes of Western Europe. Both leaders counted on reaching a compromise in negotiations with Stalin on their terms or even convincing the Soviet leader to accept their proposed solutions. Yet, at the start of 1945 Stalin had a strong hand that actually allowed him to dictate terms during deliberations.

First of all, he was able to convince the Western leaders to come to Yalta. Previously, citing various excuses, he deliberately delayed the meeting of Big Three leaders that was already planned for September 1944. This allowed the Red Army to occupy as much territory as possible before the meeting in Yalta. Even though the state of President Roosevelt's health gradually worsened (the US President was ill since 1921 and was forced to use a wheelchair), Western leaders agreed to embark on a long and tiresome journey to Crimea. The US President was forced to travel 9,000 km! Stalin feared travel by air and, as he stated, doctors discouraged him from lengthy journeys. Therefore, the conference venue was set at an appropriate distance in order to travel by rail or ship from Moscow. Churchill in typical irony commented on the selection of Yalta as the meeting location: "We could not imagine a worse place for the meeting, even if we searched ten years to find it."

In this manner, Joseph Stalin led to his current allies arriving in his own territory, the USSR. This also gave him an additional advantage: "bugs" – miniature listening devices – were installed in the US President's apartments, as a result of which Stalin knew Roosevelt's private and less official views on matters discussed at the conference table. Secondly, at the start of 1945 the Red Army occupied nearly the entire territory of Poland, thus forcing Western leaders to face a state of *fait accompli*. As a result of this situation, their arguments concerning the borders of Poland and Europe, as well as Churchill's desire to weaken Soviet influence in post-war Europe is much as possible, had little impact.

Each of the Big Three leaders came to the conference with his own expectations and each had his own goals to achieve. At the same time, efforts were made to maintain the image of unity and commonality of interests necessary to swiftly defeat Hitler's Germany. After the wartime experiences of Russians, Joseph Stalin sought to ensure the security of the Soviet Union by establishing Soviet control over territories seized by Russia. He sought to carry out this intent through maximum expansion of the Soviet Union's borders, primarily in territories once belonging to Czarist Russia, and the creation of a zone of Russian influence through the formation of puppet governments. He was also aware that achievement of this goal would ease the situation that the Soviet army already *de facto* faced on lands that Russia intended to control. "He who holds territory imposes his own system on it. Each side imposes its system on that area occupied by its armies," declared Stalin. This scenario was executed particularly in the context of the fate that befell Poland and other countries of East-Central Europe (Hungary, Romania, Czechia, Slovakia) and Balkans (Bulgaria, Albania and initially Yugoslavia) for nearly 40 years after the war's end. The Red Army's presence on Polish territory was a decisive factor in the course of negotiations. In Yalta, Stalin even convinced Roosevelt and Churchill of his theory that Poland was always the corridor through which Russia was attacked – by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1812 and by Adolf Hitler in 1941. For this reason the Soviet leader was determined not to relent on the Polish matter. His overriding goal was to seize as much European territory as possible and Sovietise liberated countries. This

determination on the part of Stalin, his craftiness and cunning, together with the need of the Western Allies to make concessions to maintain the coalition brought enslavement to many countries.

Churchill, in being aware that Great Britain's position after the war would depend on an alliance with the US, sought to uphold it at any price. His idea for establishing a balance of power in Europe such as to limit Soviet influence on its post-war shape is much as possible was to restore France to the role of a strong European country and ally of Great Britain after the war. Interestingly, the French leader Charles de Gaulle was not invited to any conferences of the Great Three. Nevertheless, however, France ultimately gained control over one of the occupation zones in Germany. As for Germany, Churchill felt that it should not be overly weakened after the defeat of Hitler (proposals had previously appeared to divide up Germany into several smaller states), so that no void would appear in the centre of Europe that the Soviet Union could fill. Nevertheless, the British Prime Minister was frequently unable to force through his position due to the informal alliance between Roosevelt and Stalin. The US President believed that the tactic of compromises and concessions to Russia would maintain unity of the Allies guaranteeing long-standing peace in Europe. This US position very well suited Stalin.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt intended to pursue the matter of creating an international peace organisation, subsequently the UN. He believed that such an organisation would ensure many years of durable peace in the world. He also wanted to gain Stalin's declaration of Russia's accession to the war with Japan after the defeat of Germany. Unfortunately, to the extent that Roosevelt placed much emphasis on the war in the Pacific and made decisions that public opinion in the US would have approved, he considered European matters to be less important and more complicated during his talks in Yalta. For this reason he frequently agreed to far-reaching concessions in his negotiations with Stalin. It appears that at that time the Americans did not at all recognise that the fate of Eastern Europe should be a vital element of US foreign policy. The US President understood the post-war world order as cooperation between the great powers, frequently bypassing the views of smaller European countries, which obviously was in the interest of Stalin. Therefore, if there was any possibility of cooperation between Great Britain and the US toward Russia after the Tehran conference, if only on the issue of extracting Poland from Soviet clutches, it was indeed considerably weakened by Roosevelt's policy. The US President was convinced of his own prestige and power of the US. Moreover, it also appears that toward the end of the war Roosevelt did not fully comprehend the essence of the Stalinist system. This is perplexing in the context of his pronouncement in 1940, when he branded Russia as a totalitarian state and absolute dictatorship. However, from the time of the conference in Tehran Roosevelt naïvely believed that Stalin was a "man I can do business with," kindly referring to him as "Uncle Joe."

As a seasoned politician, Stalin understood the differences of view between the US President and British Prime Minister on European matters and was able to fully exploit them. Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Affairs Minister, wrote in his diary: "Stalin is the only one of the three who knows exactly what he wants and is a tough negotiator. P.M. [Churchill] is highly emotional on these matters. F.D.R. [Roosevelt] is in turn weak and jealous of others". "When an issue under discussion concerned an area under Soviet control [...],[Stalin] "proved to be a master of deft and procrastinating tactics without regard for facts" wrote Charles Bohlen, American diplomat and personal interpreter for Roosevelt, seconding Eden. Therefore, the Yalta conference is frequently considered to be a bilateral Soviet-American conference with Great Britain in the role of a "poor relative."

Prior to the Second World War, Yalta, a city in the southern part of the Crimean Peninsula on the Black Sea coast, was a popular vacation spot. The warm climate and sandy beaches were conducive to a lazy holiday. However, at the start of 1945 Yalta presented a sad image. As a result of recent military action in Crimea (the German offensive in this direction had the task of breaking through to rich oil deposits beyond the Ural Mountains, which would have allowed the German army to continue the war), the city was full of destroyed military vehicles, tanks, ruins and rubble. A neo-Renaissance palace in Levadia was selected as the main location of conference talks at which the US President also resided. When delegations arrived at the airport in Saki, a four-hour automobile journey to Yalta still awaited them. Snow fell in Crimea at the time and the road from the airport to Yalta was guarded by hundreds of Russian soldiers, who, due to the lack of snow clearing equipment, trampled the snow with their shoes to allow vehicle columns to pass.

With great effort, albeit superficially, the Russians were able to renovate three palaces, where the guests were accommodated. Sanitary infrastructure was in a miserable state (the withdrawing Germans completely plundered the premises, taking even door handles with them). Long queues to one of the bathrooms at the British residence and icy water in faucets are now legend. The conference guests also had to fight insects - troublesome fleas in rooms in which even up to 11 people were quartered. Winston Churchill complained about insects biting his feet. The Russians brought their best chefs and hotel service from Moscow to the conference. Table groaned under the weight of delicacies during evening banquets and there was never a shortage of vodka. All three leaders raised many toasts in banquet rooms. "The dinner atmosphere was exceptionally cordial. After 45 toasts, we were all drunk," wrote Charles Bohlen.

The Yalta conference had no previously established written agenda. The main plenary session began each day at 16:00. In sitting down to talks, leaders proposed subjects for discussion and reached general agreements that were subsequently discussed and specified by ministers, statesmen and military men of the three powers' working subgroups. The Big Three leaders also met for bilateral talks: Churchill with Roosevelt, Roosevelt with Stalin and Stalin with Churchill. Each delegation had its own interpreter, who simultaneously translated each sentence. Such model of communication between the participants significantly lengthened deliberations.

The conference began with a discussion of the current military situation. Military men from both sides gave an account of progress on the front: Gen. George Marshall on the part of the Allies and Gen. Alexei Antonov representing the Soviets. Stalin stressed the enormous range of Red Army operations in diminishing the scale Western offensive by the Allies, who were bogged down on the so-called Siegfried line, a long 600 km long network of German fortifications on the German-French border. He expressed fear that an insufficiently swift advance of Anglo-American forces toward Berlin could lead to some German units being shifted to the Eastern front to forestall the Russian offensive. The Allies, in turn, voiced the need to accelerate the Soviet advance toward the northwest, Prussia and Gdańsk, since Gdańsk was the base for German U-boat submarines wreaking havoc on Allied vessels on the Atlantic and North Sea.

Discussion then began on the post-war fate of Germany and its division into occupation zones. An initial concept was to divide Germany into several separate states, but it was ultimately decided to create occupation zones with each zone under the control of one of the

Big Three. Agreements on this issue were actually quite general, since Winston Churchill, concerned with post-war balance of power in Europe, avoided final decisions on this matter in fear of excessive dismemberment of Germany. Details were left to future deliberations, yet Churchill was able to convince the other leaders to grant France a separate occupation zone in post-war divided Germany. He thereby achieved his goal of raising France to the role of Great Britain's partner in Europe. Ultimately, it was decided to divide Germany into four occupation zones: Soviet (which later became the German Democratic Republic) and American, British and French (subsequently the Federal Republic of Germany).

Joseph Stalin raised the issue of war reparations (compensation for wartime losses). He proposed that Germany pay \$20 billion of which Russia would receive one-half, proportionately to its losses and engagement in the war effort. However, Churchill did not support this plan by arguing that Germany would be reduced to a nation of hungry beggars with such a scale of compensation. "In order to ride a horse, it must be given drink and food," argued the British Prime Minister. Russia therefore proposed that reparations be paid in-kind (80% of factories, equipment, transport means, ships, shares in foreign companies, and forced labour by German POWs would be allotted to Russia) and in the form of deliveries of goods from Germany to Russia for ten years after the war. The German economy was to remain under international control. It was agreed to leave discussion on more specific agreements concerning reparations to a separate commission. Nazi war criminals were to be brought to trial and executed in lands where crimes were committed.

The issue of creating a peace organisation, as already discussed in Teheran in 1943, continued to be addressed in Yalta. It was agreed to convene a Conference of United Nations on 25 April 1945 in San Francisco, USA in order to establish the UN statute, number of permanent members and procedure of distributing votes. It was agreed that the US, Soviet Union, Great Britain, France and China would become founding members of the organisation. Stalin also successfully pressed upon the Western Allies to include Ukraine and Belarus among permanent members (initially, he insisted on each of the 16 Soviet republics being given a separate vote). Therefore, the UN was created as a group of seven permanent members with the right of a single vote for each of them.

The US President and leader of the Soviet Union also set the terms of Russia's entry into the war against Japan. This was to take place two or three months after the end of the war with Germany. In exchange for the Red Army's engagement in Asia, Russia obtained territorial gains, including southern Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands and a naval base in Port Arthur. It also maintained control over Mongolia. These agreements were reached without knowledge of the countries vitally interested in changes in the region, in this case China. The US President counted on public opinion in the US approving territorial concessions to Russia in exchange for a swifter end to the war and the saving of many American soldiers' lives.

The third day of the Yalta conference was decisive as far as the Polish issue was concerned. In fact, the matter of Poland was discussed at seven out of eight plenary sessions in Yalta and the leaders mutually exchanged 18,000 words on this matter, as noted in British minutes. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Minister of Great Britain, wrote: "The most difficult matter at Yalta was Poland." "If conference participants disperse without achieving an agreement on the Polish matter, the entire conference will be deemed a failure," seconded Churchill. Debate on the fate of Poland was to also be a constant point of deliberation during all remaining conference days and elicited great controversy among participants. In the context of agreements on Poland, Churchill's words nevertheless proved true that the Yalta conference

would be one at which the Western Allies must decide not on what could be gained, but rather on what they would be forced to concede.

During the course of the conference the Soviet army occupied nearly the entire territory of Poland. A communist Polish Committee for National Liberation (PKWN) was established on lands occupied by the Soviets already on 22 July 1944, but had little support among the Polish populace. The PKWN manifesto generally declared that eastern borders of the Polish state would be established in mutual accord with the Soviet Union.

Previous agreements in Teheran postulated the setting of Poland's post-war eastern border on the so-called Curzon line. This was a line drawn in 1921 during the Polish-Bolshevik war and mostly extended along the present eastern border of Poland (with minor changes). In Yalta, leaders of the Great Three confirmed this agreement by stating that the Soviet Union deserved these eastern lands for its contribution to the victory over fascism and immense war suffering. Therefore, in their concessions to Stalin Western leaders accepted the status from 1939 – the Soviets kept the part of Poland that they annexed after their aggression on Poland on 17 September 1939.

Churchill still appealed for leaving Lwów on the Polish side as an expression of Stalin's goodwill (Roosevelt declared that he would not insist upon this). Stalin firmly rejected this proposal. As compensation for the loss of eastern lands, Poland would gain territory along its western border previously belonging to Germany. However, no exact course of the western border was determined at Yalta with only the quite general declaration that "Poland is to receive significant territory in the North and West." In response to Churchill's question of how to expel several million people into the heart of Germany, Stalin responded that Germans are no longer there anyhow, because they left by themselves (it is estimated that millions of people either fled or were expelled to the German heartland as a result of the shift of the western border). In turn, masses of people, mainly from the former Polish eastern regions, flowed to post-war Wrocław and Gdańsk. Agreements on Europe's post-war borders ultimately sealed Soviet domination in Poland.

The post-war composition of the Polish government raised enormous controversy. A Soviet creation already existed in Poland acting as a puppet Polish government – the Temporary Government of the Republic of Poland established on the basis of the PKWN in Lublin with Prime Minister Edward Osóbka-Morawski. It was recognised that the time only by the USSR and Czechoslovakia. In turn, a government of the Republic of Poland in exile already existed in London with President Władysław Raczkiewicz and Prime Minister Edward Mikołajczyk at the head. This Polish government was recognised without interruption during the Second World War by Great Britain, the US and all coalition partners together with neutral states, and enjoyed support from the vast majority of Poles in the country. Churchill firmly underscored (in line with the so-called Atlantic charter from 1941, an eight-point document on international relations and the self-determination of nations after the end of the war signed by the US President and British Prime Minister) that Great Britain would not accept a situation in which Poland would not be a sovereign state with the right to self-determination.

Thus, Western leaders counted on the formation of an independent Polish government through democratic and free elections. They proposed a Polish government based on members of the exile government. They deluded themselves that Stalin would accept such a solution. Russia nevertheless sought complete and permanent control over Poland that it actually already held, if only through presence of the Red Army throughout its territory.

The Soviet leader demonstrated political savvy and cynicism on this matter in knowing that he could withdraw from promises made at Yalta at any time. He stated that he would not allow Poland to again serve as a corridor to attack the Soviet Union, which, in his view, was the case when Poland was weak. He declared his desire for Poland to be free and independent and that this would, in turn, guarantee security to Russia. At the same time he harshly criticised actions of the Polish government in London by charging its members of harbouring anti-Soviet sentiment, calling them criminals and bandits and accusing them of inspiring attacks on the Red Army and Russian partisans by forces of the Polish underground. He vigorously argued that the only guarantee of stability for Poland was the present Temporary Government in Warsaw, which should be treated on equal terms as the French government headed by Gen. De Gaulle. He allowed for the ability of only two or three émigré politicians to join this government.

The Western Allies did not want to consent to the creation of a new leadership in Poland based on the Lublin arrangement in which authority was imposed on Poland by force. Churchill wrote: “We demand a real, concrete and effective representation of Polish figures with which we have been aligned thus far, particularly the participation of Mikołajczyk, Grabski and Romer (members of the exile government in London), as well as a certain number of Poles in Poland [...]. If it is possible to include eight or ten individuals from among them in the Lublin government, we can recognise this government at once.” He also appealed for the swiftest compromise possible on this matter, calling the Polish matter a “conference turning point” since, as he stated, “[...] the entire world expects a solution from us; therefore, if we disperse by still recognising different Polish governments, the world will learn that there are still fundamental discrepancies among us.”

Ultimately, in a quite generally formulated communiqué, it was agreed that a government would be formed with the inclusion of representatives of the government in exile as well as representatives from Polish lands. “The Temporary Government presently functioning in Poland should be transformed to a broader democratic base with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland and Poles abroad [...]. This Polish Temporary Government of National Unity will be obligated to hold the swiftest possible free and unfettered elections based on universal and secret voting,” read the final communiqué. Asked when democratic and free elections could take place in Poland, Stalin responded that this could even be within one month.

Both Roosevelt and Churchill believed Stalin’s assurances that he would agree on free elections. Meanwhile, already two months after the Yalta conference Stalin arrested 16 leaders of the Polish underground state. Openly breaching Yalta accords, Stalin also did not agree to inclusion of exile representatives in the reorganised government as being “extremely unfriendly to Russia.” Only after Churchill’s intervention did he consent to the inclusion of Stanisław Mikołajczyk, a former prime minister of the Polish government in London, in the interim national unity government, but only after he publicly declared that he fully accepts the Yalta accords.

Countries of East-Central Europe placed high hopes in the adoption by leaders of the US, Great Britain and Soviet Union of the Declaration on liberated Europe. This was one part of the communiqué from Yalta and reflected agreements of the Great Three on countries liberated from the Hitler yoke. It primarily made reference to provisions of the Atlantic Charter from 1941 and guaranteed democracy, free elections and respect for the right to self-



determination. Stalin, in his ruthless manner, had no intention of abiding by the Declaration and shortly thereafter, as history demonstrated, made his own interpretation of its provisions.

### After the conference

We know today that resolutions from the Yalta conference were a direct result of the military situation prevailing in Europe at the final stage of the war. Most decisions and compromises accepted by Roosevelt and Churchill were forced by the ongoing war with Hitler, whereas Western leaders needed Soviet military resources to swiftly end the war with Germany and Japan. Russia, in turn, conducted a policy of *fait accompli* – Soviet armies already occupied all of Poland, similarly as with Romania and Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The true victor at Yalta was the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin.

The majority of public opinion in the world understood the Yalta accords to guarantee peace and friendly cooperation between the great powers. The British and American delegations left Yalta with the conviction that they were able to secure that which was possible. The Americans underscored that, despite a feeling of “certain frustration and bitterness over Poland,” they achieved their basic goals – secured a Russian declaration to enter the war with Japan and reached consent over the shape of the UN. Pure pragmatism of the US and British leaders prevailed in Yalta and decisions were made without querying those interested. In the case of Great Britain, the maxim was confirmed that “Great Britain has no friends, only interests.” The post-war fate of liberated nations was determined with the help of matchsticks with which leaders of the Great Three marked borders of post-war Europe on the map. President Roosevelt deeply believed that provisions of the Declaration on liberated Europe were proof that the idea of democracy prevailed over ideas of communism. The further course of developments in the world showed that the American President’s faith was based on a highly fragile foundation. Recent allies in the fight against Hitler prepared themselves for a possible armed confrontation between East and West and launched an arms race in which recent “friends” built up their nuclear arsenals. Europe was divided by a symbolic Iron Curtain into a free and democratic part and a part controlled by the Soviet Union. A long era ensued that was called the “Cold War” (1947–1991) – a fierce ideological, political and military rivalry between the USSR and its satellite states grouped in the Warsaw Pact from 1955 and a Western bloc, namely non-communist countries grouped in NATO since 1949.

As for Poland and other East-Central European countries, Yalta became a symbol of enslavement and has been recently referred to as the *Yalta betrayal*. Yalta decisions were negatively received in Polish independence-oriented circles in the West and in Poland. The Polish government in London issued a declaration already on 13 February 1945 stating: “The Polish government states that decisions of the Conference of Three concerning Poland cannot be recognised by the Polish government and cannot bind the Polish Nation. The Polish Nation considers the separation from Poland of the eastern half of its territory through imposition of the so-called Curzon line as the Polish-Soviet border to constitute a new partition of Poland, this time carried out by Poland’s allies.” A subsequent document states that “The Crimean solution provides Russia a basis to take over Poland.” The end of the Second World War did not bring sovereignty, freedom or independence to countries of East-Central Europe (Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Baltic States and the part of Germany under Soviet occupation). As Gen. Władysław Anders stated, “As a result of the conference, Poland was sold to the Bolsheviks through its complete handover to their authority.” After all, how much could the leaders of the US and Great Britain count on if the communiqué on Poland began with the statement that “a new situation has arisen in Poland as a result of its

complete liberation by the Red Army?” Quite simply, the status quo was accepted. After enslaving the entire territory of post-war Poland, the Soviet terror apparatus and subservient Polish communist authorities repressed independence forces fighting for a sovereign homeland for another 40 years.

Only democratic changes initiated in Poland in 1980, the appearance of NSZZ “Solidarność,” public anti-communist protests spreading throughout post-Soviet countries, a political thaw in Russia and the symbolic fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 are deemed to constitute the end of the so-called Yalta-Potsdam order.