

The United Nations

Allied leaders at Yalta failed to agree on the future of Eastern Europe. In addition, they disagreed about keeping Germany. Both Churchill and Roosevelt wanted a single Germany to emerge from the war. Stalin did not. The result was the partitioning of Germany into four zones of occupation to be administered by the three nations of the Grand Alliance, plus France.

At Yalta, Roosevelt compromised the future of Asia by agreeing to allow an increase of future Soviet influence in Korea and Manchuria in exchange for Stalin's promise to enter the war against Japan at some date following the end of the war in Europe. (As events turned out, the development of an atomic bomb during the summer of 1945 made the Soviet Union's involvement against Japan unimportant. In fact, Stalin waited to declare war on Japan until after the United States dropped the first atomic weapon on the Japanese city of Hiroshima in August 1945.)

Such decisions at Yalta—an uncertain future for Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe, the partitioning of Germany, and a green light for an increased Soviet influence in Asia—all served as signs of the end of the Grand Alliance of FDR, Stalin, and Churchill, signaling the beginning of the Cold War. (It would prove the last meeting between the three men, since Roosevelt died two months later in April of 1945.)

But the Yalta Conference did include some positive decisions. Both Stalin and Churchill were concerned with establishing future spheres of influence. (They met secretly in October 1944 and agreed to Soviet control of postwar Romania and Bulgaria, British control of Greece, and joint control of Yugoslavia, and Hungary.) But Roosevelt was not interested in any policy based on spheres of influence. Instead, he called for “the end of the system of unilateral action, exclusive alliances, and spheres of influence.” At the heart of his goals was the establishment of a new international organization to be known as the United Nations.

In fact, the groundwork for the creation of this new organization had already been laid the previous year. In the fall of 1944, representatives from the United States, Russia, Great Britain—and later nationalist China—met at Dumbarton Oaks—a private Washington, D.C. estate—to discuss plans for forming just such an organization.



The Dumbarton Conference focused on creating a body to encourage “the maintenance of international peace and security.” Plans for forming the U.N. continued into 1945, when representatives from the Allied nations met in San Francisco in April and hammered out a structure for an international peace-keeping organization. A document defining the goals of the infant organization was drafted

called the Charter of the United Nations. By June, representatives from 50 nations signed the UN Charter, becoming the first UN members. The United Nations officially came into existence as an organization on October 24, 1945.

From the beginning, the United Nations was designed as a stronger, more meaningful international organization than its predecessor—the League of Nations—which was established following World War I. Its primary organ is the Security Council, a powerful entity which would decide the course of the UN in times of international conflict. Today, the United Nations provides social and medical organizations and peace-keeping troops to troubled countries around the world.

Review and Write

1. How did Churchill and Roosevelt compromise their beliefs with Stalin at the Yalta Conference?
2. Describe the process of organizing and founding the United Nations.