

Yalta conference the division of germany history essay



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During the first half of the XX century, two destructive wars raged throughout the world and brought about tremendous political and social change. The First World War destroyed the power of monarchies and made the interest of having alliance systems for protection and defense agreements ever more popular. The spark of new ideologies and ways to govern took over all monarchies, dynasties and empires; one of the most important ideologies that grew popular this century was Communism, which appeared during the 1920's with the Russian Revolution. Nazi aggression in Germany eventually led to the Second World War, being the most destructive in history. So by 1945 there was a total of about 78 million casualties from war alone, and the world was tired of the slaughter, yet the tensions still remained when the United States and the Soviet Union arose from World War II as the world's two superpowers.

What is “ Cold War”?

When hearing the words “ cold war” one may of a war probably taking place in the winter time or snow, thanks to the word “ cold.” But the term “ cold” in this case, is not referring to the weather or temperature; instead it's referring to the attitude of the enemies and countries involved. The first time this term was used, was in 1945 by the author George Orwell in his essay, You and the Atomic Bomb[1], published in the British newspaper Tribune. Contemplating a world living in the shadow of the threat of nuclear warfare, Orwell wrote:

“ For forty or fifty years past, Mr. H. G. Wells and others have been warning us that man is in danger of destroying himself with his own weapons, leaving the ants or some other gregarious species to take over. Anyone who has
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seen the ruined cities of Germany will find this notion at least thinkable.

Nevertheless, looking at the world as a whole, the drift for many decades has been not towards anarchy but towards the reimposition of slavery. We may be heading not for general breakdown but for an epoch as horribly stable as the slave empires of antiquity. James Burnham's theory has been much discussed, but few people have yet considered its ideological implications—that is, the kind of world-view, the kind of beliefs, and the social structure that would probably prevail in a state which was at once unconquerable and in a permanent state of 'cold war' with its neighbors." (George Orwell: 1945, paragraph 9)

At the end of World War II, the two superpowers of the East (USSR) and West (USA) emerged, since no other nation had equal military power or political influence. Differences in political beliefs and politics soon pulled the two superpowers apart and led to a struggle between them known as "cold war". In the cold war, each superpower sought world influence by means short of total war. This was because the possibility of nuclear war made the costs of a "hot" war too high. The "weapons" used in this cold war included the threat of force, the use of propaganda, and the sending of military and economic aid to weaker nations.

The next to use the phrase was American financier and statesman, Bernard Baruch, when he used it to describe post-WWII geopolitical tensions between the USSR and the United States of America along with its Western European allies. His speech in April of 1947 warned:

“ Let us not be deceived-we are today in the midst of a cold war. Our enemies are to be found abroad and at home. Let us never forget this: Our unrest is the heart of their success. The peace of the world is the hope and the goal of our political system; it is the despair and defeat of those who stand against us. We can depend only on ourselves.” (Bernard Baruch: April 16, 1947, Speech in the South Carolina House of Representatives)

The term “ Cold War” was then instantly embraced by American newspapers and magazines as an apt description of the situation between the United States and the Soviet Union: a war without fighting or bloodshed, but a battle nonetheless. Newspaper reporter-columnist, Walter Lippmann gave the term wide currency, with the book titled *The Cold War*, and when asked in 1947 about the source of the term, he referred it to a French term from the 1930's, *la guerre froide*.

And so it was named the Cold War, as it never features direct military action, since both sides possessed nuclear weapons, because their use would result in mutual assured destruction. Being a non-combat war, it was much more a clash of superpowers; the USSR would support communist countries in battle with military and financial aid, and the US would do the same for capitalists, providing weaponry, and soldiers. What the war mostly considered of was the building of new and stronger arms, advancement in technology, and the gathering of intelligence as the advancement in this contemporary era. So as Bernard Baruch intended, the phrase “ Cold War” was used to describe the non-fighting hostiles between the USSR and the USA.

How it Begun

The start of the Cold War is often dated from 1945 - 1947, immediately after the end of the Second World War, although the exact date is unknown. In 1945 there was a series of events said to have caused the Cold War: the Atomic Bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, and the division of Germany and Berlin. It was in 1947 when the term "Cold War" was being used to describe this time and situation.

In the early XX century, much of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean were controlled by European countries. These European empires all collapsed in the years after 1945. The problems with the international colonies started in the 1930's with the Great Depression. Most of these colonies suffered badly since the imperialist European countries had encouraged their colonies to produce raw materials for European factories. The price of raw materials fell drastically; the result was poverty and great unrest in the colonies. After the Depression, was WWII, a time when much of the Asian colonies were captured by the Japanese. When the Japanese were defeated, the European control was weakened and it became clear to locals that the Europeans could be beaten. After the War, Britain, France, and other European states faced more economic problems and had difficulties affording the cost of their empires. Meanwhile in the colonies, a rising tide of nationalism arose when all wanted to become independent states. There was a decline in the imperialist feeling in the European countries as well.

After the fall of the Empires, the history of the newly independent states was often troubled. The European states had imposed artificial boundaries, which sometimes led to ethnic despair. The economies of most former colonies
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were undeveloped and relied too heavily on the sales of raw materials to former colonial powers. In Europe, the passing of their colonies caused a sense of crisis in the former empires. There was a marked decline in power and status for those countries like Britain and France that had lost large world empires. Arguments over empire led to political turmoil and the fall of governments in France 1958 and Portugal 1975. Eventually most of the former colonial powers found a new identity as part of the European Community.

The end of the Empire led to a large number of newly independent countries[2]. Some of the leaders in these countries were unhappy that world politics was dominated by the conflict between the USA and the USSR. The conflict would be taken to the new states where wars involving capitalism and communism break out in civil war to decide the way to govern the state. A new “ non-aligned” movement began in 1955, when representatives from 29 countries met in Indonesia for the Bandung Conference setting up a loose organization of states that were not allied to the superpowers.

Most important disagreements between Capitalism and Communism:

American Capitalism

Soviet Communism

People should be free to make as much money as they can and want.

Rich people are selfish. They should be forced to share their wealth.

Factories and other property should be owned by individuals and companies.

Factories and other properties should be owned by the state on behalf of all the people.

The government should interfere as little as possible in the lives of ordinary people.

A communist government should get involved in every aspect of life.

At elections people should be able to choose anyone or any party they want for the government.

At elections people should only be allowed to choose communist candidates for the government.

The Press should be able to criticize the government.

The Press should never criticize a communist government.

The government should not interfere with religion.

Religious belief is nonsense and should be wiped out by the atheist government.

Atomic Bombs

What countries were most afraid of was the break out of a Third World War or even a nuclear war, which could easily destroy the face of the Earth in a mutually assured destruction. With the Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during August of 1945, Japanese were forced to surrender after the death of approximately 200, 000 people from the bombs' blast alone, and thousands more from the exposure of radio activity. This simple, but fatal

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gesture of power not only assured the United States its spot as a superpower country, but it had been part of a crucial treaty with the USSR, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty or ABMT). The ABM Treaty was an agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union on the limitation of the anti-ballistic missile systems used in defending areas against missile-delivered nuclear weapons. Author George Orwell talks about the agreement:

“” These super-state nations will make a tacit agreement never to use the atomic bomb against one another. Unable to conquer one another, they will continue ruling the world between them, in a permanent state of ‘ cold war’.”
(George Orwell: 1945, You and the Atomic Bomb)

This meaning that when the United States of America launched their Atomic Bombs upon the two defenseless Japanese cities, they were sure of the fact that they were the first to debut them because the only other country, The Soviet Union, had agreed not to use them to attack other countries. When the treaty was broken, it was conflict for the USSR and USA. This is considered “ the end” of WWII because it ends the last conflict of the War, yet it starts a new distrust conflict between the USSR and USA.

Post-war, after other countries had observed the tragic effects of the nuclear weapon, many of them tried making some of their own. This was a way to show their power and technological advance. Meanwhile, the United States and Soviets modified and made theirs better, showing their power and technological advance, while warning their enemies with their constant trials of A-bombs and H-bombs.

During the Cold War there was concern that it would escalate into a full nuclear exchange with hundreds of millions killed. Both sides developed a deterrence policy that prevented problems from escalating beyond limited localities. Luckily, these nuclear weapons were never used in the Cold War.

Yalta Conference & the Division of Germany, 1945

At the end of WWII there were many agreements made. In February 1945, at the defeat of Hitler and the Nazis, the fate of Europe's war-torn countries needed to be discussed. The "Big Three"[3], President Franklin D. Roosevelt (USA), Prime Minister Winston Churchill (United Kingdom) and General Secretary Josef Stalin (USSR), met at Yalta in the Soviet Union to reorganize the postwar world. Stalin had refused to leave the Union so the two Western leaders had to go to him. The three seemed "content" with the results of the war, and the three were "comfortable" around each other, at the time; although beneath the surface, many disagreements existed.

The discussions at Yalta were very wide-ranging but the future of Poland dominated. The three leaders had previously agreed that the Soviet Union would take land from Poland and Poland would, in turn, be given German land. At Yalta they argued about the details and Churchill tried to limit the changes, worried about taking too much land from Germany and said: "I do not want to stuff the Polish goose until it dies of German indigestion." There was even greater disagreement about who should govern Poland.

Eventually, Truman (who was also present) and Churchill thought that they had won a major concession from Stalin: the Soviet leader agreed that the

Lublin government should be expanded to include some of the London Poles and he accepted that free election should be held as soon as possible in Poland. When asked how soon these elections could be held, Stalin replied: "It should be possible within a month."

The final Agreement included a Declaration on Libertad Europe. This stated that each country would be given an emergency government with representatives from any important non-fascist groups and that free elections would be held as soon as possible to set up a democratic government. The British and Americans held many prisoners of war from Soviet territory; these were men from German-occupied lands who had chosen or been forced to join the German army. At Yalta it was agreed that they would be sent back to the USSR, where about 100, 000 of these men were executed on their return and many more were imprisoned. The USSR also agreed to help with the war against Japan, which came to an end a few months later. In return the Union was given the control of island territories north of Japan.

One of the most important decisions of the conference was that the Big Three agreed that Germany and Berlin should be divided into occupied zones. Churchill argued that there should be a French zone, in addition to a British, American and Soviet zone. This was because Churchill was keen to restore the power of France. Stalin agreed as long as the French area was taken from the American and British, since he will not give any more land to capitalists, and Roosevelt accepted this suggestion. (What was also agreed at Yalta was to the setting up of the United Nations[4].)

Yalta was the high-point of the war-time alliance. To Roosevelt and many Americans it seemed like the beginning of a post-war period of cooperation. There was enthusiastic cheering in the American Senate when the Agreement was read out. In fact, the Yalta Agreement was flawed in a number of important ways:

The Soviets and the Americans interpreted it differently. The Agreement talked about the need for “ democracy” and “ free elections”. For Roosevelt, democracy was the American system of free speech. Stalin’s idea of democracy was a communist one, in which the communist party represented the people and no opposition was allowed.

Yalta raised false expectations in the USA. People expected that Stalin would now allow western-style governments to be set up in Eastern Europe. They were bitterly disappointed when this did not happen.

The Agreement tried to achieve compromise over the future of Poland. In fact, compromise over the future of Poland. In fact, compromise was not possible. Either Poland was democratic or it was friendly towards the USSR. Leading figures in Polish society were anti-Russian. Stalin knew that he could only make sure that he could only make sure that Poland was friendly by destroying free speech.

Roosevelt was proud of the Yalta agreement, yet he was disappointed to see how Stalin put it to practice. Stalin paid only lip service to the idea of bringing non-communists into the government of Poland. Harriman, the American ambassador at the time later said: “ We began to realize that Stalin’s language is different from ours.” By the beginning of April, Harriman <https://assignbuster.com/yalta-conference-the-division-of-germany-history-essay/>

was reporting to Truman that's the talks had achieved nothing. At the same time, Polish opponents of Communism were dealt with ruthlessly. In March, 16 leaders of Polish Resistance went, at the invitation of Stalin, to have talks with the Soviet authorities near Warsaw. They were arrested and never heard from again.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt had died in April; while he was dying, he managed to write a letter of criticism to Stalin:

“ I cannot conceal from you the concern with which I view the development of event since our fruitful meeting at Yalta. So far there has been a discouraging lack of progress made in the carrying out of the decisions we made at the Conference particularly those regarding the Polish question. I am frankly puzzled as to why this should be and must tell you that I do not fully understand the attitude of your government.” (Franklin D. Roosevelt: April 1, 1945)

Harry S. Truman succeeded him as President after his death on April 12, 1945.

Prime Minister Churchill also agreed with Roosevelt and wrote to Stalin displeased by the news of Poland:

“ The British went to war on account of Poland. They can never feel this war will have ended rightly unless Poland has a fair deal in the sense of independence and freedom, on the basis of friendship with Russia. It was on this that I thought we agreed at Yalta.” (Winston Churchill: April 29, 1945)

In Stalin's response, he refused to give any ground. In May, Stalin said the Americas were to blame for any bad feeling.

" At Yalta it had been agreed that the existing government in Poland was to be reconstructed. Anyone with a common sense could see that the present [Lublin] government was to reform the basis of the new government. No other understanding of the Yalta Agreement is possible. The Russians should not be treated as fools." (Josef Stalin: May, 1945)

A key figure in the early stages of the Cold War was the American President, Harry Truman^[5]. It was only through chance that he became president; as Vice President, he took over after Roosevelt's death. He had only been Vice President for a few weeks and had very little experience in international politics. He was very different from Roosevelt and his personality played part in the development of a tougher American policy. Roosevelt was much more diplomatic than Truman. Roosevelt was sure that the USA and the Soviet Union could remain friendly after the war. Just a few hours before he died, he replied a message to Churchill, who had been trying to get him to take a tough line on communists. Roosevelt replied: " I would minimize the general Soviet problem as much as possible." To the last, Roosevelt believed the United States would stay on good terms with the Soviet Union; Truman was less certain about Soviet intentions.

Truman showed his different style as soon as he came to power. In April 1945, Truman spoke angrily to the Soviet Foreign Minister, Molotov. He insisted that the Soviets must carry out the Yalta Agreement and allow free elections in Poland. He would not listen to Molotov's explanations. As

Molotov left he said: " I have never been talked to like that in my life." To which Truman said: " Carry out your agreements and you won't get talked to like that." Truman described his new approach:

" We have to get tough with the Russians. They don't know how to behave They are like bulls in a china shop. They are only twenty-five years old. We are over a hundred and the British are centuries older. We have got to teach the Russians how to behave." (Harry S. Truman: May, 1945)

Six months later, the leaders of these allies met again in Potsdam, Germany, near Berlin between July 17 and August 2, 1945. The atmosphere at Potsdam was different from Yalta and the membership of the conference showed that the wartime alliance was changing. At previous conferences the American leader had been Roosevelt; now it was Truman. Churchill was replaced halfway through, by the Labor Leader, Clement Attlee.

At Potsdam, Truman felt he was in proper control of the meeting.

The allies improved and made more plans for the occupation of Germany[6]and issued an ultimatum to Japan demanding unconditional surrender. However, more issues were raised than were settled. New tensions over the future of Europe were beginning to pull apart the wartime alliance.

List of areas of agreement and disagreement at Potsdam:

German reparations were agreed. Each country was to take reparations from its own area of occupation. The Soviet Union was to receive some additional

industrial equipment from the western zones of occupation: little of this was ever handed over.

The details of the German-Polish borders on the rivers Oder and Neisse were finally agreed. The British and American disliked the position of the new border but could do little about it.

It was agreed that the Nazi Party should be stamped out in all its sectors of Germany.

The Soviet Union wanted to play a part in the running of the rich German industrial area of the Ruhr. The USA rejected this idea.

The Soviet Union wanted to share in the occupation of Japan. Truman fully blocked this idea

The USA and Britain asked for a greater say in what went in Eastern Europe. Stalin firmly rejected this suggestion.

In addition to annexing several occupied countries as (or into) Soviet Socialist Republics, other countries were converted into Soviet Satellite states within the Eastern Bloc. These were: the People's Republic of Poland, the People's Republic of Bulgaria, the People's Republic of Hungary, the Czechoslovak Republic, the People's Republic of Romania, the People's Republic of Albania, and later East Germany from the Soviet zone of German occupation.

The Iron Curtain and War of Ideologies

The world began to see a complete separation between Eastern and Western countries. The Soviet Union created the Eastern Bloc with the eastern European countries it occupied as satellite states. The government of the USA was deeply unhappy at the spread of communism and relations between them and the USSR deteriorated throughout 1946.

Winston Churchill traveled to the United States where he and President Truman organized a speech starting the American-British alliance to meet the Communist menace. He tried to shock Americans out of their complacency, encouraging them to be hostile against the Soviets. At first, some Americans thought he was exaggerating; in time most came to agree with him. In his speech, he warned them how the Soviets were acting in Europe:

“ From Stettin in the Baltic, to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe: Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia. All these famous cities and their populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere. [...]” (Winston Churchill: March, 1946, in Fulton, Missouri)

Churchill's vivid picture of a continent divided by an Iron Curtain[7] helped change the mood of the Americans. Thereafter, 'Iron Curtain'[8] was referred to the Soviet-made divider that split Europe into non-communist Western Europe and Communist Eastern Europe. Before, there existed an alliance of three equals; now Josef Stalin was portrayed as a scheming monster, forcing countries under his submission. This started a whole new battle of

propaganda and comics[9], especially from the East. In this new battle, the countries taught whole populations to demonize their enemies.

The Americans were very critical of Soviet policy and started rejecting their common relations. The Council of Foreign Ministers met in Paris in April of 1946; the American representative, Byres, blocked every Soviet proposal and criticized Soviet policy in Eastern Europe. On a separate account, the Soviet navy wished to send ships through the Black Sea Straits and to set up naval bases in the area. Turkey felt threatened by these plans and in August 1946, the US government blocked the Soviet plans. The Americans made it clear that they would use force to resist any Soviet move. American warships were sent to the area to warn off the Soviets.

American policy took shape in the crucial year of 1947. At the beginning of the year there was an economic crisis in Western Europe. The harvest in 1946 was poor and there was food shortage in many countries. The winter was usually fierce and people were cold as well as hungry. In Britain unemployment was soaring and food rationing was more severe than it had been during the war. In Germany, people were close to starvation. Millions of refugees had fled to western Germany and this added to the shortage of fuel, food and jobs. In France and Italy discontent led to massive support for the local communist parties; unless conditions improved there was a real possibility that the communists could come to power. By early 1947 it was clear to the US government that their friends in Western Europe could not cope alone.

In February of 1947 the British government sent an urgent message to Washington saying they could no longer afford for troops to defend the countries of Turkey and Greece that were under threat to undergo a Soviet takeover. Truman made a new statement of foreign policy that became known as the Truman Doctrine; which he announced in a speech to the US Congress:

“ I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe that we must help free peoples to work out their own destiny in their own way.” (Harry S. Truman: March 12, 1947)

Congress approved Truman’s aid request. With the Truman Doctrine, the United States took on international responsibilities as the leader of the Western world. American military aid would now be available to any nation threatened by communism. As a result, Greece was able to defeat the Communist guerrillas and the spread of communism in the eastern Mediterranean was blocked.

The post-war recovery of Western Europe was also provided by the United States’ Marshall Plan, which involved financial aid. In Washington there was a belief that communism could only be stopped if Western Europe became wealthy. By the spring of 1947 it was still clear that without American help there was little chance of economic recovery. The Truman administration feared that a European economic collapse would open Europe to Communism. It believed that the military and economic security of the United States depended on a strong and democratic Europe.

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Therefore, the United States government devised a new approach to aiding Europe. On June 5, 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall proposed an aid program known as the Marshall Plan. Its purpose was to restore “ the confidence of its purpose in the economic future of their own countries.” For the plan to work, Marshall urged a united effort to determine Europe’s economic needs and how the United States could help.

Western European countries responded enthusiastically to the Marshall Plan; however, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union rejected the plan despite their need for economic aid. The Soviets decided to take no part with any kind of Capitalist economy and felt they could not afford to give out information about their economy.

The Marshall Plan was a great success and Western European Nations worked together to boost productivity, reduce trade barriers and use resources efficiently. They received aid for about five years and by 1951, Western Europe’s economies were prospering, and Communist prospects in these countries had declined. By rebuilding their economies, America was creating wealthy trade partners who would want to buy large amounts of American goods.

American influence in Western Europe extended and helped unite the region into a single economic group to counter the Soviets. In reaction to the Marshall Plan, in 1949 the Soviet Union set up a rival plan known as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, or COMECON. The establishment of this Council made it so Eastern Europe was thus formed into a competing economic group led by the Soviet Union.

At the Cominform Conference, the Soviets bitterly attacked the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan:

“ The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan are both part of an American plan to enslave Europe. The United States has launched an attack on the principle of each nation being in charge of its own affairs. By contrast, the Soviet Union is tireless in upholding the principle of real equality and independence among nations whatever their size. The Soviet Union will make every effort to ensure that the Marshall Plan is doomed to failure. The communist parties of France, Italy, Great Britain and other countries must play a part in this.” (A. A. Zhdanov[10]: September, 1947)

This may have been an attempt to counter the USSR and convince the Eastern countries that trusting the United States was not worth it, because they were unreliable. That the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan are merely attempts of the USA to contain communism, which they obviously feared. The US wants to fight communism throughout the whole world, and this is step one: preventing its spread. The American politician, Vandenburg, said so himself and made it clear that it was all part of a strategy to stop the spread:

“ The Plan is a calculated risk to help stop World War III before it starts. The area covered by the Plan contains 270, 000, 000 people of the stock which largely made America. This vast friendly segment of the Earth must not collapse. The iron curtain must not come to the rims of the Atlantic.” (Arthur H. Vandenburg, 1948)

These are all part of the first stages of the development of the Cold War. One American expert played a crucial part in encouraging a hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union, his name was George Kennan. In February of 1946 Kennan sent a famous report to Washington from the American Embassy in Moscow and his report gave a detailed view of Soviet motives. The report became known as “ the long telegram.” It made a big impact on Washington, where they accepted Kennan’s views. He said that the Soviet government was determined to expand and must be stopped. Kennan also developed the idea of “ containment” (which will later be put to practice and become the most important American policy throughout the whole Cold War).

All in all, the victory over Hitler created new worries for the winners of WWII. They had different views as to the future of Europe after the war and many other important areas. Before the end of 1945, deep divisions had emerged between the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union; starting with disagreements, until complete distrust was met by 1948.