

'The Yalta Conference' from Le Monde (14 February 1945)

Caption: On 14 February 1945, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the outcome of the Yalta Conference and speculates on the role that France intends to play in settling the German question and ensuring the establishment of peace.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 14.02.1945. Paris: Le Monde. "La conférence de Yalta", p. 1.

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The Yalta Conference

At the end of the Yalta Conference, which lasted a full week, Mr Churchill, Mr Roosevelt and Marshal Stalin published a statement that gives a detailed account of their deliberations. All the major issues surrounding the war and the peace settlement are covered, if not resolved. While it does cast light on some issues, much remains obscure, probably because, at this stage in the war, it is not possible to resolve all the issues, and it is not always possible to refer to all the issues that were resolved.

Irrespective of the detailed comments that such a document calls for, any Frenchman reading it for the first time will feel considerable, albeit not complete, satisfaction.

At war against Germany for five years, and a member of a coalition whose purpose was to wipe out Nazi imperialism, France can only unreservedly welcome whatever strengthens that coalition and hastens the final defeat of an implacable enemy. For the time being, the close military cooperation among the Allies is maintained and reinforced. Joint plans have been drawn up, and their effect will soon be plain to see. Important measures have been approved that will be taken in what, we have every reason to hope, will be the very near future. Allied forces, including French troops, will occupy all of Germany, which will be split into four zones of occupation. The Allied Control Commission for Germany, made up of the Commanders-in-Chief of the four powers, will have its headquarters in Berlin. However, the Reparation Commission will be based in Moscow, and we can count on the USSR, which has suffered the most significant material damage and the largest number of civilian losses, to make every effort to force the Germans to make reparations, as far as possible, for the damage they have caused. Finally, a solution is in sight for the points of dispute that could split the Russians from the British and Americans, particularly in Poland and Yugoslavia.

Accordingly, the coalition emerges strengthened from the Yalta Conference, the Nazi leaders' final hope has vanished, and the policy that France supports, illustrated most notably by the Franco-Soviet Treaty, has been resoundingly vindicated.

On the other hand, the decisions taken in Yalta do not allow France to play the full role that the press and a considerable number of Allied statesmen feel that it deserves. General de Gaulle has made it clear enough in his statements that this is not a question of damaged pride but of simple logic and of our common interests. It is fitting and necessary that France should have its zone of occupation in Germany. It is right that the zones be demarcated by the European Advisory Commission, on which our Ambassador, René Massigli, has a seat, and that France should be a member of the Allied Control Commission in Berlin. But the communiqué does not state very clearly how France will participate in the United Nations Conference scheduled to take place in San Francisco on 25 April. This, by the way, is the day after the USSR must renounce its neutrality pact with Japan if it does not want it to be automatically extended for five years. It is even less clear how all these future decisions can be discussed and adopted by the three Foreign Ministers, at 'meetings' that have become routine, without the French Foreign Minister being invited to attend.

Whether measures affecting a defeated Germany, steps taken in the liberated countries that are envisaged in the communiqué or the overall peace arrangements are at issue, it is obvious, as General de Gaulle said a week ago at the opening of the Yalta Conference, that France 'will not be bound by anything to which it was not a party on an equal footing with the other countries.'