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978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

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## Yalta 1945

### *Europe and America at the Crossroads*

This revisionist study of Allied diplomacy from 1941 to 1946 challenges Americocentric views of the period and highlights Europe's neglected role. Fraser J. Harbutt, drawing on international sources, shows that in planning for the future, Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin, and others self-consciously operated into 1945, not on "East/West" lines but within a "Europe/America" political framework characterized by the plausible prospect of Anglo-Russian collaboration and persisting American detachment.

Harbutt then explains the destabilizing transformation around the time of the pivotal Yalta conference of February 1945, when a sudden series of provocative initiatives, manipulations, and miscues interacted with events to produce the breakdown of European solidarity and the Anglo-Soviet nexus, an evolving Anglo-American alignment, and new tensions that led finally to the Cold War.

This fresh perspective, stressing structural, geopolitical, and traditional impulses and constraints, raises important new questions about the enduringly controversial transition from World War II to a Cold War that no statesman wanted.

Fraser J. Harbutt is Professor of History at Emory University. After graduation from Otago University and a decade of law practice in London and Auckland, he received a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley and later taught diplomatic, political, and legal history variously at the University of California Los Angeles, Smith College, and the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America, and the Origins of the Cold War* (1986), which co-won the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Bernath Prize, and of *The Cold War Era* (2002). He has also published chapters in several edited volumes and many articles in such journals as *Diplomatic History*, *Political Science Quarterly*, and *International History Review*.

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Frontmatter

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### Advance Praise for *Yalta 1945*

“Professor Fraser Harbutt’s latest book is a model of scholarship. It is elegantly written, a pleasure to read. It is thoroughly researched and employs archival materials hitherto overlooked or insufficiently mined. It abounds with shrewd insights and convincing portraits of British, Soviet, and American leaders as they wended their way through the final frenzy of World War II and sought to shape a new global order. With very great care, Harbutt demonstrates how the Yalta conferees were constrained by geopolitical realities, the burdens and ‘lessons’ of the past, and the multitudinous tugs of domestic politics in the UK, United States, and USSR. Harbutt in *Yalta 1945* makes a major contribution to that historiography centered on the Second World War and the early Cold War. His work amounts to a re-conceptualization, placing British statecraft and its European concerns at center stage in the Yalta contest of wills, rather than as a secondary drama to that featuring Stalin versus FDR. Particularly noteworthy is Harbutt’s nuanced treatment of the Anglo-Soviet wartime relationship in 1944–45. This is an indispensable study for anyone trying to make sense of the mid-twentieth century’s diplomatic dilemmas and violent turmoil. Harbutt’s is international history as its best – lucid, judicious, and refreshingly original. A rare achievement, most impressive.”

– David Mayers, Boston University

“*Yalta 1945* is a worthy addition to the trend of internationalizing Cold War studies. More than a study of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin’s last summit, Harbutt’s treatment puts that pivotal moment in world history in its original wartime context. Reminding us that history is lived forward, he shows how the preconditions of Yalta, notably the Eurocentric power politics practiced by Churchill and Stalin, interacted with the universalism of Roosevelt’s hopes for a postwar world order. The result was disorder and disagreements that eventually led to the breakdown of the wartime alliance and the onset of the Cold War. Harbutt’s interpretation is revisionist in the best sense. He revises our Americocentric, East-versus-West perspective on Yalta and enriches our understanding of its place in the origins of the Cold War.”

– Robert Messer, University of Illinois at Chicago

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Frontmatter

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*Emory University*



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Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*For Josie and Chris*

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978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| <i>Preface</i>                         | <i>page ix</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i>                 | xxv            |
| <i>Abbreviations</i>                   | xxix           |
| 1 The Confusions of Yalta              | I              |
| 2 Two Arenas: Europe and America       | 22             |
| 3 The Persistence of Europe, 1942–1943 | 79             |
| 4 The Making of the Moscow Order       | 139            |
| 5 Consolidation                        | 183            |
| 6 Roosevelt’s America: A World Apart   | 225            |
| 7 The Yalta Disorder                   | 280            |
| 8 Aftermath                            | 331            |
| 9 Reflections                          | 398            |
| <i>Select Bibliography</i>             | 409            |
| <i>Index</i>                           | 427            |

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Preface

This book has its general origins in a preoccupation with the transition from World War II to the Cold War and in a growing conviction that, despite a voluminous and intellectually spirited historiography, it is not properly understood. More specifically, I have been interested in the part played in that transition, insofar as it affected the future of Europe, by the famous Yalta conference of February 1945. There, on the eve of victory over Hitler's Germany, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin met to shape a future that almost immediately turned to crisis and later to Cold War.

The meeting at Yalta continues to fascinate. The leading personalities seem as compelling as ever, each the subject of a vast biographical literature. The decisions supposedly made there – the reshaping of Poland, the postwar arrangements for Germany, the Far Eastern concessions to the Soviet Union, and the repatriation of unwilling Soviet soldiers, among others – are still seen as active or at least suggestive elements in the move from wartime alliance to Cold War confrontation. But Yalta has also had a long career as a potent symbol, conjuring up images of intrigue, betrayal, and failure. For many it is still a live issue, generating a passionate response among the Poles, French, Germans, Chinese, Koreans, and others who, in one way or another, began from an early stage to identify themselves as victims of the power politics allegedly practiced there by the victorious Allies.

I shall attempt to explain Yalta by presenting a fresh, internationally oriented perspective on Allied diplomacy during and immediately after World War II. This account challenges orthodox views by rejecting the familiar “East/West” conception that sees, so far as the political

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

dimension is concerned, an intimately collaborative Anglo-American wartime leadership (Roosevelt and Churchill) coexisting uneasily and distantly with the indispensable but difficult Soviet ally. It asserts instead a “Europe/America” context. This has the effect of bringing to life two distinct wartime arenas: an Allied European sphere in which Britain and the Soviet Union, working together more closely than is generally understood, took a leading role; and a detached America intent on keeping European politics at arm’s length. Up to the beginning of 1945, it was almost universally assumed that the postwar world would reflect that dichotomy, with a battered but still autonomous Anglo-Soviet-led Europe looking across the Atlantic to a benevolent, financially supportive but still politically distant United States. In fact, of course, things turned out very differently. At some point – in and around the time of the Yalta conference – the political situation was quite suddenly transformed. The Europe/America framework began to break down, and the East/West configuration came more plausibly into view. This reconstruction is an attempt to explain why and how this came about.

Many people – statesmen, thinkers, millions of deeply interested observers, as well as many historians – look back to Yalta to explain the origins of the Cold War. In this book I will try to look forward to Yalta from the perspective of wartime diplomacy. The approach is analytic and selective. I do not present a full narrative treatment of wartime diplomacy, even of the European affairs that are my main concern. Nor do I attempt to do justice to all the divergent views in this controversial field. I do, however, want to put in question what I believe it is fair to call the conventional view of Allied diplomacy and to suggest an alternative conception that may illuminate these profound issues and perhaps inspire, if not agreement, a sense of renewed curiosity.

We badly need to get this right, for there are profound, still contentious issues here: the conduct of Allied wartime diplomacy; the matter of Roosevelt’s reputation; the question whether there was an Anglo-Soviet “road not taken” that, among other things, might have prolonged Britain’s status as a Great Power; the possibility that the Cold War itself might have been avoided or at least have taken a different form; the still unresolved issue of Stalin’s intentions; and beyond all this, the question of European-American relations, which is arguably again today a leading preoccupation of politicians, pundits, and editorialists on both sides of the Atlantic.

Yalta lies at the heart of the conventional East/West view. In broad terms, this view holds that, within the general ambit of tripartite diplomacy, political relationships during World War II essentially mirrored



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978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xi

the strategic associations. Thus the United States and Great Britain, intimate partners for war, viewed themselves as linked in a “Western,” or “transatlantic,” outlook. From this foundation, united by a shared politico-cultural outlook and the bonds of democracy as well as market capitalism, they worked to accommodate or frustrate (opinions differ about this) their distinctively different “Eastern” or “other” partner, the Soviet Union. The emphasis is invariably upon the unique Roosevelt-Churchill relationship as a decision-making and directive agency, and upon the great summit conferences as crucial occasions where the two Western statesmen engaged meaningfully with Stalin. At Yalta, it is widely believed, the three leaders divided (or refused to divide – again, opinions differ) Europe, and created what has in recent years come to be a kind of all-explanatory mantra, the “Yalta Order.” The political alliance associated with this order broke up only when Stalin (or Truman, as many revisionists think) violated the Yalta “agreements,” leading soon afterward to the Cold War.

This East/West line of thought, with the United States in a leading role, has the appeal of logic and simplicity – always desirable in times of tension and complexity – and it captured a widespread public and media understanding during the Cold War era at a time when people looked back to wartime diplomacy for explanations of their predicament. It was reinforced not only by the events of the Cold War itself but by a historiographical tradition crowned by Churchill’s own authoritative wartime memoirs, which were themselves permeated with Anglo-American and East/West conceptions. And remarkably, insofar as it assumed a powerful American component in wartime politics, the conventional view was strengthened rather than undermined by the eruption of a revisionist historiographical onslaught in the Vietnam-era United States. For the leading studies produced by that passionate movement – much of it sharp-edged, imaginative scholarship – were for the most part obsessively preoccupied with the role of the United States, and largely focused on issues of moral accountability and on politico-economic impulses rather than on objective reconstructive analysis.

Still, even during the Cold War years there were doubts and questions. Historians have often shown an awareness of the myth making associated with crucial events like Yalta, and of the manipulations of governments and vested interests. They have also complained at times of Cold War pressures, of being drawn into national-patriotic causes, of becoming, as the phrase has it, “chaplains on the pirate ship.”<sup>1</sup> There was also increasing

<sup>1</sup> Coined, unsurprisingly, by A. J. P. Taylor in *Europe: Decline and Grandeur* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1950), p. 20.

Cambridge University Press

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Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

awareness, as the Cold War dragged on and European and other foreign researchers entered the lists, of a pervasive Americocentrism. It was perhaps a sense of this professional imbalance and of the need for a more international approach that led the doyen of American diplomatic historians, George F. Kennan, to greet the Cold War's end in 1989 with a call for "a sober reexamination" of its causes.<sup>2</sup> Rather surprisingly, this has not happened. Instead, as the first Soviet records began to make an impression upon the field, there appeared a book by Professor John Lewis Gaddis, a distinguished figure in the field, with the debate-closing title *We Now Know*. In earlier days this would surely have provoked an immediate revisionist response, perhaps entitled *Not So Fast*. There was a flurry of critical resistance, but one frequently hears it said that revisionism in this sphere, once so robust and iconoclastic, is a thing of the past.<sup>3</sup>

I hope this is not so. For we need, not least in order to get a just appraisal of the American role in the politics of Europe between Pearl Harbor and Yalta, a fresh, skeptical look at the conventional view. It is, I believe, an edifice with shaky foundations. The central East/West conception, for instance, seems largely founded not on the actual record of Anglo-American collaboration in European political affairs but on the failure to make a crucial distinction between the undeniably close Anglo-American partnership for the planning and waging of war, on the one hand, and the fundamentally different set of policies these two countries pursued in their European diplomacy, on the other. In fact, these were two very separate arenas, each with its own character – one overwhelmingly strategic (though certainly with political implications), the other mostly political and geopolitical – though the two did of course overlap and intersect at times. In truth, the United States and Britain had very different attitudes about and policies toward Europe and its future, and in their policies they followed very different trajectories.

Nor was the Roosevelt-Churchill combination, undeniably a remarkable partnership for the prosecution of the war, a functioning political authority in European affairs. The two statesmen, and their two countries, had very divergent views of the European future. They often clashed. Each often went its own way. It also seems likely, when we look closely at the record, that, for all their success in imposing their authority upon their

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, October 28, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, 1997). For critical response, see Melvyn P. Leffler, "The Cold War: What Do We 'Now Know'?" *American Historical Reviews*, 104 (April 1999), pp. 501–524; and Carolyn Eisenberg, "We Now Know: Revisiting Cold War History," *Journal of American History* (March 1998), pp. 1462–1464.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xiii

national establishments, they were somewhat less powerful than popular legend and celebratory scholarship suggests, and had to listen to a variety of voices and impulses, some of which are still obscure.

Some of the famous tripartite conferences, one of World War II's most striking political art forms, similarly tend (at least insofar as the European political dimension is concerned) to receive disproportionate attention. The first of these, the Moscow and Teheran conferences that, at the end of 1943, brought American leaders physically into the European political milieu for the first time (only eighteen months from the end of a six-year-long war), were mainly concerned with strategy, personal relationships, and public morale. Like the Anglo-American strategic partnership and the Roosevelt-Churchill association – foundations of the Allied war effort in the West – they were crucially important for the furtherance of the war effort, less so in matters affecting the fate of Europe. Significantly, at both the 1943 conferences and at Yalta, the two primary concrete issues that the United States pressed were always the same: the establishment of the United Nations and Soviet entry into the Pacific war. Neither of these directly affected Europe. And while Yalta was infinitely more important than the earlier meetings (though not in the way generally believed), one is bound to question what is today its most widely credited outcome: the division of Europe and the ensuing “Yalta Order.” There was in fact no division of Europe at Yalta. And one can only observe with amazement the ease with which the notion of a Yalta “order” caught on (and persists today) in the press and in world opinion as a description of the significant residue of a conference that was so obviously riddled with semantic confusion and deep political misunderstanding that it produced within a month the most serious crisis in the history of the “Grand Alliance” (another conveniently functional but misleading characterization, this one an appropriation from Britain's imaginative prime minister). The effect of these qualifications is surely to cast doubt upon the conventional wisdom.

A reason for the considerable interest in the Moscow and Teheran conferences, one suspects, is simply that the United States government, which carefully avoided the more European-focused gatherings, was a major participant in each. Yet most of the significant political activity affecting Europe between June 1941 and February 1945 took place in much less well-known contexts, and there is some force in the complaint of one British diplomatic historian that “although there are excellent historians of individual European countries and European culture in the United States they lack interest in European international politics.”<sup>4</sup> Today the American

<sup>4</sup> D. Cameron Watt, “Britain and the Historiography of the Yalta Conference and the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History*, 13, 1 (Winter 1989), p. 71, n. 11.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

tendency to self-preoccupation is widely acknowledged by historians. At the same time, it is to a large degree understandable. Since the early nineteenth century visionaries from Simon Bolivar to Alexis de Toqueville had been predicting the political engagement of the United States with Europe. Contemporaries (and historians) might surely be forgiven for thinking, so tenacious and powerful was the American commitment to victory from 1941 to 1945, that the moment had at last arrived (as indeed it had, but not until February 1945). For many writers, especially after the Wilsonian false start, the argument from destiny has therefore been compelling. Further, the United States was arguably the only global power fully engaged in World War II, fighting two wars at full throttle, supporting its two allies in impressive material fashion, and posing credibly and uniquely as the foremost champion of a democratic, progressive future. When one adds to this the fact that the great majority of early Cold War historians were American and that United States governmental archives were the first to open their holdings for inspection, it is hardly surprising that Cold War historiography has tended to focus primarily on, and attribute profound effects to, American thought and action.

Another factor that tended to turn this healthy national partiality into a more obsessive introspection that left little room for the actions of other states was the almost universal post-1945 American public interest in, and indeed demand for, explanation and accountability concerning the Cold War's origins. Most great historical issues seem to revolve around a basic question. In this case historians were responding to a confused, anxious American audience that wanted to know: How is it that World War II led, not to the hoped for peace, but to the Cold War? The intense focus on that question did two things. First, it produced the explanatory paradigm I have called the conventional view, holding in essence that the key to the 1941–45 period and its aftermath, at least so far as Allied diplomacy was concerned, lay in the governing conception of a more or less like-minded United States and Britain positioning themselves in relation to a distinctly different Soviet Union. Second, it appears to have led many historians to produce, in full compatibility with and reinforcement of that paradigm, a hierarchy of relationships among the Big Three: a United States–Soviet political one characterized by deeply portentous initiatives, gestures, and personal relationships; a uniquely intimate and substantive Anglo-American strategic partnership; and finally, a distant third in American historiography and thinly developed even in European historiography, an Anglo-Soviet association that expressed itself occasionally (and only too predictably, in American eyes) in spasms of atavistic political behavior and

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978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xv

was treated as of little consequence by American historians, who chose to follow instead the intriguing path of the inexorably rising United States, and were perhaps looking ahead prematurely to the era of superpower hegemony.

Out of ingredients like these came, within the framework of the conventional view, an impressive but overwhelmingly Americocentric historiography that, once launched successfully upon an expectant public and a warmly receptive political and military establishment, steadily took on some of the attributes of a powerful biological organism, adept at both energizing itself by harnessing reinforcing lines of inquiry and defending itself by carefully bypassing threatening impulses that might have suggested alternative scenarios.

Three illustrations that bear on the comparative neglect of the European dimension of wartime diplomacy show how this worked out in practice. The first has to do with the widespread tendency to link Churchill to Roosevelt. This has the effect of immediately making FDR a party to all Churchill's multifarious activities, and thus a much more significant figure in European affairs, for instance, than in fact he was. A reader in the World War II historiography produced in the United States may well get the impression that the three Allied powers were the United States, the Soviet Union, and Winston Churchill. This approach probably owes something to Harry Hopkins, who, during his pathfinding mission to London in 1941, cabled a delighted Roosevelt, who did not want to deal with a spectrum of British leaders, that "Churchill is the Government," and to Averell Harriman, who similarly affirmed that "[t]here is no other man in sight to give the British the leadership that Churchill does." This line was fully appropriated by many American historians, content to judge Anglo-American relations by the extraordinary Roosevelt-Churchill correspondence and perhaps overimpressed by Churchill's persistent courtship of the president. Other British leaders doing other things, notably in Europe, could thus be, and were, largely ignored. The effect was inevitably to exaggerate the American political role. For once wedded to Churchill in this way, FDR automatically comes to be seen as a major actor (often *the* major actor) in all important issues. In fact, however, his pre-Yalta involvement in European political affairs was, largely but not entirely by his own choice, fitful and only marginally consequential.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York, 1950), p. 243. Harriman to Roosevelt, March 7, 1941, PSE, Box 50, Roosevelt MSS.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The second illustration appears to exhibit a self-protective turning away from the threat of potentially subversive thought. The occasion was the release in the early 1970s of the British diplomatic records for World War II. By this time the American archives had already been long available. The British records posed some threat to the conventional wisdom, and especially to Americocentric perspectives. For insofar as they posited a leading British role, they opened up a hitherto neglected, autonomous European dimension of Allied diplomacy. They revealed, for instance, a range of independent collaborations with the Soviet Union, led by the Foreign Office, looking to an agreed framework for postwar European security. Churchill himself had been actively involved in this. But few of the leading American Cold War historians of the day, distracted at the time by the intense orthodox-revisionist arguments of the Vietnam era, showed much interest in these admittedly voluminous records. Indeed, several fine scholars whom we think of as leading “Cold War historians” have made little or no use of the British material, preferring to probe ever more deeply into new sources at home, sources that throw ever more light on American policy, rather than contemplating the system-disturbing international dimension now on offer in London. This, I believe, is why we are still burdened with such concoctions as the “Yalta Order” (which carries the implication of a large role for Roosevelt in bringing about this fictitious result) and yet have been unable to come up with an alternative explanation of that intriguing meeting that can command public understanding. Ironically, Yalta was, in many respects, essentially an American revolt against a European “order” agreed upon months before within the long-developing Anglo-Soviet nexus.

The third example involves not a turning away from a potential source of subversion but a vigorous reaching out for reinforcement and perhaps for reassurance. For the sudden prospect in the early 1990s of access to Soviet diplomatic records stimulated in the United States all the appropriating and integrating energy that had been so significantly lacking in the British case twenty years earlier. There is surely no more eloquent manifestation of the commitment to a bilateral, East/West, and specifically United States/Soviet view of Allied wartime and Cold War diplomacy than the enthusiastic response of the American political and academic establishment to the chance to gain revelations from the great Soviet foil. Now, through the energetic midwifery of American foundations and universities, extensive support was given to American and Soviet scholars. The results, at least for the World War II years, have in fact been meager. No striking evidence of a crucially enhanced American role in Europe’s

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xvii

affairs before 1945 has yet emerged. Indeed, it seems that, at least up to the Yalta conference, the Soviets looked to their British connections, not to the Americans, as they planned for the postwar.

I have undoubtedly in these observations unfairly flattened out some fine, variegated scholarship to make my point – which is, put very simply, that we should bring the Europeans much more fully into our thinking about World War II Allied diplomacy. For there are demonstrably enough flaws, gaps, and obvious distortions and imbalances in the conventional East/West view of Allied diplomacy in the early 1940s to raise an important question: Is there another scenario, with an evidentially stronger base, to take its place? Now that we are out of the Cold War cage and free from the intellectual pressures generated by that struggle, we can perhaps reach for, or at least consider the possibility of, a more satisfying account of its origins and its relationship to World War II. Let us therefore shelve the “traditional” categories and assumptions for a moment and with them the momentous inquiry: Why and how did the World War produce the Cold War? Let us pose instead a humbler question: What, as precisely as we can measure in light of evidence old and new, were the constituent relations of the three Allied powers during World War II?

As soon as we invoke this simpler perspective, fresh explanatory vistas begin to present themselves. We start to see Yalta as it appeared to contemporaries rather than as it seems to us in Cold War retrospect. We become more conscious of their past, of their predicaments, rather than of our own presuppositions. We see the politics of World War II not as a dress rehearsal for the Cold War but as rooted, more than we had thought, in prewar 1930s patterns. We become more conscious of the weight of Europe and its non-Nazi leaders in the wartime affairs of their own arena. We see more clearly the corresponding passivity of American diplomacy in its approach to Europe. And we become more aware of the continuing separation, up to the time of Yalta, of the European and American political worlds.

Above all, we become aware of a change in the significance, at least so far as European matters are concerned, of the three basic relationships I mentioned earlier. The Anglo-American nexus is, of course, still uniquely and intimately strong, but so far as its political character is concerned we feel more aware of its engagement, not with the future of Europe – which Roosevelt and Churchill tended to avoid – but with the European politics necessarily involved in the prosecution of the war and, much more seriously, with the shape of future worldwide economic competition. The postwar political architecture of Europe, except in the casual talk of Anglo-American leaders suddenly thrown together in the course of

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii

*Preface*

complex strategic operations, or during the occasional eruption of emotions engendered by the ambitions of irritating figures like de Gaulle, plays little part in Anglo-American relations before the autumn of 1944.

The other strong relationship now is the neglected Anglo-Soviet association – founded not only in the exigencies of a war fought on their continent but also in a natural concern with the politics of Europe during and after the catastrophe. Suddenly, events like Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden's meeting with Stalin in December 1941, the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of May 1942, and the connections culminating in the Churchill-Stalin agreements of October 1944 come to the fore as tangible reflections of a profound pattern of deeply felt concern for their own future among Europeans.

What then of the third relationship, that between the United States and the Soviet Union, in which so much of our forensic energy has been invested? This now seems from the overall record to have been less important and thin by comparison, characterized, at least in its European manifestations, by a combination of American detachment and Soviet reluctance to forge a closer association. Only at the very end of the war, when apparent British and Soviet excesses in the reordering of Europe forced President Roosevelt to engage more fully than he wished with the old continent's politics at Yalta, did this change significantly.

There is, therefore, I believe, a persuasive alternative scenario to that offered by the conventional view of Allied wartime diplomacy. It posits a more internationalist and specifically European reality. It stresses the importance of the Anglo-Soviet nexus, institutionalized by treaty, sanctioned by history, compelled by geopolitical logic, and, most importantly, demonstrable by reference to the historical record. There we find a growing partnership in European affairs evident in a range of negotiations and relationships as well as in various kinds of diplomatic and political cooperation and culminating in the Churchill-Stalin arrangements of October 1944. There too we see a political division of Europe (one that in its territorial aspects lasted through the Cold War) which, in its subsequent consolidation and working out, we might reasonably call the Moscow Order.

The case for this alternative scenario depends, of course, on a credible reordering of the significant events in light of the evidential record as it now exists. In this account some familiar events, including some that seem to show the United States as a dynamic actor in European affairs, recede in importance. These include FDR's persistent efforts to arrange meetings with Stalin, and even some of his personal interventions such as the declaration of "unconditional surrender" in 1943. At the same time other,



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xix

less familiar events, particularly those signifying some kind of European political vitality – such as the Anglo-Soviet treaty of 1942, the intensive intra-European negotiations over the future of Poland, and the widespread dissemination of European geopolitical visions – become more prominent. A similar adjustment of priorities will be noticed in personal relationships. We will see less here of such Rooseveltian acolytes as Henry Wallace, Sumner Welles, and William Bullitt – names that appear in most American accounts of the period. We will see more of such people as Eduard Benes, Paul-Henri Spaak, and Ivan Maisky – names rarely found in American studies but more prominent in the work of European historians.

What then is the evidence for this heightened sense of European diplomacy? Significant facts and suggestive relationships have emerged from the Soviet archives, and (though my knowledge of Russian is very limited, and I have had to rely on better-equipped historians and professional researchers, whose help I gratefully acknowledge) I have been able to make some use of these. They tend, I believe, to support the argument I make here, especially the notion of a Soviet desire to avoid close ties with the United States and to make a partner of the British in wartime and postwar Europe. But, as everyone knows, the high expectations of 1989 have not been fulfilled. The new materials are selective and very limited (especially for the wartime period with which I am most concerned), and their release has often been guided by political and other criteria. I can therefore make no pretence to a definitive account, probably a mythical quest in any kind of diplomatic history.

There are basically three problems with the Soviet records. A major one has been the haphazard and difficult access since the warm but brief initial welcome in the early 1990s. Another is the lamentable paucity of the available wartime record so far, which works to hide from us that sense of plausible context and bureaucratic infrastructure that historians need for confident evaluation. (This is particularly true for the wartime period we are concerned with here.) Nearly all the admirable volumes based on Soviet records produced by the Woodrow Wilson Cold War project deal with the Cold War itself, not with the war period. There were apparently several “shredding” operations of the wartime papers during the Cold War, and Stalin himself, the man who was at the center but did much of his business on the telephone, seems to have covered his tracks well. Obviously there is much we shall never know. Stalin hated historians, whom he called “archive rats.” At the October 1944 conference in Moscow, when Churchill offered an awkward apology for his earlier hostility to the Bolshevik regime, Stalin gracefully produced, as he was wont to do, a soothing Russian proverb:

Cambridge University Press

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Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

“He who recalls the past should lose his eyesight.”<sup>6</sup> To be fair, historians, who like to think they have the last word, have been taking their revenge ever since. But in many ways Stalin has won, for as we search for archival enlightenment we find that he has left us, to paraphrase his notorious proverb about the pleasures of calculated revenge, a dish served cold and with very little in the way of nutritious fare. And this is a pity, because the decision making on important issues was, it is generally agreed, in his hands. Indeed, so powerful was he that he felt able to reverse basic policy virtually overnight and make the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 without even consulting the Politburo, or apparently any other political figure except his compliant commissar for foreign affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov.

On the other hand, in addition to the valuable glimpses into the work of the wartime diplomatic establishment now available, we have the benefit of some important revelations, notably the records of the postwar planning commissions established during 1943 under Maisky, the former ambassador to Britain, and Maxim Litvinov, the former ambassador to the United States. Further, there has been a proliferation of useful memoir literature in recent years. We also have the British Broadcasting Corporation’s *Daily Digest of Soviet Broadcasts* for the entire war, an excellent, little-exploited source, at least for public policy. Using these and other sources we can show much of the reality of the Anglo-Soviet nexus, and from the smattering of more intimate sources we can convey something, at least, of the calculations that inspired the Kremlin’s commitment to it, as we endure the long wait for a fuller enlightenment.

The most useful sources available today for a delineation of the European dimension, however, are the British wartime archives. These have not been fully exploited. One wonders if they will be in the future. The danger now is that the internationally oriented insights in the British archives will for a time be swamped by the lure of exciting new Soviet records, which, while in fact they appear to be steadily reinforcing the perspectives I am urging here, seem nevertheless to be leading many researchers back to congenial thoughts of a superpower bipolarity that is perfectly appropriate for the course of the Cold War itself but badly misleading for the World War II years, or even for the period between May 1945 and March–April 1946, when new political associations were still crystallizing and the range of postwar possibilities was still quite open and conjectural.

<sup>6</sup> Record of talks at the Kremlin, October 18, 1944, in PREM 3.434/7.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xxi

The British records are a useful corrective to any tendency toward narrowly nationalistic or excessively bipolar thinking. They tell us a great deal about large World War II issues, about Yalta's real significance, and about the unexpected emergence of the Cold War. There are a number of obvious reasons for this. One is the basic fact that Britain was much closer to both the United States and the Soviet Union than those two countries were to each other. Another is that Britain had worldwide interests and was both European and transatlantic in outlook and historic orientation. Inevitably, therefore, the British were close students and perceptive observers of each partner, the more so because Britain was in many respects the most vulnerable of the three powers and was in fact subjected to intense pressures from each of its better-endowed allies as the war progressed. Then too, London was the wartime capital of non-Nazi Europe, the home of many exile governments for whom it exercised a generally sympathetic custodial or at least fiduciary role. All this was reinforced by a comparatively efficient governmental machine, a tradition of worldliness and political sophistication, and a vast array of international connections. Britain's archives, therefore, were always likely to be a primary source for any historian interested in the international as opposed to the narrowly national diplomatic history of World War II.

What the British records seem to show, above all, is that while the war itself was always the governing concern of the Churchill government, this focus was accompanied by the development and elaboration of a European vision of postwar security based not on the creation of a successor to the League of Nations or on the vindication of the principles of the Atlantic Charter, but on a steadily growing Anglo-Soviet understanding about future security from which, partly by its own choice, partly by Anglo-Soviet preference, the United States was excluded. The resulting "Moscow Order" represented the short-lived triumph of traditional and geopolitical logic over the visionary ideas and economic multilateralism offered by what then seemed to be a politically very detached United States. In the end, Churchill and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden forged with Stalin and Molotov what amounted to a European path. At the beginning of 1945, as the three leaders prepared for the Yalta conference, this was still generally expected in Paris, Berlin, and Madrid, as well as in London and Moscow, and even in Washington, to be the basis of postwar European political organization. Yet a few short weeks after Yalta all this lay in ruins.

Thus, from the viewpoint developed here, the Yalta conference turns out to be just as important as it appears to be in the conventional account, but for different reasons. It did not produce a division of Europe,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

or a Yalta Order, or any other kind of coherent or integrating conception. In fact, we might with some justice speak of a “Yalta Disorder.” For President Roosevelt, who had up to this point openly or covertly endeavored to subvert nearly all impulses toward European postwar unity, came to Yalta determined to break down, or at least to weaken, the now well-established Anglo-Soviet concert, which, by its sudden display of vitality and activism, was threatening in late 1944 to destroy public support in the United States for his policy of a postwar internationalism focused on a United Nations organization. In this he was, as we will see, largely successful. The president’s eccentric personal diplomacy, and the various temptations it seemed to offer, worked to separate Churchill and Stalin. But in publicly proclaiming the Yalta agreements a brilliant success for American diplomacy, FDR presented the British leader with an unintended opportunity, which Churchill quickly seized, to try and create at last an Anglo-American front against the Soviets (now suddenly upstaged in the post-Yalta myth making) in defense of the supposed Polish settlement, a general regime of freedom and democracy in Eastern Europe, and much else. And in this Churchill was partly successful. Ironically, therefore, the consequence of Roosevelt’s Yalta success was not the tripartite tranquility or the beneficent Yalta Order he had hoped for, but the entanglement of the United States at last in the complex and constraining politics of Europe.

Could the Anglo-Soviet concert have worked? Would it have avoided the Cold War? Defenders of the conventional view of the Cold War’s origins may be inclined to dismiss such questions as inconsequential and simply to ask whether it is worth studying this European “road not taken.” The short answer is that this road was taken. The geopolitical arrangements made by Churchill and Stalin, in effect a political division of Europe, founded on military realities, became a territorial framework for continental Europe that lasted for nearly half a century. In this the United States played no part. What did change were the presiding relationships. And here the United States played a crucial role. For the real significance of Yalta is that, in its erratic conference course and in its convoluted aftermath, it brought about the political commitment to that now divided Europe of the hitherto separate United States. Thus the Moscow and Yalta conferences worked, together with the underlying military realities, to create the Cold War Order – the one creating the geopolitical architecture, the other establishing (after a short crystallizing interval) the new political relationships – within which Europe struggled to recover from the midcentury catastrophe.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xxiii

The argument here will be developed through three phases. We begin with a brief review of Yalta's image during the Cold War era, with a view to demonstrating in a rudimentary way the subjective character of much that we think we know about this event that is so deeply embedded in the conventional view of the Cold War's origins. The book then works into a more positive mode with three chapters that take the story, in a necessarily selective way, from the shocks of 1939 to the eve of the Yalta meeting in February 1945, tracing the origins and evolution of the Anglo-Soviet concert of power that was generally seen at the time as the likely framework for postwar European politics. These chapters will emphasize both the continuing efficacy of European diplomacy and the equally traditional detachment, despite a growing practical involvement in European affairs as the war progressed, of the United States. The third phase involves some further stage setting for Yalta, with a chapter exploring some of the distinctive features of Roosevelt's America and the ways in which the war influenced not only FDR's policies but also a range of official and private interests. By 1944 these elements were moving into position to shape and underpin that sudden and remarkable projection of American power and organization that was soon seen by everyone to be ushering in a new era. We then come, in two concluding chapters, first to the conference itself and then to its complex aftermath, which was in one sense transformative in breaking down the Anglo-Soviet nexus through two distinct crises in 1945 and 1946, yet in another way confirmatory in that it did not challenge (indeed, it tacitly endorsed) the structural, geopolitical division of the continent created earlier by the European leaders.

I should be clear about one thing. It is not my purpose to try to stamp out the East/West conception of Allied diplomacy and substitute for it an all-encompassing Europe/America framework. There is far too much tripartite activity and complex mixing for that, too many material American intrusions in Europe and interweaving relationships among the Big Three to justify a dogmatic generalization of that kind. It is really a matter of proportion. By bringing Europe more fully into the story of Allied diplomacy, and correspondingly reducing the supposed American role, I want not simply to challenge a prevailing Americocentrism but, more substantively, to render a truer portrait of the activities of the victorious combination, so that we can see these two great continental theaters as they really were, at least until February 1945: politically autonomous arenas that – despite the distortions caused by the obscuring Hitlerian overlay, the culturally imperializing character of the Anglo-American strategic partnership, and Churchill's spellbinding transatlantic oratory

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxiv

*Preface*

and persisting anticommunist animus – viewed each other as separate and distinct political worlds and expected that to continue.

Yalta is best seen as the end of the Grand Alliance. It was not, I think, the beginning of the Cold War, though its immediate aftermath did produce a crisis that in turn created conditions for future confrontation and made that outcome much more likely. The final denouement came in a second crisis in early 1946. Between these two clashes there were both spasmodic attempts to restore good relations within the tripartite association and, on the other hand, intervening causative events (such as the appearance of the atomic weapon) that created new tensions and would certainly need to be factored in to a fuller account of the Cold War's origins and consolidation than I am offering here. Nonetheless, the Crimean meeting remains central to any understanding of these later events as well, and also to an appreciation of the structural approach to the Cold War's origins. For Yalta set in train a process that produced, for the third time in just over thirty years, a situation in which the United States found itself gradually and uncertainly moving through the familiar British corridor toward a fateful confrontation with Britain's continental adversary. Even in the United States, where we instinctively resist deterministic explanation, this is surely a humbling reminder of the constraints on human action that seem to rear up repeatedly to frustrate the most creative statesmen of almost any era in modern history, even as they inspire the scholarly enterprise that tries to understand them.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Acknowledgments

It is a pleasure to acknowledge certain debts I have incurred while writing this book. In general, I have a strong sense of the obligation I owe to friends and fellow practitioners in the field of modern diplomatic/international history, and especially to the fellowship and collegiality of the scholars grouped in the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. These have been enriching associations.

Any field of study devoted to the recent diplomatic history of a Great Power that is still as active in the world as the contemporary United States is bound to be a feisty arena: effusive, articulate, and pulsing with emotion. But, as historians know only too well, the attractive lure of immediacy and relevance comes at a price. Current political and philosophical allegiances, continually refreshed and sharpened by the ongoing story, tend to shape inquiry into the past. It is sometimes hard to be objective. Dichotomous thinking flourishes. And fresh perspectives have to make their way against entrenched views that also function, far beyond their crystallization in the academic community, as a strongly defended treasure chest for politicians and polemicists who take a somewhat opportunistic view of the past.

Increasingly, however, we appear to be coming to terms with these hegemonial domestic constraints and breaking free of the Americocentrism that has long been their most obvious manifestation. One sign of this is the steady trend in recent years toward a more internationally oriented understanding of American diplomatic history, especially for the crucially transformative years of World War II and the early Cold War. This comes from a line of thought that draws its inspiration from distinguished scholars – W. H. McNeill and George F. Kennan in the United States,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxvi

*Acknowledgments*

Donald Cameron Watt in Britain, for example – whose work during the Cold War era urged the importance, when exploring the American role in world affairs, of wider views. I hope this book, with its central Europe/America focus, will help to reanimate that tradition.

My interest in the Europe/America juxtaposition goes back to my graduate training in the 1970s at the University of California at Berkeley. I began my studies with two stimulating courses, one in classic European diplomatic history with Raymond Sontag, the other in the history of modern American foreign relations with Martin Sherwin. Other teachers on that remarkable faculty – Lawrence Levine, Kenneth Waltz, and Michael Rogin, among others – are also gratefully remembered. I want to mention with appreciation Diane Shaver Clemens, who arrived to teach at Berkeley after I had completed my course work but who kindly chaired my dissertation committee. Her own book, *Yalta*, published in 1970 before any official British or Soviet records had become available, is a model analysis of a diplomatic negotiation. It has long been admired. Our mutual interest in this extraordinary meeting is entirely coincidental, but I have found her book very useful in the preparation of this study. The Yalta conference can of course be profitably viewed from a variety of angles, and I have benefited from participation in panel discussions about it with Robert Dallek, Robert Service, and Constantine Pleshakov and in informal discussions too numerous to mention, though several stimulating conversations with Holger Afflerbach are lodged firmly in my mind. I would also like to thank Robert Messer and Klaus Larres, who read the manuscript and offered helpful suggestions. All errors and shortcomings are of course mine alone.

I want to thank Svetlana Savranskaya of the National Security Archive for her help with Soviet and Eastern European research materials. She has been a splendid guide to many of us, including my own graduate students. I am grateful, too, for the insight I received at various points from participants in the events described herein, such as the Foreign Office's Sir Frank Roberts in London and Stanislaw Szwalbe, former vice-marshal of the Polish Sejm. I am deeply thankful to the many librarians in the United States and Europe (especially at the British National Archives at Kew) who have eased my way. There is an extraordinary volume of material to examine in this field, far beyond the ability of any lone scholar to fully comprehend, let alone master. One particularly values, therefore, collections like Warren Kimball's fine volumes on the Churchill and Roosevelt correspondence and the Woodrow Wilson Center's Cold War International History Project. We need more help of that kind.



Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads  
Fraser J. Harbutt  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

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*Acknowledgments*

xxvii

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My greatest debt is to my family, above all to my wife, Marysia, whose fluency in Russian has been of enormous practical help, and whose warmth and vibrant personality have sustained me throughout. The engaged historian is, from a human viewpoint, a notoriously difficult proposition, a fact amply illustrated by the penitential eloquence one often finds in these familial tributes. The physical frame may still be present, but the mind becomes a wandering thing. It takes a very special person to understand this and eventually lead the time traveler back to a safe shore. And here, as friends and relations are always pointing out to me (needlessly, I might say), I have been exceptionally fortunate. I am also indebted, for their good-humored indulgence and interest, to my children, Josie and Chris, the bright lights in my personal firmament. The book is lovingly and thankfully dedicated to them.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Abbreviations

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| BBC Digest            | British Broadcasting Corporation, world broadcasts                               |
| CAB                   | Cabinet papers (UK)  |
| <i>Correspondence</i> | Warren Kimball, ed., <i>Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence</i> |
| COS                   | Chiefs of Staff (UK)   |
| EAC                   | European Advisory Commission   |
| FO                    | Foreign Office (UK)  |
| FRUS                  | <i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>                                    |
| FRUS, Yalta           | <i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i> , conferences at Malta and Yalta   |
| HW                    | Intelligence files (UK)  |
| INF                   | Ministry of Information papers (UK)  |
| JCOS                  | Joint Chiefs of Staff (U.S.)   |
| OSS                   | Office of Strategic Services (U.S.)  |
| PHP                   | Post-Hostilities Planners (UK)   |
| PMM                   | Prime ministers' meetings (UK)   |
| PREM                  | Prime ministers' papers (UK)   |
| SC                    | Security Council, United Nations   |
| SCCA                  | Stalin's correspondence with Churchill and Attlee                                |
| SCRT                  | Stalin's correspondence with Roosevelt and Truman                                |

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85677-5 - Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads

Fraser J. Harbutt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

xxx

*Abbreviations*

|       |                                      |
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| SD    | State Department (U.S.)              |
| SOE   | Special Operations Executive (UK)    |
| T     | Treasury papers (UK)                 |
| ULTRA | British intelligence intercepts (UK) |
| WM    | Cabinet minutes (UK)                 |
| WP    | Cabinet papers (UK)                  |