The YALTA and Potsdam Conferences

During the War, Britain and the USA were allies of the Soviet Union but the only thing that united them was their hatred of Germany.

In 1945, the Big Three held two conferences – at Yalta (February) and Potsdam (July) – to try to sort out how they would organize the world after the war. It was at these conferences that the tensions between the two sides became obvious.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTION:

How does the above statement by Churchill represent the spirit of cooperation between the big three powers?

YALTA (February 1945)

Held during the war, on the surface, the Yalta conference seemed successful. The Allies agreed a Protocol of Proceedings to:

1) divide Germany into four ‘zones’, which Britain, France, the USA and the USSR would occupy after the war.
2) bring Nazi war-criminals to trial.
3) set up a Polish Provisional Government of National Unity 'pledged to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible'.
4) help the freed peoples of Europe set up democratic and self-governing countries by helping them to (a) maintain law and order; (b) carry out emergency relief measures; (c) set up governments; and (d) hold elections (this was called the 'Declaration of Liberated Europe').
5) set up a commission to look into reparations.

At Yalta, the negotiations went very much in Stalin's favor, but this was because Roosevelt wanted Russian help in the Pacific, and was prepared to agree to almost anything as long as Stalin agreed to go to war with Japan. Therefore, Stalin promised that:

- Russia would join the war in the Pacific, in return for occupation zones in North Korea and Manchuria.
- Russia also agreed to join the United Nations.

On behalf of HM Government I send you grateful thanks for all the hospitality and friendship extended to British delegation at Crimea Conference... No previous meeting has shown so clearly the results which can be achieved when the three heads of government meet together with the full intention to face difficulties and solve them.

You yourself said that co-operation would be less easy when the unifying bond of fight against a common enemy had been removed. I am resolved, as I am sure the President and you are resolved that the friendship and co-operation so firmly established shall not fade when victory has been won.

Winston Churchill, in a telegram dated 17 February 1945, thanking Stalin for his 'hospitality and friendship' at the Yalta Conference.
Although the Conference appeared successful, however, behind the scenes, tension was growing, particularly about reparations, and about Poland.

After the conference, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt that ‘The Soviet Union has become a danger to the free world.’ And on their return home both he and Roosevelt were criticized for giving away too much to the Soviets:

**SOURCE A**

‘How are we feeling today?’ – a British cartoon of 1945 shows Churchill, Roosevelt (USA) and Stalin (USSR) as doctors, working together to heal the world.

**CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS:**

How does this political cartoon reflect the mood/tone of the Yalta conference?

This cartoon was used as propaganda in Britain. What is it trying to show the British people?

**Source B**

This cartoon by the American cartoonist Paul Plaschke appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, shortly after the Yalta Conference. It shows Stalin playing poker with Churchill and Roosevelt.

**CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS:**

How is this political cartoon a criticism of the Yalta conference?

How does the artist depict Stalin compared to Churchill and Roosevelt?
**POTSDAM (July 1945)**

At Potsdam, the Allies met after the surrender of Germany (in May 1945) to finalize the principals of the post-war peace – Potsdam was the Versailles of World War II. Three factors meant that the Potsdam Conference was NOT successful:

- Relations between the superpowers had worsened considerably since Yalta. In March 1945, Stalin had invited the non-Communist Polish leaders to meet him, and arrested them. Things had got so bad that, in May 1945, the British Joint Planning Group had drawn up plans for 'Operation Unthinkable' - a 'total war ... to impose our will upon Russia'.
- Meanwhile, Roosevelt had died, and America had a new president, Truman, who was inclined to 'get tough' with the Russians.
- Also, soon after he had arrived at the Conference, Truman learned (on 21 July) that America had tested the first atomic bomb. It gave the Americans a huge military advantage over everyone else. It also meant that Truman didn't need Stalin's help in Japan. Instead, Truman's main aim at the conference was to find out from Stalin what date the Russians intended to enter the war in the Pacific - something which (unlike Roosevelt) he did NOT want.

So, at Potsdam, the arguments came out into the open.

The Conference agreed to the following Protocols:

1) to set up the four ‘zones of occupation’ in Germany (see map to the right). The Nazi Party, government and laws were to be destroyed, and 'German education shall be so controlled as completely to eliminate Nazi and militarist doctrines and to make possible the successful development of democratic ideas.

2) to bring Nazi war-criminals to trial.

3) to recognize the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity and hold 'free and unfettered elections as soon as possible'.

4) Russia was allowed to take reparations from the Soviet Zone, and also 10% of the industrial equipment of the western zones as reparations. America and Britain could take reparations from their zones if they wished.

President Truman presented it as a 'compromise', but in fact the Allies had disagreed openly about:

1. the details of how to divide Germany.
2. the size of reparations Germany ought to pay.
3. Russian influence over the countries of Eastern Europe.
CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS:
How do the above sources reflect the changes between the Yalta and Potsdam conferences?

Explain at least 3 reasons why relations between the three countries have changed.

Source E
This cartoon was published in the Soviet magazine *Krokodil* on 30 July 1945, three days before the end of the Potsdam Conference.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS:
How is this political cartoon a contradiction to what was actually happening at the Potsdam conference?

Why might this cartoon (published in a Soviet magazine) have depicted the conference this way?

The historian Alan Bullock (1991) thought that 'Stalin's diplomatic successes at Yalta and Potsdam were as great as Hitler's in the 1930s'. Do you agree? Justify/explain your answer.