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# The Round Tablette

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

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Thursday, 11 November 2010

**Welcome to the November session of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Roundtable.** Tonight is the annual Harold C. Deutsch Lecture and features Dr. S.M. Plokhy of Harvard University and author of *Yalta: The Price of Peace*, which he will be speaking on this evening.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with this annual event, we offer a word of explanation. It was the custom of Dr. Deutsch to speak on a topic of his choosing at the November meeting. These lectures were always well attended due to his reputation. His knowledge on virtually any World War II topic was second to none. Many of his former students from the University of Minnesota came to this lecture. With his death, it was decided to remember him through, not only this Roundtable, but also a lecture series named after him. This is an academic lecture for the most part without a panel of veterans.

Held in February 1945, the Crimean (more popularly known as the Yalta) Conference brought together the three Allied leaders, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Josef Stalin, for one last wartime meeting. Soviet troops were only forty miles from Berlin but while an Allied victory

might seem close at hand it was not yet inevitable.

The Black Sea resort town of Yalta was chosen for the conference because Stalin said his doctor prohibited him from making long trips. In reality the sickest of the three leaders was Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) who would die in less than two months. His health at the conference has become just one of the many controversies surrounding the conference.

Each country came with an agenda for the conference. The United States wanted the Soviet Union's support in the war with Japan after the defeat of Germany and their participation in the new United Nations. The British agenda included free elections for the countries in Eastern Europe. Finally the Soviets wished for a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe against future invasion threats. All three countries agreed that they needed a plan to govern a post-war Germany.

During the meeting Stalin took a strong stance on the issue of Poland, citing it as the obvious invasion route, saying that the Soviet Union would not return the land it annexed in 1939. Stalin wanted to build a buffer zone of friendly states between the Soviet Union and Western Europe and Poland was the key. He agreed to the British demand for free elections in Poland; however, what Stalin conceived of as a free election was oceans away from what FDR and Churchill thought they should be were.

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The “Big Three” agreed that Germany would be divided into three zones of occupations for the three Allies and the same would happen for Berlin. (Austria was also divided into three zones.) The British and the US wanted a zone for the French and Stalin agreed as long as it came out of the US and British zones. The three leaders re-committed themselves to unconditional surrender along with demilitarization and de-nazification.

FDR pushed for Soviet participation against Japan and Stalin agreed to enter the war three months after the defeat of Germany. But Stalin also demanded American diplomatic recognition of Mongolian independence from Nationalist China and FDR agreed. Stalin also agreed to join the United Nations after the voting procedures on the Security Council were defined.

Other minor issues were discussed, like the return of displaced persons (DPs) to their countries of origins, and the restoration of pre-war governments. The Conference ended on February 11<sup>th</sup> and each of the leaders celebrated their success. However, the mood was short-lived as relations between the Soviets and the US deteriorated. Many blamed FDR for ceding Eastern Europe to the Soviets, and it was believed that Stalin broke his promises. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the opening of their archives, has offered historians a chance to re-assess the impact of the conference.

**Further Readings:**

S.M. Plokhy, *Yalta: The Price of Peace* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2010).

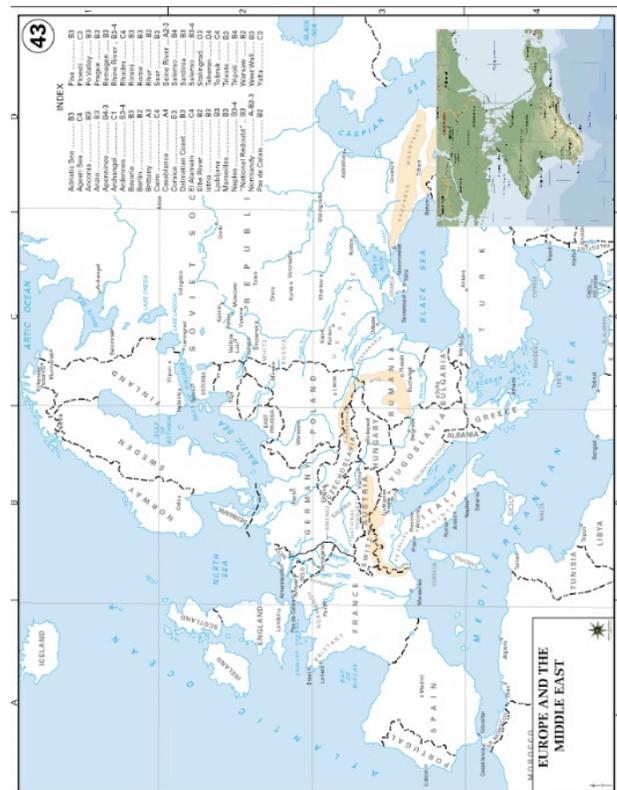
Fraser J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Lloyd C. Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition in Europe, From Munich to Yalta* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1994).

W.R. Smyser, *From Yalta to Berlin: The Cold War Struggle over Germany* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

**Round Table Schedule 2010-2011**

- Nov. 11, HCD Lecture: Yalta Conference
- Dec. 12, Pearl Harbor
- Jan. 13, 2011 Eastern Front Tank Battles
- Feb. 10, Relief of the Philippines
- Mar. 10, Coast Guard Role In Naval Ops
- Apr. 14, Battle of Cassino
- May 12, Bombers Over Germany



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