

To what extent did the Yalta and Potsdam conferences mark the start of the Cold War?

At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, President Roosevelt praised the family atmosphere between the US, Britain and the Soviet Union.

But by July and Potsdam, the family was on the verge of a breakup.

So how had Allied relations soured in just five months?

At Yalta in February 1945, the war against Germany was still raging, and the three allies had a common enemy.

But by Potsdam in July, the Germans had surrendered, and the allies each had different visions of the future. Personalities mattered too.

At Potsdam, Attlee replaced Churchill as Prime Minister, and Truman replaced the deceased Roosevelt as President. Truman was less willing to make deals with Stalin. He believed in democracy and individual freedoms and saw the USSR as a communist dictatorship.

But the biggest source of friction was post-war policy in Europe. At Yalta, the powers agreed that due to its devastation, the USSR would take more reparations from Germany. They also agreed that free elections would be held in Eastern Europe. But by Potsdam the USSR was demanding even more reparations, which Britain and the US opposed, fearing it would damage Germany's recovery.

To create a buffer zone, Stalin was also installing a communist government in Poland and blocking elections in Eastern Europe, which angered the Americans in particular.

And looming over these tense discussions was the atomic bomb. The US had tested it the day before Potsdam.

Stalin saw this as a provocation and sped up the USSR's nuclear program.

This and other changes turned the allies of Yalta into Cold War rivals by Potsdam.