

ATLANTIC CHARTER

TREATY AT A GLANCE

Completed

August 14, 1941, pursuant to a conference aboard the
U. S. S. *Augusta* off Newfoundland

Signatories

United States and Great Britain

Overview

Issued during the darkest days of Britain's involvement in World War II and five months before the United States entered the war, the Atlantic Charter was an Anglo-American statement of common principles.

Historical Background

From the time Adolf Hitler invaded Poland, the American president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, began seeking ways to come to the aid of Great Britain in the face of an isolationist Congress hostile to U.S. involvement in the European war. As Germany marched over Europe and isolated the British, Roosevelt persisted, pushing the pace of U.S. rearmament from a mere \$2 million in defense spending in January 1940 to some \$10.5 million following the fall of France. Caught in a presidential election campaign against a strong Republican candidate, Wendell Willkie, Roosevelt paid close attention to opinion polls indicating that Americans favored a policy of "all aid short of war" to Britain. He promised voters he would not send American soldiers to fight in a foreign war but also urged increased support for British prime minister Winston Churchill's government. Voters ignored Willkie's absolutely valid argument that Roosevelt was hoping to provoke an attack, which would mean the war was no longer foreign, and sent FDR back to the White House for a third term. After the election, the public, including the defeated Willkie, supported Roosevelt's LEND-LEASE AGREEMENT, a scheme to help the besieged and nearly bankrupt Britain by lending, instead of selling, Churchill all the arms he needed.

What the public did not know was that Roosevelt had secretly authorized joint U.S.-British staff talks and collaborated with Churchill's government on how to meet the German U-boat threat. In April 1941 he gave the U.S. Navy license to attack German subs in the North Atlantic, reached an executive agreement with

the exiled Danish government to place Greenland under American protection, and in July sent the U.S. Marines to occupy Iceland. By the time Germany invaded Russia, he was all but fighting an undeclared war with Hitler at sea, and now he extended lend-lease to the USSR. Finally, Roosevelt began pressing Congress for amendments to the Selective Service Act to raise the ceiling on the number of men in the armed forces, lift the ban on the use of troops outside the Western Hemisphere, and permit him to extend the tours of draftees.

The Republicans had had enough, and Roosevelt's proposed amendments sparked the last great congressional debate on isolationism versus intervention. It was during the middle of this debate that FDR and Churchill met secretly off the coast of Newfoundland to draft a manifesto of the common principles that bound the two nations, and a free people, together: the Atlantic Charter.

Terms

Roosevelt and Churchill met for four days (August 9-12) aboard the U.S.S. *Augusta*. Their unofficial manifesto set forth eight principles of American and British aims in war as well as peace, all of them reminiscent of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points.



Joint Declaration of the President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister, Mr Churchill, representing His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, being met

together, deem it right to make known certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world.

First, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;

Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned;

Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them;

Fourth, they will endeavour, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity;

Fifth, they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security;

Sixth, after the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want;

Seventh, such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance;

Eighth, they believe that all of the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons must come to the abandonment of the use of force. Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside of their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a

wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They will likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments.



Consequences

Churchill later claimed that Roosevelt promised to "wage war but not declare it" and to look for some event, some incident, that would justify open hostilities by the United States. It was certainly true that Roosevelt pushed Congress to vote on November 7 for arming merchant ships and allowing them to sail into the war zone, which would indicate that he believed submarine warfare might become a *casus belli* for the United States, just as it had in World War I. Indeed, Admiral Dönitz's U-boats had already torpedoed two American destroyers, *Kearney* and *Reuben James*. As it turned out, in less than a month, the Japanese would give FDR more than enough to make his undeclared war official. Not surprisingly, Roosevelt immediately made the war in Europe the major emphasis of the American war effort, though most Americans supported the war as a means of seeking revenge against Japan. In any case, the Atlantic Charter continued to inform American war aims: the charter's principles were endorsed by 26 allied nations in the UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION on January 1, 1942.