

CASABLANCA DECLARATION

TREATY AT A GLANCE

Completed

February 12, 1943, at Casablanca, Morocco

Signatories

United States and Great Britain

Overview

One of several conferences between the major Allied powers, Casablanca was noteworthy for its surprise declaration from Roosevelt and Churchill that the Allied goal in World War II was the "unconditional surrender" of the Axis powers.

Historical Background

After the American entry into World War II, U.S. president Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill, who had already on occasion met in secret summits, began holding a series of well-publicized conferences on the conduct of the war. Although the Allied leaders always discussed matters of substance and came to major decisions at the conference, not all of the statements, reports, or declarations they issued reflected their importance. Much of what was discussed of necessity remained secret. For example, one could hardly have expected the joint statement that followed the Quebec Conference in August 1943 to have announced the American decision to share with the British its results under the top secret Manhattan Project, which would produce the atomic bombs that ended the war in the Pacific. Some of the public announcements were significant, however, beyond the propaganda purposes their language was clearly meant to serve. The Casablanca Conference, one of the earliest such summits, in January 1943, produced just such a significant declaration.

Roosevelt and Churchill met in Casablanca in the wake of Operation Torch, the combined allied invasion of North Africa, to determine the strategy for the coming year. Roosevelt once again soothed Churchill's feelings by putting off the opening of a second front in France in favor of operations in Sicily. General George Marshall and Admiral King won approval at the conference for offensives in Burma and the southwest Pacific. The two leaders spent a lot of time trying to persuade the rival military leaders of Free France, Charles de Gaulle and Henri Giraud, to at least feign

unity. Then, as the conference was drawing to a close, Roosevelt made the parting pronouncement that peace could only come with the total elimination of Germany's and Japan's military and their "unconditional surrender."

With this declaration, which was not nearly so spontaneous as he would have those in attendance believe, Roosevelt was trying to send a signal to Joseph Stalin about American resolve in the war. He felt he needed to do so because his commander in Operation Torch, Dwight Eisenhower, had blundered politically in North Africa. The collaborationist Vichy government had severed diplomatic relations with Washington and ordered French forces to resist the Allied invasion. Looking for a French leader with enough prestige to rally French Africa against the Axis, the Allies had turned to Henri Giraud, a hero of the Free French who had escaped from a prison camp. The only trouble was that Giraud demanded command of the whole invasion force. Then Admiral François Darlan showed up suddenly in Algiers. A leading fascist, Darlan was, according to the Vichy government, the commander of the local French forces, and he promised Eisenhower he would make them stop fighting the Allies if the American commander recognized him as the political chief of North Africa. Eisenhower made the deal, and the Americans escaped utter humiliation only when a French royalist assassinated Darlan and de Gaulle outmaneuvered Giraud to become de facto leader of the Free French.

It all seemed sinister to Stalin, who had objected to the North African invasion from the start, suspecting his Western allies of delaying a direct invasion of the mainland as a way of bleeding the Red Army by letting it do

the brunt of the fighting against the Nazis. Thus, Roosevelt's "unconditional surrender" was aimed as much at the ally who was absent from Casablanca as it was at the enemies whose future it was destined to dictate.

Terms

The declaration itself was couched in the tough-guy phrasing and casual punctuation of American wartime propaganda, as would be most such documents.



The decisions reached and the actual plans made at Casablanca were not confined to any one theater of war or to any one continent or ocean or sea. Before this year is out, it will be made known to the world-in actions rather than words-that the Casablanca Conference produced plenty of news; and it will be bad news for the Germans and Italians-and the Japanese.

We have lately concluded a long, hard battle in the Southwest Pacific and we have made notable gains. That battle started in the Solomons and New Guinea last summer. It has demonstrated our superior power in planes and, most importantly, in the fighting qualities of our individual soldiers and sailors.

American armed forces in the Southwest Pacific are receiving powerful aid from Australia and New Zealand and also directly from the British themselves.

We do not expect to spend the time it would take to bring Japan to final defeat merely by inching our way forward from island to island across the vast expanse of the Pacific.

Great and decisive actions against the Japanese will be taken to drive the invader from the soil of China. Important actions will be taken in the skies over China-and over Japan itself.

The discussions at Casablanca have been continued in Chungking with the Generalissimo by General Arnold and have resulted in definite plans for offensive operations.

There are many roads which lead right to Tokyo. We shall neglect none of them.

In an attempt to ward off the inevitable disaster, the Axis propagandists are trying all of their old tricks in order to divide

the United Nations. They seek to create the idea that if we win this war, Russia, England, China, and the United States are going to get into a cat-and-dog fight.

This is their final effort to turn one nation against another, in the vain hope that they may settle with one or two at a time-that any of us may be so gullible and so forgetful as to be duped into making "deals" at the expense of our Allies.

To these panicky attempts to escape the consequences of their crimes we say-all the United Nations say-that the only terms on which we shall deal with an Axis government or any Axis factions are the terms proclaimed at Casablanca: "Unconditional Surrender." In our uncompromising policy we mean no harm to the common people of the Axis nations. But we do mean to impose punishment and retribution in full upon their guilty, barbaric leaders . . .

In the years of the American and French revolutions the fundamental principle guiding our democracies was established. The cornerstone of our whole democratic edifice was the principle that from the people and the people alone flows the authority of government.

It is one of our war aims, as expressed in the Atlantic Charter, that the conquered populations of today be again the masters of their destiny. There must be no doubt anywhere that it is the unalterable purpose of the United Nations to restore to conquered peoples their sacred rights.



Consequences

In many ways the Casablanca Declaration was a rash act. It committed the United States to a power vacuum in postwar Europe rather than a balance of power, which would vastly complicate the peace and give Stalin ample opportunity to fill the vacuum with puppet regimes. It may also have discouraged Germans from attempting to oust Hitler even when facing sure defeat. And it certainly underlay Japan's determination to fight on in Asia long after losing all realistic hope of anything but utter defeat.