

### **The Atlantic Conference & Charter, 1941**

The Atlantic Charter was a joint declaration released by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill on August 14, 1941 following a meeting of the two heads of state in Newfoundland. The Atlantic Charter provided a broad statement of U.S. and British war aims.

The meeting had been called in response to the geopolitical situation in Europe by mid-1941. Although Great Britain had been spared from a German invasion in the fall of 1940 and, with the passage of the U.S. **Lend Lease Act** in March 1941, was assured U.S. material support, by the end of May, German forces had inflicted humiliating defeats upon British, Greek, and, Yugoslav forces in the Balkans and were threatening to overrun Egypt and close off the Suez Canal, thereby restricting British access to its possessions in India. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union on June 22 1941, few policymakers in Washington or London believed that the Soviets would be able to resist the Nazi onslaught for more than six weeks. While the British Government focused its efforts on dealing with the Germans in Europe, they were also concerned that Japan might take advantage of the situation to seize British, French, and Dutch territories in Southeast Asia.

Roosevelt, on the other hand, wanted the British Government to affirm publicly that it was not involved in any secret treaties, particularly ones concerning territorial questions, such as those concluded by the Allies during the First World War concerning the division of enemy territory at war's end. Roosevelt also wished to arrange the terms by which Great Britain would repay the United States for its **Lend Lease** assistance. Roosevelt wanted the British to pay compensation by dismantling their system of Imperial Preference, which had been established by the British Government during the Great Depression and was designed to encourage trade within the British Empire by lowering tariff rates between members, while maintaining discriminatory tariff rates against outsiders.

While the Atlantic Charter of August 1941 was not a binding treaty, it was, nonetheless, significant for several reasons. First, it publicly affirmed the sense of solidarity between the U.S. and Great Britain against Axis aggression. Second, it laid out President Roosevelt's Wilsonian-vision for the postwar world; one that would be characterized by freer exchanges of trade, self-determination, disarmament, and collective security. Finally, the Charter ultimately did serve as an inspiration for colonial subjects throughout the Third World, from Algeria to Vietnam, as they fought for independence

Excerpted from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/wwii/86559.htm>

### **The Atlantic Conference : Joint Statement by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, August 14, 1941 Excerpted:**

They have agreed upon the following joint declaration: (2)

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 endeavor, 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 objector securing, for all, improved labor 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

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

(1) The copy in the Department files is a press release which indicates signature by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill. Apparently, however, there was no signed copy.

(2) Known as the Atlantic Charter, published in Department of State Executive Agreement Series No. 236.

<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/at10.asp>