

Atlantic Charter

The Atlantic Charter was a statement issued on 14 August 1941 that elaborated American and British goals for the world after the end of World War II

The Atlantic Charter was in the news recently when on 10 June 2021, a revised version of the original Atlantic Charter was issued between U.S. President Joe Biden and U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson in Cornwall, England.

As per the statement issued by the US government, the new Atlantic Charter was more in line with the ideals of the 21st century, while setting out on fulfilling the commitments and goals of the 1941 charter.

The Atlantic Charter is part of the International Relations segment of the UPSC Exams.

To know more about the other topics of this segment, visit the UPSC Syllabus page.

New Atlantic Charter

The New Atlantic Charter is an agreement that was signed by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson and the President of the United States Joe Biden on 10 June 2021.

The article issues eight aims:

- To defend the principles and institutions of democracy and open societies
- To strengthen and adapt the institutions, laws and norms that sustain international co-operation
- To remain united behind principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and peaceful resolution of disputes
- To harness and protect the countries' innovative edge in science and technology
- To affirm the shared responsibility to maintain collective security and international stability, including against cyber threats; and to declare the countries' nuclear deterrents to the defence of NATO
- To continue building an inclusive, fair, climate-friendly, sustainable, rules-based economy.
- To prioritise climate change in all international action
- To commit to continuing to collaborate to strengthen health systems and advance health protections

Background of the Old Atlantic Charter

Despite World War II starting off on a bad note for the Allies, they still expressed the principle and vision for a post-war world following the Declaration of St. James Palace in June 1941.

The United States President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met to discuss such prospects of what the world post-war would look like at the Atlantic Conference in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. These discussions would become the foundation of the Atlantic Charter in August 1941. A joint declaration was made between the two nations, as a result, in which the United States would enter the war on the side of the allies.

However, opposition by the United States Congress meant that the US would still be neutral in the conflict until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941.

The basis of the charter was derived from the ideology of Anglo-American internationalism, which sought British-American cooperation for international security. British War Tactics and American industrial power were both needed in order to push back the Axis power in Europe and Asia. There was an assumption that the Americans would have an equal role to play in any postwar politics based on the charter's principles.

However, events following the end of World War II would end such a notion.

Details of the Old Atlantic Charter

The Atlantic Charter made it clear that the United States supported Britain in its war efforts. Although the fundamental aim was to focus on the peace that would follow without any specific involvement of the Americans, it became evidently clear that such an involvement would be more likely if not inevitable.

There were eight principal clauses of the charter:

- No territorial gains would be pursued by either parties
- Territorial adjustments would be in accordance with the people concerned
- All the people of Axis-occupied territories would have a right to self-determination
- Trade barriers were to be limited
- For the advancement of economic and social-welfare, there would be extensive cooperation
- The participants would work for freedom from want and fear as well as freedom of the seas
- There would be disarmament of aggressors as well as a common disarmament of other nations following the war

The fourth clause, with respect to international trade, consciously emphasized that both "victor (and) vanquished" would be given market access "on equal terms."

This was in contrast to the trade relations enforced in Europe following the end of World War I

Impact of the Old Atlantic Charter

The Axis powers, particularly Japan and Germany, felt that these diplomatic agreements were the foundation of an alliance against them. Britain even had to drop millions of leaflets over Germany

stating that there would be no punitive actions taken against the German state following the end of World War II.

The most striking feature of the discussion was that an agreement had been made between a range of countries that held diverse opinions.

The charter proved to be one of the first steps towards the formation of the United Nations.

Impact on Imperial Powers and Imperial Ambitions

The main problem was in no ways related to the occupied territories of the Axis, but rather the empires of the allies themselves. The allies who were part of the Atlantic Charter like the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the Netherlands were not keen on following through with the ideals of self-determination.

Initially, Roosevelt agreed that self-determination would not apply to Africa and Asia where the British Empire had valuable holdings. However, Roosevelt's advisors pointed out that the peoples of India, Burma, Malaysia and other nations under imperial yoke would ask if the Atlantic Charter extended to them as well.

But the war needed to be one with the help of those allies, and thus Roosevelt agreed to put pressure on Britain regarding decolonization but would postpone the issue until after the war.

Regardless, the Atlantic Charter's acknowledgement that all people would have a right to self-determination gave hope to independence leaders in European colonies.

Churchill still refused to reject the universal applicability of the Charter's principle. Self-determination was Roosevelt's guiding principle, but he was reluctant to place pressure on the British in regard to India and other colonial possessions, as they were fighting for their lives in a war in which the United States was not officially participating.

Although Mahatma Gandhi refused to support Britain's efforts in the war, India still sent the largest volunteer force from any nation to fight in World War II.

Churchill was eager to pursue the principle of self-determination for the Baltic and Eastern Europe, which was supposedly being 'liberated' by the Soviet Union. He was distrustful of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's promises to conduct elections in territories under soviet control. Correctly deducing that Stalin would hold elections consisting of communist parties, essentially making them puppet states.

Roosevelt was more trusting of Stalin and therefore, did not object to the takeover of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union, since the war still needed to be won. He would take up the issue once the war was over, but he passed away in April 1945, before Germany's official surrender that year. The new President, Harry S Truman, although hostile to Stalin, was not keen on further destroying the already

fraught relations between the United States and the Soviet Union and thus agreed to the Soviets occupying the eastern half of Europe, much to Churchill's outrage.

What Truman did, however, was persuading the new British government under Clement Atlee to adhere to the universal application of the self-determination principle. The Marshall Plan - an aid package offered by the United States for the reconstruction of post-war Europe - was needed to revive Britain's devastated economy and Churchill had to agree to the decolonisation initiative of the empire. One of the conditions of the Marshall Plan meant relinquishing Britain's colonies.

In short, the charter inspired several other international agreements and events that followed the end of the war. The dismantling of the British Empire, the formation of NATO, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) all derived from the Atlantic Charter.