
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the January session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. James Conroy, tonight's speaker, will discuss the Casablanca Conference of 1943 where the Anglo-American leadership clashed over strategies and compromised on a grand plan to win the war.

The Anglo-American alliance of the Second World War began not with US entry into the war in 1941 but haltingly and in secret in 1937. Despite fighting on the Allied side in the "Great War," the United States was not a part of the Grand Alliance. Instead, the US was an "Associated Power" and did not share many of the Allied war goals.

At the Paris Peace Conference, Britain stove to maintain its Empire while the US sought a world free of war on the basis of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. Subsequent relations in the 1920s were marked by disagreement and tension, exacerbated by both historical animosities and recent experiences. These differences between UK and US, seen in the 1920s made future diplomatic and military cooperation difficult.

Common dangers helped bring the US and UK into a new relationship, following the Japanese invasions of Manchuria in 1931 and China in 1937, but this relationship was still fraught with difficulties and impediments. Hitler's rise, along with his revision of the Versailles Treaty and open rearmament, created another major threat to both US and UK interests, and further complicated the international scene. Weakness, both in military strength and in political will, prompted British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to pursue a policy of appeasement in Europe while looking for help from the United States to cover the exposed British territories in the East.

Mired in the Great Depression with a strong public isolationist sentiment as well as a public desire to avoid war, President Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) was limited in his ability to respond to the aggressive actions of the European dictators and the Japanese. He therefore issued only a mild public call for a diplomatic quarantine of Japan in October 1937. Behind the scenes, FDR approached the British proposing bilateral naval talks to deal with Japan but was rebuffed. The collapse of British power in the interwar period, and lack

of trust between the two democracies led to a period of stalled initiatives and half-hearted attempts to co-operate.

Military talks between the two countries sputtered on even as the war began in Europe and the Japanese made more incursions in the Far East. A major turning point for the Anglo-American alliance came on 10 May 1940, when Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister. Chamberlain's distrust of Americans was transformed overnight by the new Prime Minister. FDR and Churchill had corresponded since September 1939, when Churchill became first Lord of the Admiralty. Though national interests still divided them, the two leaders shared a mutual trust and admiration of each other and loved their navies. Thus, the personal relationship of the two leaders helped create a much broader diplomatic cooperation of the two nations.

Still a secret to the broader American public, the Anglo-American alliance took shape during the American-British Conversations (ABC-1) that went on from January through March 1941. During ABC-1, the two countries' military leaders with the approval of the heads of state formulated a grand strategy which included a 'Germany first' emphasis; a defensive posture towards Japan; an air offensive against Germany; and the early elimination of Italy. The two parties also agreed on a global division of geographic responsibilities, liaison machinery and procedures, but disagreed on how to strategically defend the Far East, notably Singapore.

The Casablanca Conference, 14-24 January 1943, reiterated publicly what had already been decided on privately. Occurring two months after the Allied invasion of North Africa, OPERATION TORCH, FDR and Churchill wanted to coordinate plans for the coming year to include concentrating efforts on Germany, increasing supplies to the Soviet Union, moving forces to England for a future invasion of France, knocking Italy out of the war by invading the Italian peninsula, strengthening strategic bombing against Germany, repelling the Japanese invasion from New Guinea, and opening new supply lines to China through Burma.

The most surprising announcement came on the final day of the conference and was not even written into the final communique. Quite "accidentally," FDR unilaterally announced that he and Churchill agreed that the only way to preserve post-war peace was through the "unconditional surrender" of the Axis powers.

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

FDR wanted no myths of German forces being "stabbed in the back" by Socialist Politicians. The Axis military forces would be totally defeated. "Unconditional surrender" originated with General Ulysses S. Grant in the American Civil War.

Myths abound about the "special relationship" between Great Britain and the United States. Foremost was the idea that the British were the senior partner in the alliance (which likely came from Churchill's postwar writings), but in reality it was the Americans who were the leaders in military strength, economic resources, and therefore political direction. Eventually the US fostered a convergence of grand strategic visions so that broad strokes of policy could be agreed to. In addition, the British believed that they could take the lead in the Atlantic and Europe while the US could focus on the Far East, but that would prove impossible by the time the US formally entered the war. Overall, the relatively far greater strength of the US compared to the UK meant that the US would get its way on most issues. The United States also dominated on an economic level with hard bargaining in the destroyers-for-bases deal, the demand for cash payments before the passage of Lend-Lease, and the end of Britain's imperial trade preferences to the benefit of US businesses. Politically, FDR held all the face cards in the hand he played with Churchill.

The origins of the alliance reflected the relative power of the two countries. The US was superior in every respect to the UK save the vast land area, population, and resources of the Empire, and the Empire imposed significant defense vulnerabilities on the UK. Reflecting this power imbalance, as US entry into the war became almost a certainty, FDR was the master of the alliance, and Britain, compelled by necessity, was the reluctant junior partner.

FURTHER READINGS:

James B. Conroy, *The Devils Will Get No Rest: FDR, Churchill, and the Plan that Won the War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2023).

Meredith Hindley, *Destination Casablanca: Exiles, Espionage, and the Battle for North Africa in World War II* (New York: Public Affairs, 2017).

Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and US Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

Matthew Jones, *Britain, the United States, and the Mediterranean War, 1942-1944* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

Steve Weiss, *Anglo-American Strategic Negotiations, 1938-1944* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

Andrew Rawson, *Organizing Victory: The War Conferences, 1941-1945* (Stroud, U.K.: The History Press, 2013).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 16 Jan. 2024, *Ciphers and Codes* – www.tccwrt.com

- info@tccwrt.com

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 -

320-616-6050. <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>.

8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at 1100 -

<https://www.8thmn.org>.

Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show – TBA - 320-564-6644 -

<http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie –TBA July 2024 - Flying Cloud Airport - 952-746-6100 -

www.wotn.org

Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - www.afmsp.org

Friends of the National WW II Memorial –

<http://www.wwiimemorialfriends.org>.

Pittsburg Veterans Breakfast Club

- <http://www.vbcphg.org>.

Western Naval Historical Association

info@wnha.net

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 -

www.cafmn.org

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 -

crazyjerry45@hotmail.com

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2024

13 Feb. 99th "Viking" Battalion

12 Mar. Selling the War – Bill Maudlin

26 Mar. Coast Watchers: Hawaii, England

9 Apr. War of Supply–Mediterranean

14 May Dieppe's Lessons for Normandy

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US & UK Leaders at Casablanca 1943



Generals Giraud & De Gaulle



ANFA Hotel, Outskirts of Casablanca, French Morocco, 1943