

Fighting in North Africa in 1942/1943 and the 1943 Casablanca Conference and their Consequences¹

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Abstract:

1941 brought a significant change in the course of the Second World War. The German offensive against the Soviets and the Japanese fleet's attack on Pearl Harbor rearranged the balance of power, as the Soviet Union and the United States of America became belligerents. On the eastern battlefield, a bloody fight broke out between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army, while in Africa the German-Italian troops faced off against the British and American units. At the turn of 1942/1943, a turning point occurred in the course of the Second World War both on the eastern battlefield and in Africa, and in 1943, the military formations led by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel had to face the fact that Africa could be permanently lost for the Axis powers.

Keywords:

French North Africa, Casablanca, Casablanca directive, El-Alamein, German Africa Corps / Afrika Korps, Operation Torch, Second World War

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Introduction

After Italy declared war on 10 June 1940 to France and Britain, it also tried to enforce its political and military goals in Africa (Lieb, 2018, p. 14–15). On 4 July 1940, the Ethiopian Italian garrison first occupied certain border towns of the Condominium of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, then they broke into Kenya and on 3 August attacked British Somaliland Protectorate, which is important for checking the Red Sea and thus the Suez Canal, which was soon occupied. In response to this, in November 1940, the British launched a major offensive in East Africa, and by spring 1941 they also occupied Eritrea, Italian Somaliland and Ethiopia. This ensured British authority in the Red Sea leading to the Suez Canal (Ferwagner, 2008, p. 62, Sipos, 1997, p. 543-547, Playfair, 1954, p. 165–178).

The Italians, on the other hand, not only tried to achieve results in East Africa, but from Libya from their North African colonies, they wanted to occupy Egypt, then Suez, and finally the Middle East oil fields under the command of Marshal Rodolfo Graziani. The plan was undoubtedly ambitious, and the campaign of the Italians launched on 13 September 1940 was rapidly broken on Richard N. O'Connor's troops resistance, then turned into a disorganized escape after the British counterattack, as a result of which 130,000 Italian soldiers were captured by British (Ferwagner, 2008, p. 66).

Although the British achieved more serious results in the second half of 1940 and in the spring of 1941 in North and East Africa, in the main European military theater, Germany had the control of events, and with exception of the British Islands, almost every country in Western Europe were under German occupation. In the year between the summer of 1940 and 1941, Great Britain fought virtually alone against the Third Empire. For the British, there was a significant change in the military situation with the German offensive against the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, and the Japanese with a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. At that time, the great power in Far East destroyed much of the United States Pacific Fleet in Hawaii. In response the next day the United States and the United Kingdom also declared war on the Japanese Empire (Sipos, 1994, p. 33, 551).

The Gaining Ground of Anglo-Saxons in North Africa

After the entry of the United States of America into the war, negotiations began between the Anglo-Saxon great powers regarding the war policy to be followed. At the meeting held in Washington between 22 December 1941 and 4 January 1942, under the code name Arcadia, led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill, the American and British political and military leaders began to develop a joint strategy for the war. They agreed that defeating Germany was their primary task, and to coordinate military operations, they established the Combined Chiefs of Staff,

consisting of British and American military leaders. At the meeting, it was decided that the Allies would land in North Africa in the spring of 1942, and that the plans for the Normandy landings would begin to be developed in the Operations Department of the American Chief of Staff, headed by Major General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The aim was to carry out the operation by 1 April 1943 (Israeljan, 1974, p. 116, 122). During the Arcadia conference (1 January 1942), the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China and 22 other states (Halmossy, 1983, p. 533) published a joint declaration of the United Nations on their war goals. In it, they declared that the war against the Axis powers would be fought in accordance with the principles of the Atlantic Charter signed by Roosevelt and Churchill on 12 August 1941. They declared that they would mobilize all their forces for victory and would not make a separate peace.

Although the Americans and the British agreed that they would land in North Africa in the spring of 1942, this did not happen. However, the Germans were there, as the Italian government requested military assistance from Germany on 19th December 1940. On 3 February 1941, the Berlin government decided on the military support of the Italians in North Africa. Soon after, the German Africa Corps, under the command of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, landed in North Africa on 11 February. Shortly, on 24 March, El Agheila was occupied by the Germans, and on 10 April, the German units reached the Egyptian border, and as an addition, they managed to capture General O'Connor and his commanding staff (Playfair, 1956, p. 12–18, 31, United States Military Academy, 1945, p. 20).

The British launched an attack on 18 November 1941, but the Germans launched a counterattack on 13 December but the British temporarily came out better in the struggle when they managed to capture Benghazi on 24 December. At the beginning of the following year, the fighting between the British and the German-Italian troops continued in North Africa. The fortunes of war favored the forces of the Axis powers, and by the end of January Benghazi was again under German control, then on 21 June Tobruk was under the control of Rommel's units, and finally on June 30 they reached El-Alamein in Egypt. Then the so-called in the first battle of El-Alamein, the German-Italian troops tried unsuccessfully to break through the well-built British defense line, so from the beginning of July, the military forces of the Axis powers had to arrange themselves for defense in the region. During the summer, the German-Italian formations made several attempts to advance towards Alexandria and Cairo, but during the last attack launched on 30 August, their attack stalled 20 km before Alexandria after the troops of Lieutenant General Bernard L. Montgomery, who had been appointed head of the British 8th Army, stopped them. The British waited with the counterattack. In the Battle of Alamein, which took place between 23 October and 4 November 1942, Lieutenant General Montgomery defeated the forces of Field Marshal Rommel, who was forced to order his troops to retreat on 4 November 1942 (Karsai, 1981, p. 331, 338–339, 345, Playfair, 1960, p. 338–339).



The decisive victory of the British in Egypt came at the best time, because in the late autumn of 1942, another attack by the Anglo-Saxons in Africa began. The historical background of this is that negotiations between the American chief of staff, General George C. Marshall, Harry Hopkins, the president's adviser, and the British general staff and government began in London in April 1942 regarding the second front line in Europe. The Americans wanted to land in France, the British supported the North African landing for geopolitical reasons. Finally, on 24 July 1942, the Anglo-Saxons decided to invade North-West Africa, codenamed Operation Torch. On 26 July with the approval of Churchill, Roosevelt appointed Eisenhower as the commander of their troops, under whose command 125,000 soldiers of the American-British forces (82,600 of them Americans) began the landing in French North Africa (Morocco, Algeria) on 8 November 1942., in order to acquire the colony, which was under the control of Vichy France and which, starting from the German-French armistice concluded on 22 June 1940, was considered a neutral state like its mother country in international law (Karsai, 1981, p. 349-352, Anderson, 1993, p. 5, 26).

The French had a serious antipathy towards the British since the fleet attack at Mers-el-Kébir on 3 July 1940, when the British sank the units of the French fleet stationed there to prevent them from coming under German control. Because of this incident, some of the French became anti-English. Despite this, the French were not clearly dismissive of the Anglo-Saxons and were inclined to support the Americans and British. Finally, in order not to scare the French away from supporting the Anglo-Saxons, British soldiers also went to war under American flags when the Anglo-Saxons landed on the North African coast (Karsai, 1981, p. 356–357, Anderson, 1993, p. 28, 30. Playfair, 1966, p. 147–148).

The Allies managed to hide their attack plan from the German intelligence (Abwehr) and thus the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht), i.e. the High Command of the German Army, received false information (Karsai, 1981, p. 357).

The Allies would have begun their invasion of French North Africa in three main directions (Casablanca under Major General George S. Patton Jr., Oran under Major General Lloyd R. Fredendall and Algiers under British Lieutenant General Kenneth A. N. Anderson) at dawn on 8 November. In the end, instead of Lieutenant General Anderson, the American Major General Charles W. Ryder led the Allied forces attacking in the direction of Algiers due to the sensitivity of the French. The shipping tasks of the attackers were coordinated by the British Royal Navy, while the air support of the ground troops was handled by the British and American air forces under separate commands. The US Air Force was headed by Brigadier General James H. Doolittle (Anderson, 1993, p. 6).

The Allies encountered serious resistance only in the age of Casablanca and Oran, while negotiations between the Americans and the French were already taking place in the background. General Alphonse Juin was contacted by the American Consul Robert

Murphy on 7 November to inform him about the landing, but the French did not change sides due to the return of Admiral François Darlan, finally, in Algiers on 13 November, shortly after the capture of Casablanca and Oran, Admiral Darlan and Lieutenant General Eisenhower concluded an agreement with each other, so that 100,000 soldiers of the French troops in North Africa switched to the side of the Allies (Ferwagner, 2008, p. 75). In return, the Americans recognized Darlan as the de facto head of state of French North Africa and General Henri Giraud as the commander-in-chief of the French troops (Sipos, 1994, p. 42). The action of the Americans earned the wrath of General Charles de Gaulle, who was the leader of Free France. De Gaulle felt insulted that the Americans negotiated with a Frenchman whom he considered a collaborator - Darlan - and not with him, who had been fighting on the side of the Allies against the Axis powers since 1940. In this regard, Churchill explained to de Gaulle that he accepted his objections in the case of Darlan, but that their most important goal was the displacement of Italian and German forces from Africa. And this is only a temporary situation. Although Charles de Gaulle accepted the British position, but he still had reservations about this situation. Finally, after the assassination of Darlan in Algiers on 24 December 1942, General Giraud became the leader of the colony, which created a new situation, although de Gaulle's distrust of the Americans and the French leaders of the colony remained (De Gaulle, 1973, p. 259).

The OKW reacted quickly to the situation and on 9 November they occupied the Bizerte and Tunis airports with paratrooper formations, then on 15 November they took Tunis and took possession of the most important ports and airports. In Europe, as part of the Atilla Plan, the Germans invaded Vichy France, but the French fleet stationed in Toulon was sunk by French sailors, so it did not fall into the hands of the Germans.

After Operation Torch, the situation of the Anglo-Saxon troops in North Africa became extremely favorable. Although Ivan M. Majsky, the Soviet ambassador in London, had a devastating opinion about the Anglo-Saxon occupation of North Africa decades after the war: “[...] Churchill promised both in public and in his private conversations the quick end of the operations in North Africa, the results there (as expected) developed much more slowly than had been assumed. Several factors contributed to this: both the series of failures of Commander-in-Chief Eisenhower, both the disputes between Washington and London, both the military inexperience of the Anglo-American troops, both the higher standard of the enemy's military command (with Rommel at the head), and many other things” (Majszkij, 1975, p. 606). Despite the Soviet ambassador's opinion, by February 1943, the forces of the Axis powers were pushed back to the Tunisian bridgehead from the Allied troops advancing from two directions, which created another opportunity for further attacks by the Anglo-Saxons, now against Europe.

The Casablanca and Washington conferences

In addition to the combat events, the Allies also made important military and political decisions shortly after the success of Operation Torch. At the beginning of December 1942, American President Roosevelt proposed that the leaders of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union hold a meeting somewhere in North Africa to discuss the most important issues of the war and of the subsequent period (Majszkij, 1975, p. 603). In a letter to Roosevelt dated 6 December 1942, Soviet leader Joseph V. Stalin canceled the invitation to the meeting planned for mid-January 1943 citing the Battle of Stalingrad. Thus, only the Anglo-Saxons and the French were represented at the conference held between 14 and 24 January 1943 in Casablanca, French-Morocco, which had been conquered in November. Led by American President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill, the American and British political and military leaders, as well as the French, continued negotiations in Casablanca at the Anfa Hotel and 14 adjacent villas (United States Department of State, 1968, p. 522–523, Churchill, 1989, pp. 186–188). Among the Anglo-Saxon political and military leaders present on the American side were Presidential Advisor Harry Hopkins, Special Representative of the President Averell Harriman, General George C. Marshall, Admiral E.J. King, Lieutenant General H.H. Arnold, Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower, on the British side: General Harold Alexander, General Sir Alan F. Brooke, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, Lieutenant General Sir Hastings L. Ismay, Vice-Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. On the French side, General Giraud was present with two staff officers from the beginning of the meeting, until after long negotiations, on 22 January 1943, Charles de Gaulle arrived in Casablanca, whom the Anglo-Saxons were able to seat at the same table with General Giraud with great difficulty, to discuss with each other, among other things, the situation in occupied France (Buchanan, 2014, p. 78–81). Among other things, De Gaulle's main concern was that, in his opinion, the Anglo-Saxons were interfering in the internal affairs of the French without authorization. As he told Churchill: "I have a duty to reckon with what remains of France's sovereignty. Do not doubt the sincere appreciation, which I feel for him [Churchill] and Roosevelt, but I do not admit that they have any right to settle the question of power in the French Empire." (De Gaulle, 1973, p. 283).

Soviet diplomat Ivan M. Majsky wrote about the mood of the negotiations in Casablanca: "The Battle of Stalingrad is not over yet, but its outcome has already been decided. This circumstance strongly influenced the events of the conference. The mood of Roosevelt and Churchill at the conference can be roughly described as follows: the Russians fight magnificently; they take care of their own affairs; we, Englishmen and Americans, can occupy ourselves with the execution of our own plans; it is only necessary to maintain the good spirit in the Russians, for which wide ranging supplies, increased aerial bombardment of Germany and, of course, beautiful promises are sufficient." (Majszkij, 1975, p. 603).

The actual negotiations began on 15 January 1943 in Casablanca between the political and military leaders, and after ten days of negotiations a compromise was reached on the most important issues. At its 61st meeting held in the Anfa “camp” on 19 January 1943, the Joint Committee of the Chiefs of Staff (on the American side: General Marshall, Admiral King, Lieutenant General Arnold, Lieutenant General Brehon B. Somervell, Rear Admiral Charles M. Cooke, Brigadier General John E. Hull, Brigadier General Albert C. Wedermeyer, Colonel Jacob E. Smart, Frigate Captain Ruthven E. Libby; on the British side: General Brooke, Admiral Pound, Air Marshal Portal, Field Marshal Sir John Dill, Vice-Admiral Mountbatten, Lieutenant General Ismay, Major General Sir John N. Kennedy and Lieutenant General Sir John C. Slessor) adopted CCS memorandum No. 155/1, i.e. the document entitled “Managing the War in 1943” (United States Department of State, 1968, p. 637, 774–775).

Regarding the Casablanca meeting, Churchill later noted, that at their joint press conference with Roosevelt on January 24 it became known to the public that the British and American leader was in Africa (Churchill, 1989, p. 194). And how well they managed to deceive, not only the public, but also the Germans, was immortalized in the diary entry of Hitler's Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels on 28 January 1943: “The sensation of the day is the meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt in Casablanca. So the discussions did not take place in Washington, as we thought, but in the hot land of Africa. Our intelligence service has once again failed completely, it was not even able to locate the location of the meeting. The discussions lasted almost two weeks; the hostile press talks very grandly about the gate of victory. [...] Stalin demonstrated with his absence. He did not even send his representative, which was declared very regrettable in the final announcement. Stalin declared that he could not leave the country as he had to lead the current offensive. In fact, he probably doesn't want to participate in the Anglo-Saxon pact.” (Goebbels, 1994, p. 350–351)

In Casablanca, decisions were made on quite sensitive issues affecting the Germans and their main European ally, Italy. From the continuation of the North African campaigns to the invasion of the Kingdom of Italy to the issue of European bombings. On the penultimate day of the almost one and a half of week conference, 23 January 1943, the political and military leaders met in full, to discuss the document “Managing the War in 1943” submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), which contained the Allied military plans for 1943. On the American side: President Roosevelt, Harry Hopkins, General Marshall, Admiral King, Lieutenant General Arnold, Lieutenant General Somervell, Frigate Captain Libby. On the British side: Prime Minister Churchill, General Brooke, Admiral Pound, Air Marshal Portal, Marshal Dill, Vice Admiral Mountbatten, Lieutenant General Ismay were present. According to the ideas, the goal of the Anglo-Saxons was to defeat the German submarines, thereby turning the Battle of the Atlantic to their advantage, and to support the Soviets with as many supplies as possible. In addition to this, the goal on the European battlefield was still to defeat the



Germans, and to this end they set themselves the following tasks (United States Department of State, 1968, p. 637, 707, 774–775):

The Mediterranean region:

1.) The occupation of Sicily happened in the framework of the Husky operation since the connection to the Mediterranean Sea would be safer. This was a vital issue for the British Empire, as they were able to maintain contact with their Asian colonies via the Suez Canal, the Mediterranean Sea and Gibraltar, while the easiest way for Iraqi oil to be delivered to Great Britain was via the Mediterranean Sea. That is why military activity in the Mediterranean region was a vital issue for the British versus landing in France. This was highlighted by Liddell Hart, who made the following statements regarding Italy's entry into the war on 10 June 1940: "...With Italy's entry into the war, the Mediterranean route became too risky, convoys carrying supplies and reinforcements had to go around the Cape of Good Hope, down along the west coast of the African continent, and from there up along the east coast and the Red Sea..." (Karsai, 1981, p. 195) The notes of US Chief of Staff George Marshall resonate with Hart's thoughts, too: "Axis powers control over the Mediterranean islands and the southern coasts of Europe – from Franco's Spain to Turkey – prevented our traffic in the Mediterranean, forced our ships to sail around the Cape of Good Hope, and this meant a detour of 12,000 miles." (Marshall, 1945, p. 28)

Another goal was to reduce German pressure on the eastern battlefield, but at the same time increase the military burden on the Italians. This is why the Sicilian landing (10 July 1943) was important, as it fell during the Citadel operation between 5 July and 13 July 1943. Thus, the allies significantly influenced the Battle of Kursk in the Belgorod and Orel region (Keegan, 2003, p. 589, 781–795, Szabó–Számvéber, 2002, p. 11–14).

2.) The involvement of Turkey to the Second World War on the side of the Allies. The British planned military actions in the Balkans involving Turkey, and there were ideas that the Allies would request air bases from the Turks for an air attack on Ploiești. At the Casablanca conference, the 62nd meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on January 19 dealt with the Turks. After Casablanca, Churchill held talks with Turkish Prime Minister Şükrü Saracoğlu in Adana on 30-31 January 1943 (Üzenetváltás, 1981, p. 117, United States Department of State, 1968, p. 649–652, Iszraeljan, 1974, p. 175).

From the United Kingdom:

- 1.) Intensification of air attacks against the German military industry.
- 2.) Limited offensive operations.

3.) Joining forces with the aim of landing on the European continent as soon as the German resistance was sufficiently weakened.

4.) In addition, they wanted to maintain the pressure on Japan in the Far East and the Pacific region, so that they could launch an offensive against the island nation after defeating Germany. Therefore, the occupation of Burma, the Marshall Islands and the Carolina Islands was planned for 1943 (Churchill, 1989, p. 194, United States Department of State, 1968, p. 774-775).

Based on the above, the most important task was an offensive against Sicily as soon as possible to increase the pressure on the Italians and draw away German forces from the eastern battlefield. The other purpose was to make safer the Mediterranean shipping, they believed that due to the island's small area, there was no need to station significant occupying forces there. The Sicilian campaign, i.e. the Husky operation, was not incidental to the Anglo-Saxons in terms of moving the bases of the allied bombing forces further north, because it made the German bombing targets easier to reach (Eisenhower, 1982, p. 160).

On the issue of the Sicilian campaign, American and British ideas were different. According to Churchill, "General Eisenhower saw it as necessary to attack Sicily only if our objective is to clear the Mediterranean shipping lanes of the enemy. But if we want to attack and defeat Italy, we must first land on Sardinia and Corsica." (Churchill, 1989, p. 229). Generals Eisenhower and Marshall believed that, in military terms, the Mediterranean region was considered a secondary battlefield, and they wanted to carry out the main attack through the La-Manche Canal in 1944. Churchill however, explained the following opinion in his memoirs regarding to the debate: "Eisenhower was undoubtedly a great professional authority, but I could not share his opinion. Political factors also play a big role in the war, and we achieved much faster and far-reaching results by occupying Sicily and immediately after that we pushed into the Italian peninsula." (Churchill, 1989, p. 229).

Another burningly important issue of the Casablanca conference – perhaps the most important of all – was in addition to the Husky operation, the issue of the planned Normandy landings. It would have been extremely important for the Soviets to open a second front line in Western Europe, which the Allies had already planned at a conference codenamed Arcadia in Washington (22 December 1941 – 14 January 1942) – at that time for the spring of 1942 – however, it was postponed for various political and military reasons. For the Moscow leadership, due to the relief of the Red Army, there would have been a burning need to divide the forces of the Wehrmacht and force Germany into a two-front war. In principle, the American armed forces were ready for the attack by the spring of 1943 - the planned date of the campaign. At least US Vice President Henry A. Wallace thought in February 1943 that by opening the second front in 1943, they could defeat Germany that year. In addition, Harry Hopkins and the American Chief of Staff George C. Marshall believed that the invasion of France would



take place in 1943. This American perception was also supported by the words of Oliver Lyttleton, the British war production minister on 23 May 1943, who said that there was every opportunity to land ashore (Israeljan, 1974, p. 197-198).

General Marshall himself, in his report to the American Secretary of War after the World War, had this to say about the European battles: “It would have been advantageous to attack the Germans in Western Europe or Southern France immediately after the North African campaign, if this could have been carried out with the forces available to General Eisenhower. Except it wasn't” (Marshall, 1945, p. 28).

However, the British political leadership was of a different position. Even before the Casablanca conference, on 25 November 1942, a memorandum was presented, in which the capture of Sicily and the attack on Italy were designated as the main direction of attack (Israeljan, 1974, p. 175). Churchill himself wanted to postpone the Normandy invasion at the Casablanca conference, too. Because he believed that the air attacks would lay the foundation for the opening of the second front, while the Red Army and the Wehrmacht could cause significant losses to each other, which was obviously important to the British in terms of the political situation in Europe after the war. This is evident in Churchill's geopolitical pursuits during World War II.

In terms of military preparation, unlike Minister Lyttleton, Churchill had a completely different opinion. He explained to the Soviet ambassador in London that they were not militarily ready for the operation. In the end, British arguments triumphed in Casablanca, and the priority of the year 1943 became the European air war, in addition to the Mediterranean. Experts and leaders in this field had been studying the question of how to increase the scale of air attacks against the Axis powers for some time. Back on 3 November 1942, Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, Chief of Staff of the British Royal Air Force, analyzed the expected developments of the bomber offensive in a report, and he voiced his opinion that in the event that an Anglo-American bomber force is deployed to the island country, the number of which will reach 4,000 – 6,000 bombers by 1944, then they will be able to reduce the German war potential, and the invasion against the continent can be launched. Marshal Portal believed that 6 million German homes would be destroyed, and the industrial potential of the Germans will be proportionally damaged. Furthermore, in addition to 900,000 German dead and 1 million wounded, Germany will have 25 million citizens homeless. In contrast, the Americans rejected air strikes against territorial targets. Targeted bombing was believed to be more effective. Alexander de Seversky explained this in his 1942 book *Victory thru Air Power*. In his work, he described the need for targeted bombings instead of random attacks, because the morale of the German population was not broken by the air raids. Seversky's opinion significantly influenced the American position that the deliberate slaughter of civilians is unacceptable, but civilian casualties caused during precision attacks are acceptable, or at least can be justifiable (Majszkij, 1975, p. 604-605, Hastings, 1999, p. 288-289, Seversky, 1942, p. 145).

General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the British Imperial General Staff, doubted Marshal Portal and the British Royal Air Force's idea of this "generous" air war against Germany, but Marshal Portal's report was approved by the Chiefs of Staff of the British Armed Forces on 31 December 1942, and submitted to their political leaders. Pursuant to the decision, the role of strategic airstrikes has increased in value. They accepted the assessment of the situation by the American and British air staffs, the essence of which was that the German fighting ability should be weakened to the level at which the invasion could be successful. The leaders of the ground forces, on the other hand, believed that in the case of the Normandy landings on the part of the air force, the most important thing is to achieve strategic air superiority and not the so-called decisive results achieved by bombing. And the timing of the invasion depends on when the political and military decision-makers judge that the time has come to attack (Hastings, 1999, p. 293).

The so-called Casablanca directive adopted at the conference was the CCS 166/1/D decision of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Hastings, 1999, p. 293). This gave orders to British Generals Arthur Harris and American Ira C. Eaker to destroy a certain part of the targets of the Axis Powers (Germany) with their planes for the success of the landing in France. In the instruction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff explained that the main task of the allied air forces was to destroy the German military, industrial and economic system, and to break the morale of the German people.

This directive defined the order of importance of bombing targets as follows:

- 1.) Submarine construction and repair factories, ports of diving nasads;
- 2.) Luftwaffe bases, warehouses and aircraft factories;
- 3.) Ball bearing factories;
- 4.) Oil industry;
- 5.) Synthetic rubber and tire production, as well as
- 6.) Transportation system.

The order of importance of the Casablanca Directive primarily reflected the military needs of the Western Allies, but the priorities could change over time due to the strategic situation and the constantly changing political and military situation (United States Department of State, 1968, p. 781).

The aim was to bomb targets connected to submarines, which were in first place among the targets, to attack German submarine bases between Spain and France in the Sea of Aquitaine, or in other name the Bay of Biscay, day and night, and the German fleet at sea and in ports, for the success of the Battle of the Atlantic. This was important because of supply shipments to Britain, which were closely related to the opening of the second front (United States Department of State, 1968, pp. 781–782).



In the case of the other targets, there was also a more extensive explanation of why they wanted to bomb them. E.g.: the attacks on aircraft factories were connected to the goal that weakening the Luftwaffe was of great importance to the Allies. While the attacks on the ball bearing manufacturing factories were considered important by the strategists because they believed that with a small effort they could cause significant damage to German industry and the war economy, since no technical equipment (eg. tanks, airplanes, diesel engines, etc.) can be made without bearings. There were similar reasons for the other targets (United States Department of State, 1968, p. 782, Hastings, 1999, p. 293–294, Joint History Office, 1943, p. 10).

In the period after the Casablanca Conference, the American General Henry H. Arnold tried to promote the joint control of the American and British air forces due to the complexity of the operations in his 22 April 1943, letter to Air Marshal Charles Portal. This the addressee – whom in Casablanca was vested with the decision-making authority of the Joint Committee of the Chiefs of Staff regarding the CBO plan regarding its implementation and the leaders of the RAF (Royal Air Force) also opposed it, so this proposal was finally rejected. In other words, rather the Americans could not get their will against the British in this regard during the war. Therefore, the leaders of the American and British air forces were more concerned with the war plan of the air war. The principles formulated in the Casablanca directive were broken down into orders that can be implemented in practice by an operations committee tasked with developing the actual war plans., under the leadership of Lieutenant General Eaker. The resulting war plan was the “Plan for Combined Bomber Offensive from the United Kingdom,” i.e. the CBO plan, which was completed under number C.C.S. 217, dated 14 May 1943, and submitted to the Joint Committee of the Chiefs of Staff the next day. On 15-25 May 1943, the Allies discussed this plan at the conference codenamed Trident in Washington (May 15, 18 and 21, 1943). The plan was to increase the number of aircrafts of the US 8th Air Force stationed in Great Britain in four stages between 30 June 1943 and 31 March 1944 (Joint History Office, 1943, p. 5, 285, 363, 387) :

- June 30, 1943: 944 heavy and 200 medium bombers;
- September 30, 1943: 1,192 heavy and 400 medium bombers;
- December 31, 1943: 1,746 heavy and 600 medium bombers, and
- 31 March 1944: 2,702 heavy and 800 medium bombers (Joint History Office, 1943, p. 7, 23, Hastings, 1999, p. 294).

Lieutenant General Ira Eaker thought that the American 8th Air Force and the British Bomber Command, which were to be strengthened in this way, would be able to inflict significant damage on the Germans.

In the CBO plan, as in Casablanca, the attack targets were re-ranked, and gave the following guidance:

1.) Intermediate or temporary goals:

- German fighter air force (Luftwaffe).

2.) Primary targets:

- German submarine-building factories.
- Remnants of the German aerospace industry.
- Ball bearing factories.
- Oil targets (including Ploiești).

3.) Secondary targets:

- Synthetic rubber and tire production.
- Vehicles of transport/military transport (Joint History Office, 1943, p. 23).

In the plan, the expectations regarding the extent to which the targets must be destroyed were also formulated for each target group. In this way, an alternative order of the bombing targets can be read out, too.

Under the CBO plan, Allied air forces should have reduced submarine production by 89%, 76% for ball bearings, 65% for bombers, 50% for synthetic rubber, and 43% for fighter aircraft production. While regarding the oil targets, it was determined that in the event that the petroleum refineries around Ploiești, which produced 35% of the Axis Powers' oil product needs, and the synthetic fuel factories, which covered 13% of the needs, were to be destroyed, it will have disastrous consequences for the Axis powers. According to Lieutenant General Eaker, their estimates were conservative for the extent of the destruction. This was accepted by Air Marshal Portal and General Harris, at most it was disputed that with the bombs they dropped, they would be able to destroy the German submarine bases on the French coast – especially the bunkers of the submarines (Hastings, 1999, p. 294-295., Joint History Office, 1943, p. 11).

The CBO plan also dealt with the integration of Bomber Command and the 8th Air Force. Thus, it was explained in the document that the British should strike at area targets at night, while the Americans were obliged to carry out precision bombing during the day (Joint History Office, 1943, p. 14).

The CBO plan was discussed by the Chiefs of Staff at the Trident conference during the meetings on 15 and 18 May but was also reviewed on 21 May. In addition to Roosevelt and Churchill, several American and British military leaders also participated in these negotiations, including Admiral William D. Leahy, General George C. Marshall, Admiral Ernest J. King and Lieutenant General Joseph T. McNarney from the American side, while from the British side: Admiral Sir John Dill, General Sir Alan F. Brooke, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, Sir Charles Air Marshal F. A. Portal and Lieutenant General Sir Hastings L. Ismay. Finally, on 10 June 1943, it was officially issued to



determine the course of the air war until D-Day, or the landings (Joint History Office, 1943, p. 285, 363, 387).

The leaders of the ground armies considered the air raids to be a supplementary operation at best, and among the leaders of the American and British air forces, Generals Spaatz and Harris believed to be sacred that the Germans would bring them to their knees until the invasion of the continent. In fact, the importance of the Casablanca Directive, the CBO Plan and its first phase, the Pointblank Plan, was that both the US Air Force and the British Royal Air Force obtained the financial resources needed to continue their operations based on the needs of the bombing offensive. The war plans did not exclude precision air attacks by the Americans and carpet bombing by the British against German cities, that is, attacks on moral stamina. General Arthur Harris, commander of Bomber Command, well before Casablanca, that is, even before the air attack on Cologne on 31 May 1942, he believed that the essence of the bombing offensive was the systematic destruction of German cities. While negotiations between the Anglo-Saxons on military and political issues were taking place in Casablanca and then in Washington, meanwhile, preparations were underway for the 1943 campaigns to exclude Italy from the war (Hastings, 1999, p. 298–299, Piekałkiewicz, 2007. p. 386).

The Expulsion of the Axis Powers from Africa and the Elimination of Italy from the War

The most important task of the year 1943 – in the period between the Casablanca conference and the meeting in Washington – first became the cleansing of North Africa from the forces of the Axis powers, and then, after the conference codenamed Trident, the preparation and implementation of the landing in Sicily.

After Casablanca, certain transformations were made in the military leadership of the Allies. Accordingly, Air Marshal Arthur Tedder was appointed as the head of the Mediterranean Air Command (MAC), and Lieutenant General Carl Spaatz as his deputy. The American II corps commander for a time became Major General Patton, then, from 15 April Major General Omar N. Bradley took over the task from his predecessor, who had been reinstated to the command of the 7th Army (Eisenhower, 1982, p. 149–150).

After the success of Operation Torch, and the Battle of El Alamein, American and British troops advanced in the direction of Tunisia. The Germans surrendered Tripoli on 23 January 1943, and finally, on 1 February 1943, the Afrika Korps retreated to the Mareth Line built by the French in 1939 and here they settled for protection. In the fact that Field Marshal Rommel – in agreement with the German military command – withdrew his troops to Tunisia, it also played a role, the fact that they realized the military realities and that it is easier to organize the evacuation of troops to Italy from the Tunisian bridgehead also played a role, as, for example, from Libya (Ferwagner, 2008, p. 77). At the same time, they did not give up striking a blow at the American

troops advancing from the west. In the meantime, significant supplies arrived in Tunisia from Europe, and the German 5th Panzer Army was set up under the command of General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim.

While General Montgomery was in Tripoli, Field Marshal Rommel and General Arnim decided to try to take advantage of the inexperience of the American military forces and strike at them in Tunisia. Field Marshal Rommel thought they should attack towards the supply base at Tebessa, Algeria, while General Arnim wanted to attack further north. Due to the rivalry between the two military leaders, they divided the African forces of the Axis powers and they so launched the offensive towards the west. On 14 February, General Arnim won against the troops of the II American Corps and advanced to Sbeitla on the 17th. In the meantime, Field Marshal Rommel left the Mareth Line and marched through Feriana towards the Kasserine Pass, then with the forces of the Afrika Korps and the 10th Panzer Division, he broke through the defense line of the American troops at Kasserine, opening the way to Constantine in central Tunisia (here was the headquarters of General Eisenhower). At that time, the German high command appointed Field Marshal Rommel to head the military forces of the Axis powers in Tunisia, and then the “Desert Fox” advanced with his troops in the direction of Tebessa. At this critical moment for the Allies, General Alexander stabilized the situation by deploying more British divisions. In the meantime, the British 8th Army led by Lieutenant General Montgomery reached the Mareth Line, so the British and American forces received significant reinforcements. On 22 February 1943, the German advance stalled. On 25 February, General Arnim's troops were defeated at Béja, and then on 6 March, near Medenine, Field Marshal Rommel's troops were defeated by General Montgomery's 8th Army. A few days later, on Hitler's order, Erwin Rommel left the battlefield, and General Arnim took the command of the German troops in Africa on 9 March 1943, while the Italian Lieutenant General Giovanni Messe became the commander-in-chief of the military formations of the Axis powers (Karsai, 1981, p. 367–368, Ferwagner, 2008, 78).

By this time, however, the situation of the German and Italian units stationed in North Africa was sealed. Led by Lieutenant General Patton, the American II Corps launched an offensive at Feriana on 19 March and almost surrounded the Germans defending at the Mareth Line. The defense line was breached by General Montgomery's 8th Army after 20 March, then everything came under their control on the 28th, and the British troops led by General Montgomery reached el-Hamma within days, too. Fortunately for the Axis powers, the Allied attack progressed slowly, so they did not achieve complete success, so the German-Italian units led by the Italian Marshal Messe were able to retreat and could build new defensive positions in the Wadi Akarit area. At the same time, after 20 March, in the area of the Mareth Line, General Montgomery's troops managed to establish contact with Lieutenant General Patton's II Corps, thus the front lines of the Allies were united (Eisenhower, 1982, p. 150). After the subsequent American and British offensive at the beginning of April, the military formations of the



Axis powers were forced to retreat to the town of Enfidaville, where the 8th British Army shortly carried out a diversionary operation in preparation for the attack on Tunis. The British 1st Army attacked the central part of the defense, while the American II corps launched an attack in the north, and soon they reached the military port of Bizerte. At that time, General Arnim still tried to stop the British advance, which caused General Alexander to suspend the siege of Enfidaville and strengthen the central section of the front line. “In the conviction, therefore, that the enemy would in any event keep strong forces in front of the Eighth Army, General Alexander quickly and secretly brought around from that flank several of the Eighth Army’s best divisions and attached them to the British First Army. These arrangements were completed in time to begin the final assault on 5 May. The results were speedily decisive. On the left the American II Corps, with some detachments of French “Goumiers”, advanced magnificently through tough going and captured Bizerte on the seventh. Just to the southward the British First Army, under General Anderson, carrying out the main effort, was in Tunis at approximately the same time that the II Corps reached Bizerte.” (Eisenhower, 1948, p. 171). Then on May 12, Tunisia, thus North Africa, came under American and British control.

Marshal Messe, the “nominal” commander-in-chief of the military formations of the Axis powers, capitulated to the 8th Army on 13 May on behalf of the Italian troops, while General Arnim, who was captured by Indian soldiers at the St. Marie du Zit airport on 12 May did the same on behalf of the German forces. Thus, there was no longer any obstacle for General Alexander to make report on the victory of the Anglo-Saxons in Tunisia and the successful completion of the campaign. In the last week of the offensive, the Allies took 240,000 prisoners of war, of which 125,000 were German soldiers (Montgomery, 1981, p. 178, Karsai, 1981, p. 369, Eisenhower, 1982, p. 155–156).

“The Tunisian victory was hailed with delight throughout the Allied Nations. It clearly signified to friend and foe alike that the Allies were at last upon the march. The Germans, who had suffered during the previous winter also the great defeat of Stalingrad and had been forced to abandon their other offensives on the Russian front in favour of a desperate defence, were compelled after Tunisia to think only of the protection of conquests rather than of their enlargement. Within the African theatre one of the greatest products of the victory was the progress achieved in the welding of Allied unity and the establishment of a command team that was already showing the effects of a growing confidence and trust among all its members” (Eisenhower, 1948, p. 174).

The Allied victory in North Africa created an opportunity for the Anglo-Saxons to implement the campaign against Sicily, which caused a dispute between the Americans and the British in Casablanca, the planning of which had already begun in February 1943 in a special group under the command of General Alexander. This process accelerated after the conquest of North Africa. The attack on Sicily began at dawn on 9/10 July following air force bombardment and fleet snare fire. At that time, the British, American and Canadian units began to land in the designated places. In the days after the start of the operation, Churchill and Roosevelt first sent a radio message to the

Italians from Algiers, then on July 19 Prime Minister Benito Mussolini and Hitler met in Feltre. The Führer – knowing that Mussolini's position was shaky and the Italians would withdraw from the war – asked the Duce for a further war effort, who was unable to indicate that his country was exhausted and unable to continue the war. The bombing of Rome further worsened Mussolini's situation. On 25 July at the request of the Fascist Grand Council, Mussolini was deposed by King Victor Emanuel III and he was replaced by Marshal Pietro Badoglio. The fact that the Italians suffered serious defeats also on the eastern battlefield and in North Africa played a major role in the downfall of the Duce, and several influential figures believed that Hitler only wanted to defend the Reich on Italian land. The new Italian goal became the armistice (Kaiser, 1999, p. 84, Churchill, 1989, p. 237–238, Keegan, 2003, p. 593).

In Sicily, the Germans fought until August 11, and then began the evacuation. The rapid deterioration of the situation of the Italian and German formations was indicated by the fact that on 14 August the Badoglio government, due to the Anglo-Saxon bombings, unilaterally declared Rome an open city. The campaign ended with the capture of Messina on 17 August 1943, General Harold Alexander reported to Churchill that the Allies had captured Sicily in 38 days. He wrote about the opposing forces that 13 Italian-German divisions with 315,000 Italian and 90,000 German soldiers fought against 13 allied divisions. Regarding the Italian forces, he noted that they may have been destroyed, while the Germans were pushed out of the island on the morning of 17 August (Churchill, 1989, p. 235).

The Italians were concerned with the possibility of exiting the war from the time of the Sicilian landing. After the substitution of Mussolini, the Badoglio government contacted the Allies and their representative met with the Anglo-Saxon assigns on 5 August. The conclusion of the armistice was delayed due to the unconditional surrender, but after the Anglo-Saxon ultimatum of August 31, the Italians finally accepted the terms, and the armistice was signed at Cassibile on 3 September, which was announced on 8 September after lengthy complications (Keegan, 2003, pp. 593–594).

Summary

As can be seen, the Anglo-Saxons pushed the German and Italian formations out of Africa during the period from 8 November 1942 to 12 May 1943. With this, they created the opportunity to attack Italy and achieve Italian capitulation with the fall of Hitler's most important European ally. Although only partially successful, this created the possibility for the Anglo-Saxons to occupy southern Italy, and thus be able to bomb Southern Germany and Central Europe with the deployment of the American 15th Air Force, created by Brigadier General James H. Doolittle, and the 205th Bomber Group of the British Royal Air Force, which previously fought in Africa.



In other words, the goals formulated in Casablanca were partially completed. From the point of view of the Axis Powers, it was definitively decided that they would no longer have a chance to win the Second World War on any battlefield.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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