“AN UNWORKABLE POLICY WHICH ENCOURAGES THE ENEMY TO FIGHT TO THE LAST GASP”

Depiction in British and American newspapers of the Allied policy of unconditional surrender for Germany, 1943-1945

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*Part of a project to present case studies of newspaper treatment of significant political controversy during the Second World War, this example considers reporting and analysis of the western allies’ insistence that Germany must surrender unconditionally. Political and military critics attributed to the policy of unconditional surrender the power to prolong German resistance and increase the death toll among servicemen and civilians. German opponents of Hitler believed it undermined their cause. Recent scholarship has explored connections between the demand for Germany’s complete capitulation and the origins of the Cold War. This paper examines a structured sample of newspaper coverage of the policy in Britain and the United States. It describes the controversies that surround it and discerns through qualitative content analysis the extent to which newspapers placed them in the public sphere.*

KEYWORDS Casablanca Conference; *Chicago Daily Tribune*; *Manchester Guardian*; *The Economist*; *The New York Times*; *The Times*; unconditional surrender

**Introduction**

In his letter published in *The Times* on Monday, June 12, 1944, J. Juxon Stevens of Bridge Boathouse, Eton, wrote:

There is a German saying, “*Besser ein Ende mit Schrecken, als Schrecken ohne Ende*”, literally, “Better an end with terrors, than terrors without end”. For Germans, unconditional surrender can only mean “terrors without end”, to which they must naturally prefer desperate resistance even though it cannot prevent the “end with terrors” of ultimate disastrous defeat. This is going to make the job of our troops that much harder and our victory that much more costly.

The surrender terms to which Mr Stevens alluded were those on which the Second World War in Europe would end, after resistance of the type he foresaw. They were agreed at Casablanca in January 1943 by President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States of America and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain. Churchill and Roosevelt had previously agreed broad principles for the organisation of post-war civilisation in the Atlantic Charter (UN, n.d.) of August 1941, but until Casablanca, Allied war aims remained unspecific. Britain had fought on after the fall of France according to the noble but limited objective defined in Churchill’s speech to the House of Commons on June 4, 1940: “[W]e shall never surrender.” The USSR was compelled to join the anti-Nazi cause following the German invasion of her territory on June 22, 1941. Beyond urgent liberation of the motherland, the principal Soviet war aim was to advance the cause of Marxism. America entered the fighting last, in response to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. A joint session of Congress declared war on Japan on December 8 pledging only to “bring the conflict to a successful termination”. Congress employed the same limited phrase in its declaration of war on Germany on December 11, 1941. Imprecision was initially useful in facilitating partnership between Allies with such different motives. When the tide of war turned, however, vagueness threatened to provoke distrust, to which Stalin in particular was uniquely prone. It became apparent that Allied unity demanded a promise that neither Britain nor America would agree a compromise peace with a non-Nazi German government.

Recent scholarship has scrutinised connections between the Allies’ demand for Germany’s complete political and military capitulation and the origins of the Cold War. It has considered the extent to which the unconditional surrender formula was exploited by the Nazis to fortify and prolong German resistance and it has examined the origins of the policy (Fest 1997; Kershaw 2012; Ramsden 2011; Reynolds 2006). The principal purpose of this article is to examine a structured sample of newspaper coverage of unconditional surrender in Britain and the United States. Having first identified relevant controversies surrounding the policy, it seeks to discern through qualitative content analysis the extent to which newspapers placed them in the public sphere.

**The Casablanca Conference**

President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill agreed the policy of unconditional surrender for the Axis powers at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. Speaking to correspondents at a joint press conference on January 24, the President explained that he had named the new policy in honour of tactics employed by General Ulysses S. Grant, Commander of the Union Army, to arrange the surrender of Robert E. Lee, Commander of the defeated Confederate forces, in the American Civil War (1861-1865). The *Daily Mail* (1944) would record that:

[O]ne of Roosevelt’s favourite stories is that, when Confederate General Robert E. Lee pleaded with General Grant at the end of the war between the States that the Southerners might retain their horses and sidearms, Grant replied brusquely: “The terms are unconditional surrender.” Then, when Lee agreed, Grant said: “Now, Bob, about those horses and sidearms…”

Outlining the achievements of the Casablanca Conference in a statement to the House of Commons on February 11, 1943, Churchill explained that he might extend the modest element of humanity implied in Roosevelt’s Civil War story. He said: “[O]ur inflexible insistence upon unconditional surrender does not mean that we shall stain our victorious arms by wrong and cruel treatment of whole populations” (Hansard 1943).

**Relevant Controversies**

Winter (2006) argues that support for unconditional surrender made the British Government reluctant to consider evidence that an anti-Hitler resistance existed in Germany. Faith in the capacity of German military officers to depose their Fuhrer was tainted by association with the Conservative arch-appeasers, Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax. Winston Churchill had made plain his opposition to partnership with German dissidents in September 1941 when he told Anthony Eden:

[W]e should not depart from our policy of absolute silence. Nothing would be more disturbing to our friends in the United States or more dangerous with our new ally, Russia, than the suggestion that we are entertaining such ideas. I am absolutely opposed to the slightest contact (Lamb 1991, 287).

Labour leaders in the coalition also doubted that real anti-Nazis existed in Germany; Arthur Greenwood, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, declared in December 1942 that Germany was: “a nation where everybody under middle age has got the mark of the swastika on him” (as quoted in Tombs 1996). Such attitudes persuaded British intelligence services not to draw attention to German anti-Nazi groups or to make contact with their representatives. Fest notes that: “The Allies did not even trouble themselves to reject the various attempts to contact them; they simply closed their eyes to the German resistance, acting as if it did not exist” (1997, 209). So intense was British scepticism that when the July Plot of 19441 narrowly failed to kill Hitler, Whitehall was slow to ascertain the identities of the plotters and the extent of any support for their planned putsch.

British Quakers identified flaws. At their Friends’ Yearly Meeting in 1943 they declared that unconditional surrender would make Germans fight harder and might leave large parts of Europe under Russian control (Rempel 1978).Their criticisms anticipated those made during the Cold War by several American historians who blamed unconditional surrender for contributing to the division of Europe. Hanson Baldwin (1950, 14-25) considered it one of the great mistakes of the war. For O’Connor it “contributed significantly to the onset of the Cold War” (as quoted in Divine 1972). Chase (1955) considers its main purpose to have been “to impose a damper on premature discussion of the post-war settlement”. Wilt (1991) notes that: “although it did not allay Allied suspicions of one another, it did lessen them to some extent”. It achieved this only by postponing discussion of the post-war territorial settlement and the form of government appropriate for a defeated Germany. Later, when these costs became apparent, Churchill tried to pass it off as an American policy imposed on Britain without prior debate, claiming that he had not heard the term “unconditional surrender” until Roosevelt used it at the Casablanca press conference (Chase 1955, 259). He later confirmed that he had in fact discussed it with the President over lunch in Casablanca and with colleagues in the War Cabinet via a report sent from Casablanca on January 20 (Churchill 1950, 684). Ramsden (2011) observes that Churchill and Roosevelt appear to have had different understandings of what “unconditional surrender” meant. He notes that the British leader’s flexible interpretation of the phrase was revealed when Italy was permitted a surrender that was plainly not unconditional.

These debates were preceded by the other one identified by the Quakers and which remains controversial today: by eliding any distinction between Nazis and Germans who were not Nazis, did the unconditional surrender formula prolong the fighting by strengthening German resolve and unity? Did it, contrary to Churchill’s professed hope, persuade anti-Nazi Germans that their fate following an Allied victory would be no less miserable than their plight under Hitler and possibly worse? Reynolds (2006) notes that a version of unconditional surrender had begun to emerge in Whitehall late in 1942 as it became increasingly plain that a non-Nazi German government was not going to emerge. Compelling evidence of German atrocities was beginning to reach London and the British Government’s appetite for negotiating with “alternative Germans” diminished accordingly (Reynolds 2006, 115-116). However, despite the unacceptability of compromise at home and in relations with Allies, the propaganda value of unconditional surrender to the Nazis was plain to British leaders.

**Joint Intelligence Committee and Chiefs of Staff**

The War Cabinet received from the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (JIC) a report on the effects of unconditional surrender in Germany on January 7, 1944. It noted that: “[T]he formula of ‘unconditional surrender’, as interpreted by Nazi propaganda in default of any explanation by the United Nations, is having a big effect in making the Germans afraid of the consequences of defeat to themselves individually and collectively.” Whilst acknowledging that few Germans remained optimistic about the prospects for German victory, it observed that the Nazi propaganda machine was working at maximum effort to persuade the civilian population that “unconditional surrender means that they can expect no mercy from the United Nations; that Germany, to the accompaniment of all sorts of horrors, will disappear as a nation, and that the German people as a whole will be held collectively responsible with their leaders for all crimes perpetrated. In other words, the Germans are being told that they and their leaders must stand together or else both will face utter ruin.” The JIC concluded: “[F]ear of the consequences of defeat enhanced by the lack of any Allied explanation to counter Nazi interpretations of what is meant by ‘unconditional surrender’, is one of the main influences that makes the German armed forces and civilians feel that, even though there is now little hope of victory, it is still worth continuing the war” (PRO 1944a).

A subsequent report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee to the War Cabinet was circulated to a strictly limited list of 35 recipients on February 5, 1944. It noted that President Roosevelt had tried to soften the impact of the policy by announcing on December 24, 1943 that the Allies had no plans to enslave the German people and that they would allow Germans to develop in peace as useful and respectable members of the European family. However, Britain’s most senior wartime military leaders observed that: “The formula of unconditional surrender is being used by Nazi propaganda to convince the Germans that the loss of war would be infinitely worse than their present sufferings.” Describing it as “one of the props supporting the German will to resist”, the Joint Chiefs proposed a Draft Declaration that they wished Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin to issue. This appeared as an annex to their report. It is reproduced below:

Draft Declaration

1: Germany shall be deprived of the fruits of her greed and aggression and held responsible for all the loss and damage caused by the war.

2: German war criminals shall be handed over to punishment but there will be no mass reprisals against the German people.

3: Steps will be taken to ensure that German aggression cannot be renewed and that the Nazi Party system and Prussian domination and militarism are extirpated.

4: We shall assist in building up a new Germany based on the rule of law and truth and it will be our desire to maintain the livelihood of the people. We wish them to have a normal chance to develop in peace as useful and respectable members of the European family (PRO 1944b).

Ramsden (2011) argues that unconditional surrender “gave to Hitler and Goebbels a wonderful argument with which to persuade Germans to continue with ‘total war’, because nothing less than the complete prostration of their country could bring it to an end”. He notes that it denied British propagandists any bait with which to tempt anti-Nazi Germans and compounded the consequences of Churchill’s instructions to the BBC that it should not suggest in its broadcasts that anti-Nazi Germans might be treated as friends by the Allies.

**The Newspapers**

This essay concentrates on the treatment of the Allied policy of unconditional surrender in a sample of five influential British and American newspapers between January 1943 and the end of the war in Europe. At a time when such newspapers were widely used as sources of news, comment and analysis, it identifies which discussions about the policy they placed in the public sphere and identifies arguments through which politically engaged citizens were equipped to debate its value. My findings derive principally from analysis of quality newspapers that published a broad range of foreign news: from Britain, *The Economist*, *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*;and from America, *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune.* These titles represent both the major Allied democracies, different places and political perspectives.

*The Economist* referred to itself as a newspaperbut it appeared weekly and might reasonably be described as a magazine. I include it in this study because it paid close attention to the topic under discussion and was read by opinion-formers in Britain and the United States. *The Times,* though chastened by editorial errors that had made the era of appeasement among the darkest in its history (see *inter alia*, Cockett 1989, 187-188), remained influential as the voice of part of the British political establishment. The *Manchester Guardian* was a provincial, liberal title with a presence in London and a growing reputation for excellence in its coverage of politics and foreign affairs. *The New York Times*, a liberal title famed for its coverage of world affairs, was considered the most influential newspaper in the United States by Americans and Britons alike. It was read by the American political and administrative elite, its journalism was syndicated to hundreds of local and regional titles and it informed the views of many radio commentators on politics and foreign affairs. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* shared its New York counterpart’s commitment to foreign reporting but it supported the Republican Party and nationalism and had a history of promoting isolationism.

During the Second World War, newspapers played a significant role in shaping public opinion. Their reach had expanded dramatically since the late nineteenth century and, though circulation growth was propelled by sensationalism and scandal, intelligent coverage of foreign affairs and politics remained prominent in broadsheet titles. Sales of British daily newspapers increased substantially during the Second World War (ABC Net Sales 1939-48). American newspapers also thrived in wartime. Did these organs of opinion encourage debate regarding the issue and consequences of unconditional surrender? Did they understand that it was a policy adopted in large part to dilute Soviet pressure for a second front and, crucially, to postpone discussion about the post-war government and borders of Germany? Even when repeated attempts were made by political and military leaders to mitigate and interpret it so as to lessen its propaganda value to the Nazi Regime, did they realise how controversial it was in London and Washington DC?

**Reporting the Casablanca Conference**

Coverage of the Casablanca Conference was meticulously stage-managed. Days before journalists had any inkling that President and Prime Minister were in North Africa, US State Department briefings sought to stimulate excitement about a forthcoming announcement. American radio stations encouraged their listeners to tune in “for an important news broadcast from this station at 10pm Eastern War Time tomorrow night”. Meanwhile, correspondents strewn across the front lines in North Africa were summoned to Casablanca. It was a dangerous journey. Alan Moorehead of Britain’s mass circulation *Daily Express* flew from Tunisia in an aircraft that was machine gunned while overflying Spanish Morocco. Moorehead survived but his travelling companion Edward Baudry, a Canadian broadcaster, was killed (*Daily Express* 1943). On arrival, the correspondents faced elaborate security measures to ensure that they could not alert the Axis powers to the presence in Morocco of the US President and British Prime Minister. Following their briefing by the great men, journalists were taken to a secure hotel in which typewriters had been installed to allow them to write their reports. These were flown to London in a sealed bag and held for forty-eight hours while Churchill and Roosevelt returned home. The correspondents were sworn to secrecy and put on aircraft that returned them to the front lines.

Despite these precautions, awareness of flaws in the doctrine of unconditional surrender was instantly alive in the press. Thus, on January 29, 1943, *The Times* linked unconditional surrender with Reich Propaganda Minister Goebbels’ efforts to prime Germans for the “grimmest stage” of the war by demanding “a preparedness which cannot be surpassed by anything” (1943a). But *The Times* supported the policy; in his analysis of January 27, its diplomatic correspondent depicted it as a useful antidote to Nazi propaganda. Explaining that Hitler justified the war to the German people as a necessary struggle against Communism, he wrote: “The message of Casablanca…breaks in upon the blatant anti-Bolshevist propaganda, and gives warning to the German people that the military strain which they are already feeling is going to be increased soon both on the eastern front and elsewhere” (1943b). The irony is rich; until 1941 *The Times*’ own anti-Bolshevism had been almost as blatant. Now, the newspaper had the zeal of a convert.

From its perspective on the left of British parliamentary politics, the *Daily Mirror* was equally supportive of Government policy but a little less reluctant to recognise the constraints imposed by alliance with the USSR. Its early stance was plainly stated in May 1943 in a column entitled “Teaching ‘Em”. The author, “B.B.B.”, dealt with the publication by peers calling themselves the Post-War Policy Group of proposals for the treatment of Germany when the fighting ended. Their ideas were “too detailed and didactic”, and the *Mirror* was adamant:

It will not rest with this country to say what shall happen in enemy territory. There are several nations with a finger in that pie, and the biggest finger is that of Russia. It would therefore seem to be a waste of time for British politicians to work out detailed schemes for the reformation of the German people. The armistice terms have already been settled. They are *unconditional surrender.* After that a council of the Allies will have to meet and thrash out conditions for the occupation of enemy territory (*Daily Mirror* 1943).

***The New York Times***

*The* *New York Times* reported the Casablanca agreement in a single column on its front page on January 27 (1943a). The following morning it reported approval of the policy among women members of the House of Representatives (1943b). Four days later a first hint appeared that the policy might be subject to interpretation; columnist Harold Callender speculated that Nazis might continue to hope that the Allies could be persuaded to treat the Reich as “a barrier against the bolshevization of Europe” (1943c). Real criticism was first reported in June in comments made by the Reverend Ralph W. Sockman, Pastor of Christ Church Methodist, Park Avenue. Reverend Sockman told parishioners, “The call for ‘unconditional surrender’ should be supplemented, aye, prefaced with a statement of what our Government stands for in the way of international justice and order” (1943d). Awareness that the policy might cause military disadvantage emerged in response to the July Plot. Noting that the revolt against Hitler had won negligible support among German civilians, London correspondent, Raymond Daniell, reported that: “This has raised the question in some influential quarters here as to whether Allied policy and propaganda are not to some degree responsible” (1944). Such doubts were given political voice in the United States in January 1945 when Senator Wheeler of Montana demanded that the Allies abandon, “the brutal and costly slogan of unconditional surrender”. The Montanan’s criticism inspired instant condemnation by Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, who accused him of encouraging the enemy to hold out for a negotiated peace. Stettinius noted that Wheeler had reinforced his comments with arguments made by *The Economist* (*The New York Times* 1945).

***The Economist***

*The Economist* expressed doubts immediately after Casablanca and began to challenge the policy directly early in 1944. On February 26 it opined that: “It [unconditional surrender] leaves a great vacuum into which Goebbels will pour unimagined horrors to stimulate German resistance”, and argued for a “clear statement” of the terms upon which Germany would be allowed to surrender (1944a). On July 22, in an edition sent to press before news of the July Plot could be included, *The Economist* drew attention to questions asked in the House of Commons on July 18. Rhys Davies (1877-1954), the pacifist Labour MP for Westhoughton in Lancashire, asked the Prime Minister whether the Government had made any plans to deal with a workers’ revolution in Germany that might overthrow Hitler and establish a Communist regime. Richard Stokes (1897-1957), Labour, Ipswich, chairman of the Parliamentary Peace Aims Group which sought a negotiated peace with Hitler, asked whether the Allies had agreed at Teheran to detach East Prussia from Germany. From the dusty answers given *The* *Economist* concluded that unconditional surrender meant that: “The British people may be committed to peace terms which none of their representatives have had any opportunity of discussing” (1944b). Once in possession of the facts about the July Plot, *The Economist* displayed the radical bite with which its editor, Geoffrey Crowther, liked to be associated. The assassination attempt proved that there were two Germanys:

The distinction is not between a good Germany and a bad. Neither are [sic] good. The distinction has nothing to do with morals or principles; it is a simple one – between some Germans who want peace and some who do not; and some of the Germans who do are apparently ready to take steps against those who do not.

The Allies should give these “would-be peacemakers” some idea of the terms upon which a German surrender would be accepted. Until they did so: “We are making it incredibly difficult for anyone in Germany to think of surrender.” Unconditional surrender “does not add up to a policy” it warned, “some political weapons should be placed in the hands of any Germans who will rebel against Hitler” (*The Economist* 1944c).

Throughout autumn 1944 *The Economist* contrasted unconditional surrender as it applied to Germany with less rigid versions agreed with former German satellites including Romania and Finland. It returned to blunt criticism on November 4, when it raised for the first time the possibility that the policy enunciated at Casablanca might have prolonged the war. Commenting on the Prime Minister’s explanation in the House of Commons the previous week that unconditional surrender actually meant “no bargaining with the enemy”, the newspaper argued:

If this could have been said when the “unconditional surrender” slogan was first put forward at the Casablanca Conference, much quite needless argument and disunity would have been avoided and the war might well have been shortened. Unconditional surrender, if it is to be taken literally (and no other interpretation was encouraged), is obvious nonsense. It is an unworkable policy which encourages the enemy to fight to the last gasp, and it provides opportunities which Goebbels has certainly used to the full…The mischievous phrase of “unconditional surrender” - now admitted to be misleading – has been a barrier to sound policy. It should be buried (1944d).

And *The Economist* sustained its vitriol. On February 10, 1945, in an article examining Germany’s depleted economy and its desperate efforts to stem the Red Army’s advance, it concluded: “So far, the Allies’ policy of unconditional surrender appears to have resulted in an ‘Unconditional Defence’” (1945).

**The *Chicago Daily Tribune***

An editorial in January 1945 set out this Illinois title’s position. Unconditional surrender was “an inglorious phrase”, the only return upon which had been “the loss of thousands of American lives”. By grandstanding at Casablanca, Churchill and Roosevelt had misjudged “all the cards of psychological warfare” (1945c). It did not wait until American soldiers experienced reverses in the Ardennes to denounce the policy. It began to advertise its doubts in the summer of 1943, first by noting that *Northwestern Reviewing Stand*, a radio current affairs programme broadcast by Chicago’s Northwestern University, would discuss: “What is the Meaning of Unconditional Surrender” (1943a). Shortly afterwards it observed that Stalin had “never given the slightest nod of approval to the Allied demand for unconditional surrender” (1943b). Early criticism frequently involved reporting speeches by the policy’s political opponents. Thus, in September 1943, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* recorded Senator Burton K. Wheeler’s request that President Roosevelt “define unconditional surrender” for the people of the Axis nations (1943c). Five months later it noted that newspapers were receiving many letters from individuals and organisations “all with the same plea of tossing the ‘unconditional surrender’ ukase of Roosevelt out the window and calling for an armistice now and a negotiated peace” (1944a). The language is revealing: a “ukase” is an order or proclamation by an absolute or arbitrary authority.

A letter published in a British local newspaper, the *Maidenhead Advertiser*, offered a fresh opportunity to find fault. Written by Captain William Douglas-Home, younger son of the 13th Earl of Home, an officer in the Royal Armoured Corps, it explained its author’s request during the battle for Boulogne for permission to negotiate the surrender of German troops under a flag of truce. Douglas-Home had fought three wartime parliamentary by-elections on a platform of opposition to unconditional surrender, winning 21% of the vote in Glasgow Cathcart in April 1942 and 42% in Windsor in June 1942 before losing his deposit at Clay Cross in April 1944 (Craig 1983, 587). He was court-marshalled, cashiered and sentenced to a year’s hard labour for refusing to obey orders at Boulogne (Benedick 1992), but this did not deter the *Chicago Daily Tribune* which noted that he had tried to resign his commission “because he objects to the United Nations’ unconditional surrender policy”. It reported Douglas-Home’s complaint that Allied soldiers were being asked to “die for the negative ideals of two very tired old men”, and his attack on “what I regard as a false reading of international politics by statesmen playing the old game of power politics” (1944b). The *Chicago Daily Tribune* would advance similar arguments in October 1944 in an editorial entitled “Terms to Germany?” Ostensibly a reflection on opinions voiced by Senator Edwin C. Johnson (Democrat, Colorado), this column attributed to the Senator the case that “because we have refused to tell the Germans what we mean to do to them after they lay down their arms, the Germans cannot but believe Hitler’s story that the Allies intend to dismember Germany, enslave millions of Germans and execute vast numbers in addition”. It concluded, tartly: “Perhaps the reason that terms have not been given to Germany is the inability of Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin to agree on a formula. Mr Roosevelt boasts of his intimate understanding of his colleagues’ thinking and of his skill in negotiation, but he hasn’t brought them to agreement on the objects to be gained by Germany’s surrender” (1944c). The contrast with British treatment of Douglas-Home is stark. In its coverage of the Clay Cross by-election, *The Times* (1944c) had not mentioned his support for unconditional surrender, describing him as a “candidate in search of a label”. His court martial received still more cursory coverage. *The Times* (1944g) published a single paragraph report that he had “been court-martialled in Belgium on a charge of ‘not obeying a lawful command’ under Section 9 of the Army Act”.

If the conduct of one British aristocrat offered excellent ammunition for the *Tribune’s* campaign for explicit surrender terms, a swelling wave of criticism by American politicians offered plenty more. In October 1944 the newspaper relayed to its readers a speech to Republican Party activists by Alfred M. Landon, the former governor of Kansas. Landon told his audience that unconditional surrender was “costing the lives of untold numbers of American soldiers” (1944d). Here was a clear case of editorial opinion expressed through news reporting; the *Daily Tribune* was warming to its theme. In January 1945 it gave similar prominence to a speech by Congresswoman Jessie Sumner (Republican, Illinois) who told the House of Representatives that “the unconditional surrender terms are goading the Nazis to the stiffest possible resistance” (1945a). The following week, Senator Burton K. Wheeler (Democrat, Montana) made public the contents of what the *Daily Tribune* called “the mounting pile of letters he has received from American fighting men who warn that insistence on the unconditional surrender program means the unnecessary slaughter of American soldiers and sailors by enemies that have no incentive for giving up” (1945b). A fortnight later the newspaper would nail its colours to the mast in that editorial of January 31, 1945. Headlined “Undoing the Damage”, this depicted unconditional surrender as an egregious error, the foolhardiness of which was now recognised by its authors. Evidence for this came in the form of propaganda targeted at German soldiers. “The Allies have begun showering German lines on the Western front with pamphlets explaining that unconditional surrender as demanded by Mr Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill will not be as tough as it sounds”, explained the leader writer. Germans who surrendered would be “under the protection of the Geneva Convention and would be treated with fairness” (1945c). Fresh contributions by politicians helped the *Daily Tribune* keep unconditional surrender in the spotlight. In March, the Republican Congressman for Omaha, Nebraska, Howard Homan Buffet (1903-1964) made a forthright speech. Unconditional surrender was “the Achilles heel of our whole war effort” and evidence of “bankrupt statesmanship”. It had “multiplied the cost of victory in American lives” (1945d). The *Daily* *Tribune* reduced the intensity of its campaign as the prospect of German surrender loomed larger.

***The Times***

*The Times* alerted its readers to controversy on the topic in December 1943: Mr George Hartmann, Chairman of the Peace Now Movement, had written to Congressmen denouncing the “shortsighted and undemocratic policy of unconditional surrender” and demanding “that this insane slaughter be stopped” (1943c). By February 1944 it was anxious to persuade Germans that Allied policy did not mean they would be enslaved or destroyed: “Mr Churchill’s past record and previous utterances are a pledge against any such policy”, declared an editorial (1944a). Some readers remained unconvinced, among them Noel Hopkins of the Cathedral Vicarage, Wakefield. Observing that “Hitler and other German leaders repeatedly depict the issue before Germany as between victory and annihilation”, he noted that BBC broadcasts to the continent were trying to enlighten German listeners and argued that a “clear and uncompromising declaration of the main purposes of the United Nations towards post-war Germany” was now urgently required (1944b). *The Times* asserted its own subtly modified view in a leader on 25 April 1944: “There is force in the jest that the conditions of unconditional surrender must be worked out”, it explained. The newspaper’s parliamentary columns highlighted more brutal criticism, including Viscount Hankey’s warning that unconditional surrender was “a gift to the Nazis”, and the Minister of Economics Warfare’s telling reply that it was the only way to convince the German people that: “[T]he Atlantic Charter was not a bargain with them but that they had been beaten and must accept the terms of peace the allies laid down” (1944d). In June a letter from Lord Vansittart, who had served as Chief Diplomatic Adviser to HM Government between 1930 and 1938 and whose enthusiasm for a rigid line against Germany would earn the name Vansittartism, emphasised the same point: abandoning unconditional surrender would not shorten the war; the only way to deal with the Germans was “to beat them” (1944e). News of the July Plot did not change editorial policy. Indeed, *The Times’* reporting of that incident followed the Government’s policy of saying nothing to suggest that serious opposition to Hitler existed inside Germany. A leader column warned against any hope that Germans would overturn their own government. “Today the Gestapo is looming larger in the life of the ordinary German,” it warned, “defeatists and pessimists are constantly threatened with the direst penalties, and the smallest expression of doubt of the capacity of the Nazi leaders to save a manifestly hopeless situation evokes stern retribution” (1944f). Throughout the summer and autumn of 1944, *The Times* treated unconditional surrender as settled policy, but it did not ignore evidence that it was stimulating controversy. This revealed itself with particular clarity during the final days of the 1944 American Presidential Election campaign when Thomas Dewey (1902-1971), the Republican candidate, used his final speech to accuse President Roosevelt of prolonging the war and squandering American lives by failing to abandon “the slogan of unconditional surrender”. *The Times* reflected on Governor Dewey’s speech in an editorial in which it lauded President Roosevelt’s success in becoming only the third Democratic President since the Civil War (1944h). In early December the labour correspondent reported opposition from constituency parties to the Labour leadership’s support for unconditional surrender (1944i). *The Times* noted several examples of Socialist concern about the policy in reports from its parliamentary and political staff. However, its review of the year, published on January 2, 1945, confirmed that editorial policy remained steadfast. Despite the German offensive in the Ardennes, *The Times* remained convinced that, during 1945, Allied forces would “exact the unconditional surrender they are pledged to demand” (1945a). On January 17 it reported without comment the Prime Minister’s ambiguous insistence that unconditional surrender was not prolonging the war and that the war would “be prolonged until unconditional surrender is obtained” (1945b).

At Yalta in February Allied leaders explained that unconditional surrender would mean occupation of Germany by Great Britain, Russia, France and the US. *The Times* noted Roosevelt’s observations about what it would **not** mean. The President told Congress that German soldiers and civilians could end their “present agony” by surrendering immediately. Their leaders sought to persuade them that an end to the fighting would mean they would be enslaved, but this was nonsense, unconditional surrender did not mean “the destruction or enslavement of the German people”. It meant the end of Nazism (1945c). On March 28 *The Times* reported a frank acknowledgment by Mr Elmer Davis, Director of the US Office of War Information, that unconditional surrender was reducing the impact of allied propaganda in Germany. This would be more successful “if we could offer them anything”, but the policy remained worthwhile because “it will prevent them from bringing up after this war the ‘stab in the back’ propaganda which they used after the last war to explain why they lost it” (1945d). In a generous obituary published on April 14 *The Times* listed unconditional surrender among President Roosevelt’s achievements (1945e). Three days later it reported with approval President Truman’s inaugural address to both Houses of Congress in which he confirmed that it “continued to be the American demand” (1945f).

On May 3, with Hitler dead and Admiral Donitz named as his successor, *The Times* noted that “unconditional surrender, which has come in for some criticism” had justified itself fully in Italy where powerful German forces had now surrendered to the American 15th Army Group (1945g). It remained supportive of the policy when the German Foreign Minister, Count Schwerin von Krosigk broadcast his announcement of the unconditional surrender of German armed forces and told Germans to face their fate “squarely and unquestioningly” (1945h). On this issue, though aware of controversy in Parliament and willing to publish examples of dissent on its letters page, *The Times* had remained as loyal to Churchill as it had been to Chamberlain during the years of appeasement.

**The *Manchester Guardian***

The *Manchester Guardian* was represented at Casablanca by its special correspondent Evelyn Aubrey Montague, grandson of its most famous editor, C.P. Scott. In his report from the press conference, Montague noted a tiny difference of emphasis between the President’s version of unconditional surrender and the Prime Minister’s. Roosevelt spoke of the “total elimination of the Axis war power”; Churchill “put the same thought in other words by speaking of the unconditional surrender ‘of the criminal forces that have plunged the world into sorrow and ruin’” (1943a). True to its liberal, non-conformist ideals, it went on to report examples of opposition that did not secure space in the wartime *Times*. Thus it gave two column inches to news that the Society of Friends’ Yearly Meeting had issued an open invitation to engage in “creative peace-making” while noting that demands for unconditional surrender could make no contribution to the search (1943b). Identical space went to a report that the British Section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom had called on the government to abandon the “barren formula” and commit itself to the “principles of justice enunciated in the Atlantic Charter” (1944a). The *Guardian* also published letters criticising the “Casablanca Formula”. One correspondent, Douglas J.J. Owen of Stockport, denounced it as “likely to unite the enemy and stiffen resistance, an effect it would probably have on this country if our roles were reversed” (1943c). Balance was maintained however; it reported the Bishop of Sheffield’s unsuccessful attempt to establish a “Never Again” association dedicated to “unconditional surrender of the enemy, their total disarmament and occupation of enemy territories, division of Germany into her component parts, dismantling of the German war industry and control of the whole of Germany’s industry” (1943d). The *Manchester Guardian* kept a close eye on Parliamentary discussion. It noted interventions by members of the Parliamentary Peace Aims Group, but made clear that theirs was a minority perspective opposed by all parties in the wartime coalition.

**Conclusion**

The liberal tradition in media history portrays the press as an educational institution that promotes rational discussion of ideas, important among them the policies advanced by democratically accountable governments. It asserts that a diverse range of publications operating in a free market will ensure that good ideas replace bad ones and secure the best interests of the greatest number. Plainly, the wartime market was not entirely free and it was less so in Britain than in the United States. Newspapers had no direct access to reliable sources of information about the state of morale in Germany and could gauge the impact of Allied policy there only through circumstantial evidence. Despite these handicaps, the newspapers surveyed here understood that avoidance of a compromise peace did not, *ipso facto*, require a policy of unconditional surrender. They facilitated awareness that the policy was tailored principally to keep the Allies united. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *The Economist* displayed awareness that Churchill and Roosevelt needed to limit battlefield casualties if only to maintain political support at home. The other British titles did not respect entirely Churchill’s desire for “absolute silence” on the topic. *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* based their coverage on views expressed in Parliament and only occasionally encouraged broader debate. *The New York Times’* editorial policy was defined by its support for the President.

Willem Visser’t Hooft (1900-1985), a member of the anti-Nazi resistance in Germany during the war and Secretary of the World Council of Churches from 1948, argued that Allied leaders’ adherence to the policy of unconditional surrender exposed their lack of “political imagination” (Balfour 1993). The newspapers examined here were a little more imaginative. They championed Churchill and Roosevelt’s assorted efforts after Casablanca to find terms in which to describe their policy as something less than total enslavement of Germany without promoting false expectations. They reported examples of overt hostility to the policy. They grasped the importance of keeping the USSR in the fight to the end. They understood the democratic Allies’ determination not to repeat the errors of 1918 and to achieve a post-war settlement that would make it impossible for Germany to disrupt the peace of Europe again. They discussed the need for new institutions that might preserve peace and stability.

All of the newspapers surveyed here gathered information about unconditional surrender from a variety of sources. These included political and military institutions, correspondents accompanying Allied armies, political opponents of unconditional surrender and their own readers. Real eagerness to provoke sustained debate about the wisdom and consequences of unconditional surrender was apparent in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *The Economist*. Each expressed its criticism directly and each raised the possibility that the ideals identified in the Atlantic Charter might be more easily attained if the surrender policy initiated by its authors were abandoned. To this extent each illustrated the coherence of a central tenet of liberal theory: that a diverse range of newspapers, each pursuing independent editorial policies, will place in the public sphere sufficient news and opinion to help citizens reach informed conclusions. These titles, one American, one British, also confirm the extent to which editorial policy at a healthy newspaper is dynamic and evolving. Neither the *Chicago Daily Tribune* nor *The Economist* set out to oppose allied policy. Their criticisms grew sharper in response to evidence. *The Economist*, though not instinctively a newspaper of the left, came to accept aspects of the Parliamentary left’s view that there was another Germany, one that was not culturally inclined towards Nazism and militarism. The Chicago title found hostility to Presidential policy among its political allies and seized the opportunity to promote their criticisms. But, while these titles displayed independence from government, neither title offered coherent alternatives to unconditional surrender. They held power to account in the limited sense that they identified flaws in official policy.

Readers of *The Times*, *The New York Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* could discern that unconditional surrender was not universally popular, but they were left in no doubt that their newspapers supported the policy. Though free from policy censorship, the two British broadsheets aligned themselves closely with official orthodoxy and took particular care to publish nothing likely to offend Soviet opinion. Their compliance with urgings from the Ministry of Information was plain in the enthusiasm with which they repeated Churchill and Roosevelt’s efforts to soften the edge of official policy without confronting it directly. Their most direct criticism appeared in letters to the editor and was covered by the convention that such letters express their author’s opinion alone, not that of the newspaper. To this extent *The Times* and *Manchester Guardian* were prepared to advertise the existence of controversy but not to lend it credibility or to promote a search for alternatives. The New York title’s stance was informed as much by its political identity as by intense scrutiny of unconditional surrender. Many opponents of the policy were Republicans and former isolationists. *The New York Times* served a different constituency.

To find newspaper opinion muted on a topic about which elite opinion is undivided is unsurprising. But elite attitudes to unconditional surrender were only united in public. We have seen that the JIC and the Chiefs of Staff in Britain had profound misgivings and that they presented them to Cabinet. In the United States the Republican candidate for the Presidency campaigned on a platform including opposition to unconditional surrender during an election campaign in which 2.7 million US servicemen voted (De la Rosa 2007). Even among the policy’s avowed supporters, there were crucial differences of emphasis. Hardliners, represented by Sir Robert Vansittart in Britain and Henry Morgenthau Jr. in the United States, argued that, with very few impotent exceptions, Germans were all committed to Nazism. For them, absolute surrender must apply to the whole German nation. Others, including Churchill and Roosevelt, distinguished between the German people and what the Atlantic Charter called “Nazi tyranny” and Roosevelt himself termed the “Nazi conspirators”. With the exception of *The Economist* – which pointed out in the wake of the July Plot that the German resistance “have no assurance that the Allied peace will not be rather worse than Himmler’s rule” (1944e) – newspapers failed to highlight any distinction between Nazis and non-Nazi Germans. Nor did the titles surveyed here do much to persuade the British and American Governments that there would be merit in reaching early conclusions about how best to treat Germany when the war ended.

Hampton (2009, 26-35) advises liberal historians of newspaper journalism to abandon a “perfectibilist standard of politics by public discussion”. This case study demonstrates that wartime newspapers strayed from that Victorian ideal in their treatment of the controversies around unconditional surrender. But it demonstrates also that all the titles surveyed here sought to inform public opinion and that two sought to inflame it against Allied policy. Alternative voices were allowed to air their opinions. In wartime Britain, pressure on newspapers to conform to government policy was intense. It was only slightly less so in America. Yet, even on this most diplomatically and strategically sensitive of topics, the newspaper market offered insight for those willing to seek it out.

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2. For the idea that the four daily titles surveyed here might yield through a search of their digital archives a sample of coverage suitable for my purposes, I am grateful to Stephanie Seul (2012), whose article, “A Menace to Jews Seen if Hitler Wins: British and American press comment on German anti-Semitism 1918-1933”, *Jewish Historical Studies* 44, employs the technique.

**NOTES**

1. On Thursday, July 20, 1944 a bomb planted by Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg detonated just feet from Adolf Hitler at his headquarters in Rastenburg, East Prussia, narrowly failing to kill him. The attack was intended to initiate a planned putsch by senior German officers opposed to Hitler.

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