FRENCH SUPPORT TO THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: A CASE STUDY IN UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Art of War Scholars

by

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2019

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)*	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*
14-06-2019	Master's Thesis	AUG 2018 – JUN 2019

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE

French Support to the American Revolution: A Case Study in Unconventional Warfare

5a. CONTRACT NUMBER

5b. GRANT NUMBER

5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)

Gordon T. Richmond

5d. PROJECT NUMBER

5e. TASK NUMBER

5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)

11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

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15. SUBJECT TERMS
Unconventional warfare, American Revolution, External support to insurgency

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			19b. PHONE NUMBER *(include area code)*
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	119	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Gordon T. Richmond

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

FRENCH SUPPORT TO THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: A CASE STUDY IN UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE, by Gordon T. Richmond, 119 pages.

Convinced of the inevitability of another Franco-British war, concerned with the potential of British encroachment upon France's remaining colonial holdings, eager to avert a Spanish war against Portugal, and desperate to buy time to build military strength, France launched a covert intervention in the American Revolution between 1776 and 1778. In contemporary U.S. military doctrine, French actions could be considered unconventional warfare (UW), or external state support to insurgency. Despite the intervening two and a half centuries, the French experience can inform contemporary practitioners of UW. France's intervention in the American Revolution illustrates the importance of a deliberate decision to transition from limited to overt war and the centrality of diplomacy throughout the planning and execution of UW.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Dr. Jonathan Abel for his tireless efforts coaching and directing me toward completion of this paper. I am also grateful for the contribution of the two readers, Dr. Phillip Pattee and LTC Mike Reber, whose insightful feedback shaped the direction of this paper.

I owe a tremendous debt to Dr. Dean Nowowiejski for his leadership of the Art of War Scholars Program and his stewardship of our professional development throughout the year. His program design provided structured time for writing and a collaborative environment that ensured successful completion of my paper.

Finally, I am indebted to my wife Maddie for her understanding and for her support. She took on far more than her fair share of the parental burden to allow me, a slow reader and writer, to complete my research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

King Louis XV died in May 1774, passing the French crown to his grandson, Louis XVI. The elder Louis left a French empire far smaller than the one that he had inherited, primarily due to the results of the disastrous Seven Years War, which saw Britain surpass France in almost every measure. When Louis XVI ascended to the throne, he presided over a court whose worldview was heavily shaped by the country's defeat by the British. The rise, in 1775, of an American revolt demonstrated the first opportunity for the new king to begin to settle the score against Britain.

Convinced of the inevitability of another Franco-British war, concerned with the potential of British encroachment upon France's remaining colonial holdings, eager to avert a Spanish war against Portugal, and desperate to buy time to build military strength, France intervened in the American Revolution. Despite dire warnings from Jacques Turgot, Louis XVI's first finance minister, France pursued a policy of covert support to the Americans, rebuilt the French fleet to counter the British navy, and ultimately committed the French army and navy to the American cause. Though French assistance made for a more protracted conflict that was more damaging to Britain, the expansion of an American war into a global conflict was financially ruinous to France and contributed to the demise of the *Ancien Régime*. Louis XVI would have better served France's stated interests by continuing a policy of covert and limited support to the American insurgents—well short of overt war. This approach would have allowed significant strategic flexibility while minimizing financial cost to the cash-strapped French crown.

This thesis will examine French support to the American Revolution as a case study in unconventional warfare (UW). Joint doctrine defines UW as "activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area."[1] This seemingly narrow definition can be distilled to the provision of external state support to an insurgency or a resistance movement, which implicitly supports the sponsor state's strategic interests. Unconventional warfare also implies a sponsor's desire to maintain a layer of plausible deniability and to remain below a threshold of direct conflict with the targeted regime. At its core, UW is an economy of force effort. It can be a more appealing policy option than overt, interstate war because it allows the sponsor to impose costs on the enemy regime, while minimizing risk to the state sponsor.

Working through an insurgency, the sponsor can protract the conflict to weaken or defeat the enemy and buy time for the sponsor to build up military strength for an overt conflict. This places the enemy regime in a conundrum—it can either tolerate the sponsor's assistance to the insurgency or it can retaliate against the sponsor. Given the low-signature nature of UW, retaliation by the enemy regime can easily lead to it, not the insurgent's sponsor, looking like the aggressor. Two and a half centuries later, the French

[1] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: GPO, August 2018), 239. Both Joint (Joint Publication, 3-05.1 *Unconventional Warfare*) and US Army (Army Techniques Publication 3-05.1, *Unconventional Warfare*) UW doctrine are For Official Use Only (FOUO). However, both publications employ the same definition as the publicly-released DOD Dictionary. I draw upon both UW publications to explore the French experience in the American Revolution, but I do not directly quote or paraphrase either.

experience in America is rich with considerations that can inform contemporary understanding of UW.

The central French policymakers under Louis XVI considered open war with Britain to be inevitable, but they were determined to make the war in the American colonies as protracted and costly as possible, aiming to sap British military strength and to buy time for the reconstitution of the French navy.[2] Far from a being a trigger that launched French intervention in the conflict, the American victory at Saratoga was merely a milestone, which coincided with a planned French decision to shift from covert to overt involvement. France's transition is one of three natural branches of the strategic application in UW, as the sponsor state considers phased disengagement, status quo maintenance, or escalation, depending on the military and political situation.

A country initiates an unconventional warfare campaign on a spectrum of intensity, from general to limited war. In a limited war scenario, the sponsor intends to use UW as its primary military effort. In this fashion, the sponsor's activities remain covert or clandestine until the sponsor achieves its objectives or determines that the campaign is no longer worth the cost. In a general war scenario, the sponsor is either already in overt conflict with the enemy or intends to expand the conflict into a broader war. In this context, the UW campaign typically serves as either an early shaping

[2] Contemporary sources paint a vivid picture of the French policy discussion. Vergennes's "Considerations" and Rayneval's "Reflections" were ministerial-level policy memos that embody the realist tradition, saying nothing of the American ideological cause. Full, translated versions of both documents appear in Mary A. Giunta and J. Dane Hartgrove, *Documents of the Emerging Nation: U.S. Foreign Relations, 1775-1789* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1998), 18-29. Turgot's response to Vergennes and Rayneval's war advocacy appears in Jacques Turgot, *Oeuvres de Turgot*, vol. 1, ed. Eugène Daire (Paris: Guillaumin, 1844).

operation to set conditions for larger, overt military intervention or as a simultaneous effort to weaken the adversary.[3] The essential trait of limited war UW is that the sponsor has no intention of intervening with conventional military forces in the immediate-term.

Unconventional warfare requires a willing sponsor, a viable enemy regime to target, and a suitable insurgent partner. While some UW campaigns are premised upon the creation of an indigenous resistance movement by the sponsor, it is always more advantageous to support or co-opt a preexisting, organic movement.[4] Though France supported the expansion of the Continental Army's capability in the later years, the *Ancien Régime* did little to stoke the fires of revolution or to codify the political component of the American insurgency before 1776. The Seven Years War, where British soldiers and American colonial militias fought side-by-side against France, served as a crucible to forge a degree of unity and identity among the colonies, an expectation of individual local rights under the British Crown, and an expectation of limited taxation.[5] The war freed Americans from the specter of French attack against the colonies, and in so

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[3] Mark Grdovic, Special Warfare Center and School Publication (SWCS Pub) 09-1, *A Leader's Guide to Unconventional Warfare* (Fort Bragg, NC: U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, November 2009), 17-20.

[4] Mark Grdovic, "Understanding Unconventional Warfare and U.S. Army Special Forces." *Special Warfare* 19, no. 5 (September 2006), 19. Grdovic uses the failure of US efforts to establish and employ the Contras in Nicaragua as an "authentic" resistance force to generalize about the broader implausibility of an externally-imposed element gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the populace. Authenticity is especially important in a limited war scenario, where the long-term survival and growth of the movement hinges on some degree of popular support. In a general war scenario, the sponsor may be able to arm the insurgent with enough capability to achieve the desired effect, without legitimacy, through local eyes.

[5] Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 744-745.

doing, gradually loosened the grip of British patriotism on America.[6] The colonists were reluctant to contribute men and money to the war with France. After the war, Americans were reticent to accept higher taxes and import duties to fund a defense that no longer seemed to be required.[7]

If, by 1774, the French menace no longer loomed over America, the *Ancien Régime* and America's shared history was a rocky one. Beyond the legacy of the war, the predominately Protestant Americans viewed the Catholic absolute monarchy of Louis XVI as repugnant.[8] However, political interests on both sides of the Atlantic prevailed, and by early 1776 the Americans had overcome initial reservations about requesting French support and the *Ancien Régime* overcame any qualms about helping libertine Protestants rebelling against a monarchy.[9] What started as material support expanded into open war between the Bourbon and British navies, and eventually grew to include French troops fighting on American soil, under the unified command of George Washington.

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[6] Max Savelle, "The Appearance of an American Attitude toward External Affairs, 1750-1775," *The American Historical Review* 52, no. 4 (July 1947): 656-657.

[7] Lawrence Henry Gipson, "The American Revolution as an Aftermath of the Great War for the Empire, 1754-1763," *Political Science Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (March 1950): 103.

[8] C. H. Van Tyne, "French Aid Before the Alliance of 1778," *The American Historical Review* 31, no. 1 (October 1925): 29-30.

[9] For the subordination of ethnicity and religion and the relative supremacy of *realpolitik* in matching sponsor and insurgent, see Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau, and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001), 23. For the European view of the "pale imitation" of a European monarchy that eighteenth century Britain represented, see Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 10-11.

Contemporary US doctrine uses a seven-phase conceptual model to describe the execution of American unconventional warfare. After identifying a potential target for unconventional warfare, the sponsor begins to prepare friendly elements for subsequent phases of the campaign. The preponderance of focus is an evaluation of whether or not the insurgency's objectives align with the sponsor's and an examination of the likelihood of the movement's success, with and without external support. If required, the state sponsor may also conduct psychological operations in the target country to facilitate the growth of a preexisting insurgency and to encourage acceptance of the sponsor's support.

After preparing for the campaign, the sponsor meets with insurgent representatives, either by infiltrating emissaries into the target country or by holding a meeting elsewhere. This initial contact, the second doctrinal UW phase, is critical, because it allows the sponsor to confirm or reject planning assumptions regarding insurgent capabilities or intention. This phase could encompass a series of meetings over months or years, or it could be a single engagement where an arrangement is reached. Either way, this marks the beginning of a provision of support to the insurgents whether it be in the form of materiel aid, safe haven, military advisors, intelligence, or another enabling capability.

Execution of the four subsequent doctrinal phases varies significantly depending on the level of commitment of the sponsor and the requirements of the insurgent. The third phase, infiltration, involves the movement of special operations forces into the target area which will subsequently serve as military advisors to the insurgents. Organization and buildup, the fourth and fifth phases, mark the sponsor's assistance to enhance the insurgency's capability by way of optimizing the structure of the movement

and adding appropriate mass. Employment, the sixth phase, is where the sponsor theoretically achieves its aim of disrupting, coercing, or overthrowing the enemy regime. This is not to imply that the sponsor, working through the insurgency, cannot achieve its objectives in an earlier phase, but the employment phase is the crescendo of effects from capabilities that were built and enhanced during the earlier phases.

Starting or joining a war is always simpler than ending one, and UW is no exception. Transition, the seventh doctrinal phase, marks the reduction of sponsor support to the insurgency. This can be because coercive or disruptive efforts were successful and campaign objectives were met, or because the campaign was no longer feasible or desirable from the sponsor's perspective. Alternatively, it could be a transition from covert support to an insurgency toward open sponsor assistance to a nascent state's government, in the event of an overthrown enemy regime.

The seven-phase doctrinal construct is merely a model, and the phases do not fit neatly into any case study of external support to an insurgency. The only certainties about the phasing are that some point a sponsor will establish contact with an insurgency, directly or through proxy; offer support if the meeting is positive; and that the sponsor will eventually have to transition from supporting an insurgent to fundamentally changing the relationship. This new relationship could be in the form of an alliance or the sponsor could cease supporting the insurgency. The manner in which an insurgent campaign progresses varies widely and may involve multiple organization and buildup phases, or none at all.

The French experience deviates significantly from the doctrinal phasing model. However, France clandestinely met with American revolutionary leadership, evaluated

their resistance potential, and established mechanisms that provided material support to the insurgency, all without instigating a wider war with Britain until a time of France's choosing. French support prior to 1778 bought time for the French navy to rebuild its fleets, enabling it to dedicate naval forces for action against British holdings in the Mediterranean. Additionally, the human and physical infrastructure developed before the alliance through France's covert aid enhanced the French ability to integrate and synchronize their operations with the Continental Army once their intervention became overt.

The second chapter examines the strategic landscape of Europe in the aftermath of the Seven Years War and French attitudes toward pre-1774 turmoil in the American colonies. It discusses the worldview and attitudes of the young Louis XVI and those of the principal architect of France's role in the war, Foreign Minister Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes. It also provides an overview of the other figures who played significant roles in the articulation and implementation of French foreign policy during the war and some of the unique dynamics of the French court. The makeup of the late-eighteenth-century European order and the composition of Louis XVI's council combined to make French intervention in the American war an attractive option.

Chapter Three examines events from the coronation of Louis XVI until the king's May 1776 decision to support the insurgents. Intelligence preparation of the environment is essential in unconventional warfare, and this chapter assesses sources of information for Versailles regarding the Revolution, with an intent to determine what the French court understood about the American war, and how this impacted French strategy. During this period, France dispatched a secret emissary to meet with American representatives, and

Vergennes met with American representatives in Europe, often through proxies. These measures represented a deliberate French attempt to determine the suitability of the insurgents as partners. Louis XVI set most of the French strategic ends and ways during the first half of 1776, and the chapter explores the ministerial-level policy debate regarding whether and when to assist the Americans and why unconventional warfare was preferable to other military options.

The fourth chapter examines the execution of French unconventional warfare, starting with the decision to support the Americans and ending with ratification of the Franco-American Alliance in 1778. Clandestine and covert operations are a hallmark of unconventional warfare, and this chapter addresses Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais's creation of a shell company to create a layer of plausible deniability for the French court. France sent volunteers to the American cause which, while not officially endorsed by Louis XVI, could be considered advance echelons and strategic sensors for France as it weighed how to shape its American policy. These men, among them luminaries such as Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette; Frederick William Augustus Henry Ferdinand, baron Steuben, and Johann von Robais, baron de Kalb, arrived when the Revolution was at a nadir and helped to increase the fighting capability of Washington's army. Finally, the chapter analyzes the conditions that led to the Franco-American Alliance, addressing the misplaced emphasis by historians on the Battle of Saratoga as a demonstration of American military competence that invited French intervention. This section examines why the treaty was a foregone conclusion, given France's broader strategy.

The fifth chapter covers the impact of French UW on the remainder of the war, subsequent to the Franco-American Alliance. There were three resonant themes from the French campaign to assist the subversion of British rule. The first was a French failure to understand American political dynamics during UW, which made post-alliance political and military efforts more difficult. After two years of covert support, France should have possessed a deep, nuanced understanding of American political dynamics, but had focused almost entirely on military matters. A second failure was France's inability to ensure that Spanish king Carlos III would enter the war overtly, alongside Louis XVI, in 1778. This failure cost France significant blood and treasure, as the *Ancien Régime* had to accept Spanish strategic objectives in exchange for their entry into the war in 1779, a year later than Vergennes had intended. The third theme was a French success. French volunteer officers serving in the Continental Army were critical in the integration of elements of the French army which deployed to the United States in 1780.

Finally, the sixth chapter briefly examines some enduring characteristics of UW that the French experience illustrates. While avoiding direct lessons learned, the twenty-first century UW practitioner can see many parallels between the French experience and the contemporary experience of planning and executing unconventional warfare.

CHAPTER 2

STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND THE COMPOSITION OF LOUIS XVI'S GOVERNMENT

French intervention in the American Revolution did not occur in a vacuum. An examination of France's unconventional warfare strategy begins with establishing the context in four interrelated domains. First, the eighteenth-century European system, in which statesmen viewed the field in terms of a balance of power that individual countries should seek to restore or exploit, whenever possible. Second, the post-Seven Years War world, in which Britain eclipsed France as the preeminent imperial power, much to the humiliation of the *Ancien Régime*. Third, French interests, which centered upon fear of British aggression, fear of a European continental war, and a desire to protect the remaining French colonies. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, the personalities of the central decisionmakers of the French regime—most critically Louis XVI and his foreign minister.

Eighteenth-century European relationships were transactional, traditionally realist, and emphasized the importance of an interstate balance of power.[10] Balance of power is a fickle concept, at best, as a country could define practically any situation as an imbalance that required redress. There were some quantitative measures: the size of armies, numbers of ships of the line, territory, and taxable revenue, to name a few. European ambassadors were essential in keeping their home countries apprised of these metrics, and almost

[10] Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 6-8.

every country employed formal and informal networks of sources around the world. However, balance of power existed primarily in the mind of the beholder. If war ended indecisively, it might foster an uneasy peace that could be seen as imbalanced. The aggrieved country might start a war to correct this "imbalance," and by the standards of the day would rarely have trouble justifying its action. Imbalances could appear anywhere: a state whose strong military threatened its neighbors, too much commercial power held by one kingdom, or even a disparity in honor or prestige.

If one state sensed that its rival was growing stronger, the imbalance that this situation created might be offset by establishing a counterbalancing alliance or set of alliances.[11] Alliances during this period were, in Schroeder's words, "power-political instruments designed for capability aggregation, normally intended for expansion and acquisition as well as mutual security."[12] Alliances were usually the easiest means, short of war, to partially offset imbalances of power. Often of short duration, the alliances were designed to deter, and contained exceptional detail regarding one country's military commitment to another in time of war. Bilateral agreements frequently contained secret riders which might further limit commitments to assist an ally in a war only against specific countries or even secretly expand the potential for joint military action.[13]

Each alliance came at a cost. France and Britain shared a time-honored enmity, but prior to 1756, the Austrian Habsburgs and French Bourbons were also primary

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[11] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 20.

[12] Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, 6-8.

[13] Ibid.

antagonists. In a dramatic reversal, Prussia's Frederick the Great struck an alliance with Britain. This Diplomatic Revolution led to a realignment of the European powers, with Austria and France on one side and England and Prussia on the other.[14] These shifts helped lay the foundation for the Seven Years War. France was the status quo power before the alliance realignment and surely must have appeared to gain power by solidifying a mutually supporting relationship with Austria, which was more powerful than Prussia by most quantitative measures. In British eyes, this was clearly an imbalance of power, as France projected power militarily and through alliances in Europe, while threatening to expand their influence in North America. The westward expansion of French frontier posts threatened British interests on the continent.[15] Sparked by conflict on the North American frontier and by Frederick the Great's invasion of Saxony, the war remade the colonial world order. France, with significant assistance from American Indian allies, was victorious through the early years of the war. Though the British regulars questioned the military capability of colonial troops during and after the war, the colonies' numerical contribution was indispensable to the British war effort, which ultimately proved victorious.

Perception of national honor and prestige were inexorably linked to state interests. In most mid-eighteenth-century states, foreign policy was still the primary purview of the monarch and thus the prestige of the king and the status of the state were intertwined. This was especially true for the *Ancien Régime*. In Hardman's words, "The *métier* of a

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[14] Tim Blanning, *Frederick the Great: King of Prussia* (New York: Random House, 2016), 216-217.

[15] Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 32, 35.

king of France was preeminently to conduct foreign policy. In a theoretically absolute monarchy, internal politics was deemed not to exist – the foreign secretary, Vergennes, always apologizes to Louis for mentioning it.'"[16] Just as military growth or territorial expansion by one state would be seen as damaging to its rival, a gain in prestige or esteem by a rival state among the European community of monarchs might be seen as just as threatening as a material gain. Monarchs controlled the levers of state power, and they were entirely willing to pull them to protect their own and their country's perceived honor.[17]

For most of the century, France was the strongest military power on the European Continent. Prior to the Seven Years War, it was arguably the world's most powerful empire, with possessions in North and South America, West and Central Africa, and holdings on the Indian Subcontinent. Louis XIV's reign marked the zenith of French imperial power, while the Seven Years War and subsequent Treaty of Paris in 1763 signified the empire's most precipitous decline. Arguably the first global war, the Seven Years War further solidified British naval supremacy and established its dominance in North America and India. France and Britain were both great powers, each exerting a gravitational pull upon the constellation of European states. The less prominent states frequently drifted out of the orbit of one and into another.

The 1763 Treaty of Paris demonstrated a confluence of diminished French prestige, officially ended the Seven Years War for France and Britain, and ceded all but a

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[16] John Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 101.

[17] Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*, 8.

trace of France's colonial possessions on the North American mainland and some of its holdings in India and in the West Indies to Britain. The French Army incurred heavy losses against Britain in North America and against Prussia in Europe, while the British fleet decimated its French counterpart. The effort was financially disastrous for France, and the *Ancien Régime* was never able to recover its prestige. France was arguably still the single most powerful continental state after the war, but by war's end, its lead had narrowed, its empire had diminished, and its influence, with both allies and enemies, had waned considerably.[18]

The postwar power dynamic was unbalanced. In destroying France's North American empire, the war created a desire for revenge that would drive French foreign policy, and thereby shape European affairs, for two decades. At the same time, the scope of Britain's victory enlarged its American domains to a size that would have been difficult for any European metropolis to control, even under the best of circumstances, and the war created circumstances of the least favorable sort for the British crown.[19] Aside from British ascent and French decline, the war generally enhanced Russian power and influence; left Prussia exhausted, but with greater prestige; and damaged both Austria and Spain.[20] England's King George II and first minister William Pitt spearheaded their country's partnership with Frederick the Great, but their successors had no such interest

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[18] H. M. Scott, "France and the Polish Throne, 1763-1764," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 53, no. 132 (July 1975): 376. According to Scott "French prestige and influence in eastern Europe had been effectively destroyed" as a result of France's short-term embrace of Russia during the Seven Years War.

[19] Anderson, *Crucible of War*, xviii.

[20] Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848*, 3.

in maintaining the relationship. Beyond merely eschewing entangling European alliances, George III and his ministry mismanaged the peace and found themselves effectively isolated by 1763. However, despite its lack of allies, Britain was the undisputed economic and maritime power.[21]

While Britain exerted relatively little direct influence on the European continent after the ascent of George III, France was comparatively contained to it.[22] Given this rough division of influence, France and Britain might otherwise have been natural allies, uniting to neutralize a rising Russia or habitually troublesome Prussia and Austria. The two countries secretly pursued cooperation in containing Russian influence in 1772-1773, but the effort never bore fruit, and both returned to the status quo of mutual enmity.[23] Apart from this brief interruption, the foreign policy of France after 1763 was defined by

[21] Arthur Hassall, *The Balance of Power, 1715-1789* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1898), 278.

[22] George I, II, and III were all Hanoverian, serving simultaneously as King of Britain and Prince-elector of Hanover, a small, landlocked state that bordered Prussia. The protection of Hanover was a centerpiece of the foreign policy of both George II and his predecessor. Unlike his forebears, George III did not identify with Hanover. The 1760 coronation of George III and the resignation of then-prime minister William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, in 1761 began a deemphasis of British interest in Hanover. George III and Chatham's replacement, John Stuart, Earl of Bute, sought to disengage Britain from continental conflict, as much as possible. Though George III's lineage traced to the House of Hanover, the king never visited Hanover and did not speak the language. See Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 125-127, 507-508. Minus its Caribbean possessions, "In the American hemisphere [France] was expelled from Canada, and retained only a precarious foothold in the important Newfoundland fisheries through its possession of two small islands, Miquelon and St Pierre. Its position in the Indian subcontinent was destroyed, and its precarious toehold in West Africa." H. M. Scott, "The Seven Years War and Europe's 'Ancien Régime'," *War in History* 18, no. 4 (November 2011): 447.

[23] Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 36-37.

its search for the means to avenge the outcome of the Seven Years War and diminish what the *Ancien Régime* saw as a British stranglehold on the maritime-based economy. Louis XV's foreign minister, Étienne François, duc de Choiseul, embodied this philosophy. Though he eventually proved too activist for the king's tastes, he delivered a relative coherence to French foreign policy from 1760 until his dismissal in 1770.[24] Almost immediately after the Treaty of Paris 1763, Choiseul pursued a policy of "revanchism," seeking to restore the mercantile and maritime balance of power. According to Abarca:

> The goal of the "Revanche" was restricted to breaking Great Britain's hold over Indian and African commerce and to restoring to Spain and France possessions like Gibraltar, Minorca, Florida, Jamaica, Senegal, and others which helped ensure what the Bourbons considered was Britain's domination of the seas and her near monopoly over Europe's commerce with the rest of the world.[25]

The war would require a joint Bourbon effort, incorporating the military and financial resources of both France and Spain.

Spain represented France's most important ally and, second only to Britain, the *Ancien Régime*'s most consequential relationship. Spain and France were members of the Family Compact, an alliance uniting the two kings of the House of Bourbon. On the grounds of this agreement, Spain entered the Seven Years War against Britain in early 1762, intending to threaten Portugal, a British military and economic ally. A Spanish

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[24] Choiseul was able to centralize the key ministries under his personal control or under that of his cousin. This provided "something more like a unified government than France had known" since the 1730s. Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France* (New York: George Braziller, 1965), 93-97.

[25] Ramon E. Abarca, "Classical Diplomacy and Bourbon 'Revanche' Strategy, 1763-1770," *The Review of Politics* 32, no. 3 (1970): 325.

invasion of Portugal failed and the Spanish army returned home without having disrupted Britain's broader strategic campaign in the Western Hemisphere.[26] This brief Spanish intervention in the last year of the war triggered the British seizure of Havana, the crown jewel of the Caribbean, and Manila, Spain's colonial capital in the Philippines. Britain ultimately returned both colonies to Spain in the 1763 Treaty of Paris, though Spain lost Florida to Britain. France also gave Louisiana to Spain as a sort of consolation prize for Spanish entry into the war as well as to prevent the rest of the North American continent from falling into British hands. Spain thus emerged from the war with a far deeper enmity, along with its Bourbon allies, towards Britain.[27]

Though Spanish power waned considerably from its heyday in the sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries, it still possessed a large navy and huge colonial possessions in the Western Hemisphere. Spain depended on France to assist militarily in any confrontation with Britain, evidenced by a 1770 dispute over the Malvinas Islands, which brought Spain and Britain to the brink of war. Each country had established a small outpost on the islands. unbeknownst to the other. Upon discovering the existence of the British outpost, the governor of Buenos Aires launched a mission to expel the British in 1770, while Madrid called upon France to support their effort.[28] By 1770, Choiseul and his Spanish counterpart had spent four years swapping increasingly detailed joint war

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[26] Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 497.

[27] Alan Taylor, "Global Revolutions" in *The American Revolution: A World War*, eds. David K. Allison and Larrie Ferreiro (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2018), 17, 20.

[28] Larrie D. Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 29.

plans to attack Britain and avenge the humiliation of the Seven Years War. Spain read the Malvinas Crisis as an opportune moment to begin their joint war against the British. Louis XV strongly rejected the Spanish request, and with it, Choiseul's foreign policy. Without French willingness to assist, Spain peacefully but begrudgingly, surrendered the islands to Britain, while Louis XV sacked Choiseul, in part for his exuberant support for war.[29] Choiseul's successors under Louis XV were not equal to the task, and the king's own interest in foreign affairs waned in his later years.[30]

Although the Bourbon partnership was arguably France's closest, due to the general alignment of the countries' foreign policies and willingness to fight side-by-side, the Franco-Austrian relationship was certainly one of the *Ancien Régime*'s most consequential. France had a difficult relationship with Austria based upon centuries spent as enemies and, by 1774, two decades of general mistrust in spite of their alliance. France and Austria established their alliance, in part, to contain Prussia. Maria Theresa, the Austrian monarch, had hoped that the Habsburgs might reacquire Silesia from Prussia during the Seven Years War. Far from winning back lost territory, Austria suffered a humiliating defeat, was exhausted by the war, and was lucky not to lose any more

[29] Choiseul was dismissed due to a combination of at least two factors—his eagerness for a war with Britain that his king did not desire and a rivalry with Louis XV's mistress, Jeanne Bécu, comtesse du Barry. For Choiseul's expulsion due to the Malvinas crisis, see Geoffrey W. Rice, "British Foreign Policy and the Falkland Islands Crisis of 1770–1," *The International History Review* 32, no. 2 (June 2010): 295-296. For the contribution of the Barry incident to Choiseul's removal, see Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI,* 442.

[30] James Breck Perkins, *France Under Louis XVI*, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1897), 256.

territory in the process.[31] By the coronation of Louis XVI, the Franco-Austrian alliance was largely valuable to France only insofar as it restrained the Habsburgs from aggression against the Bourbons.[32]

The second-tier continental powers feared France less after its decisive loss to the British.[33] French efforts to place a friendly king on the Polish throne failed, and Russia, Prussia, and Austria actively excluded France from the First Partition of Poland in 1772 and divided a country that France saw as an essential bulwark against Russia.[34] This exclusion from the diplomatic scene, combined with the weakening of the Bourbon alliance as a result of the Seven Years War and the Malvinas Crisis, demonstrated that French power and influence in Europe were ebbing through the last years of Louis XV's reign.

Though France lost the vast majority of its colonial territory as a result of the Seven Years War, its remaining holdings in the Western Hemisphere were vital French interests. The French crown retained fishing rights off the coast of Newfoundland and, most critically, sugar-producing islands in the Caribbean. Saint-Domingue, which the Spanish called Hispañola, held plantations that provided almost two-thirds of French

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[31] Herbert H. Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 19. The loss of Silesia would fuel Austrian efforts to annex Bavaria and cause the Hapsburg allies to be a regular thorn in the side of Louis XVI. See also Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 131-134.

[32] Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848*, 36.

[33] Daniel Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War, 1754-1763* (London: Routledge, 2014), 662.

[34] Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 148-149.

overseas income by the end of the eighteenth century.[35] Even prior to the Seven Years War, some French statesmen argued that France needed to expand its territory in contiguous North America because it would deter Britain from threatening French interests in the resource-rich and easily accessible Caribbean.[36] This viewpoint helped fuel the expansion of the Seven Years War and twenty-five years later, French ministers retained their view of the centrality of the Sugar Islands.

The reduction of French colonies in the Western Hemisphere only marginally simplified the French policymaking process. The inner workings of the *Ancien Régime* were always tremendously complex, but they were exceptionally so under Louis XV. Some of the king's mistresses had formidable levels of influence, especially concerning the selection and dismissal of ministers and military leaders.[37] Dismissal from the French ministry often came with internal exile, which certainly did not engender a forthcoming

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[35] Harold Mitchell, *Europe in the Caribbean: The Policies of Great Britain, France and the Netherlands Towards Their West Indian Territories* (Stanford, CA: Hispanic American Society, 1963), 8.

[36] In 1750, Roland-Michel Barrin de la Galissonière, a former governor of Quebec, delivered a memorandum to Louis XV detailing the threat that an expanded British presence in North American would pose to Saint-Domingue and Cuba, specifically. Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War, 1754-1763*, 5-7.

[37] Though Louis XV had many mistresses throughout his reign, there was only one that functioned as de facto first minister: Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, marquise de Pompadour, commonly known as Madame de Pompadour. According to Perkins, "there was a long period in which one could justly say that Mme. Pompadour reigned in France; she controlled the conduct of the king, she dictated the choice of ministers, she decided the policy of the state." James Breck Perkins, *France Under Louis XVI*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1896), 454. Louis XV's last mistress, Madame du Barry, held significant influence over the king, but did not hold sway over the entire country in the manner of Pompadour.

style among the king's cabinet, as its members constantly jockeyed for power at court.[38] Louis XV's paranoia and his penchant for secrecy made matters difficult for his ministers, as well. The king commonly demanded that recipients of his letters burn the correspondence after reading it. He also created the *Secret du roi*, both espionage network and secret conduit for diplomacy. Originally established to sway the 1764 Polish election to France's preferred candidate, Louis XV's *Secret* was unique among other state intelligence organs because the existence and extent of the network was not known to the king's ministers.[39] Ambassadors who were trusted agents of the *Secret* would receive contradictory guidance from Versailles, and would disregard the foreign minister's edicts and obey the *Secret's* commands. This was naturally disruptive to the formulation of French strategy, and Louis XV spent significant energy concealing the existence of the *Secret du roi* from his ministers.[40]

As the last monarch of the *Ancien Régime*, history does not remember Louis XVI as the sort capable of orchestrating a clandestine network of diplomats. He is seen as dull, disinterested, and generally out of touch with everything beyond his palace in

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[38] John Hardman, *French Politics, 1774-89: From the Accession of Louis XVI to the Fall of the Bastille* (London: Longman, 1995), 12-13. For a detailed account of the practice of internal exile for ministers who lost the king's confidence, see Julian Swann, "Disgrace without Dishonour: The Internal Exile of French Magistrates in the Eighteenth Century" *Past & Present*, no. 195 (May 2007): 87-126.

[39] Orville T. Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982), 150.

[40] Nicole Bauer, "The Fate of Secrets in a Public Sphere: the Comte de Broglie and the Demise of the *Secret du roi*," *Journal of the Western Society for French History* 43 (2015), accessed October 6, 2018, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.0642292.0043.005.

Versailles. While each of these judgments contain more than trace amounts of accuracy, John Hardman, the authoritative Anglophone biographer of Louis XVI, argues that the king was a diligent administrator, especially with regard to foreign policy and finances.[41] Louis-Auguste, the future Louis XVI, was eight years old when France formally surrendered the preponderance of its empire to Britain in 1763. His father, the Dauphin, died in 1765, making Louis-Auguste the new Dauphin—heir to the French throne.

By the time he ascended to the throne at the age of nineteen, Louis was accustomed to piecing together reports from diplomats and spies to evaluate their consequences for France's interests. When he became Dauphin, he regularly discussed policy with the king. Louis XV even appointed the de facto foreign minister to serve as the Dauphin's principal tutor for foreign affairs.[42] Louis XVI was also well-read, before and after his coronation, and took a lifelong interest in British affairs. He could read English and would regularly dissect reports on Parliamentary debates in Britain.[43] Though Louis XVI eschewed his predecessor's *Secret*, the new king shared Louis XV's desire for outside information. To this end, the king commonly read his ministers' public and private correspondence.[44] Combined, the tutelage under the king and his foreign minister; the interest in Britain and English literacy; and Louis XVI's advanced age,

[41] Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 442.

[42] Ibid., 23.

[43] John Hardman, *Louis XVI* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 90.

[44] Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 142

relative to his predecessors, at which he began his reign, all indicate that there should have been significant continuity in foreign policy between one sovereign and the next.

Louis-Auguste's 1770 marriage to Marie-Antoinette, the daughter of Maria-Theresa, ruler of Austria and matriarch of the Habsburgs, was a political one, as was the case in so many monarchical matrimonies. It aimed to solidify bonds between France and Austria. There is no record of Louis XVI taking a mistress during his reign, which represented a massive departure from his Bourbon predecessors; however, this did not afford Marie-Antoinette significant political influence over her husband until after the conclusion of the American Revolution. For the first decade of his reign, the king did not trust the queen's motives, fearing a hidden Austrian hand behind every action.[45] This did not stop her from trying to influence court appointments, however, and she feuded indirectly with many of the ministers throughout their tenures and had a generally disruptive effect on the overall function of the French ministries.[46]

Louis XVI was, by most accounts, a poor leader. He was incredibly shy, extremely indecisive, and was known for his long silences, especially in the face of critical questions. During the first five years of the king's reign Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, comte de Maurepas; Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes; and Antoine-Raymond-Gualbert Gabriel de Sartine, comte d'Alby, served as his closest and most influential advisors. Though other ministers were significant during the American Revolution, these three men were united in their commitment to exploit turmoil in British

[45] Hardman, *Louis XVI*, 25.

[46] Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 70. Marie-Antoinette was barely literate, further influencing her ability to influence policy.

North America.[47] Beyond the king and queen, the composition of the government in terms of people and positions was dynamic. Appointed for life, the Chancellor was nominally the first among ministers, conceptually akin to a justice minister. There were generally four Secretaries of State, one each for War, Foreign Affairs, the Marine, and the Minister of the *Maison du Roi*.[48] Though the Minister of the *Maison du Roi*'s principal responsibility was to ensure the continued function of the French court, his secondary duty made him comparable to an interior minister, with responsibility for public order in Paris.[49] The Secretary of State for the Marine served as both the ministerial director for the French navy and as administrator of the colonies, while the Secretary of State for War was the ministerial director for the French army. The Controller-General supervised finances, agriculture, industry and state infrastructure, and his duties commonly overlapped with those of the Minister of the *Maison du Roi*.[50] Under Louis XVI, the foreign minister exerted the greatest amount of control over the formulation of strategy, while the de facto first minister was a constant influence due to his consistent presence. Given the nature of the American war, the naval minister was the third most critical

[47] The Secretary of State for War (first Claude Louis, comte de Saint-Germain and subsequently Alexandre Marie Léonor de Saint-Mauris de Montbarrey) were occasional participants, but the formulation of military strategy centered around Maurepas, Sartine, Vergennes, and the king. Johnathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy, 1775-1787* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 108-109.

[48] Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, 34.

[49] Hardman, *French Politics, 1774-1789*, 21-22.

[50] Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, 34-35.

contributor, while the war minister and Controller-General were only sporadically involved in the high-level planning.

When Louis XV died, the new king summoned Maurepas to serve as his principal advisor. In other administrations, Maurepas might have served as first minister, synchronizing acts of government to the will of the monarch. Louis XVI neither granted Maurepas this position nor refused it, creating a situation where none of the French ministers were certain if Maurepas was first minister or not.[51] This created an unnecessarily convoluted manner of governance, wherein every decision required the king's assent, significantly slowing the speed of policy.[52] Twenty-five years before Maurepas returned to Versailles to serve Louis XVI, he had served as Secretary of State of the *Maison du Roi* and as Minister of the Marine to Louis XV. Ousted and internally exiled in 1749 after a power struggle with Pompoudor, Maurepas fully grasped the individual minister's tenuous grasp on power. His living quarters afforded him unequaled access to Louis XVI, more than even the queen, who resided in separate quarters, as was the custom.[53] This served to expand Maurepas's positional power, but he lacked the

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[51] Hardman, *French Politics, 1774-89*, 14. See also: Robert Rhodes Crout, "In Search of a 'Just and Lasting Peace': The Treaty of 1783, Louis XVI, Vergennes, and the Regeneration of the Realm," *The International History Review* 5, no. 3 (August 1983): 364-398. Louis XVI's embrace of François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon's *Les aventures de Télémaque* as a child and his summoning of Maurepas to serve as counselor seem to be related. Felenon's story, an early eighteenth century *Illiad* spinoff has an older character known as the "Mentor" advising the titular character on being a wise and just ruler. *Les aventures de Télémaque* was a banned book during Louis XV's reign, but Louis XVI subsequently permitted its publication. Maurepas was often referred to by contemporaries as "the Mentor," a clear reference to Fenelon.

[52] Hardman, *French Politics, 1774-89*, 119.

[53] John Hardman and Munro Price, "The Structure of Domestic Politics," *Louis XVI and the comte de Vergennes: correspondence, 1774-1787* (Oxford: Voltaire

delegated authority to make any independent decisions of consequence. Though Maurepas was frequently bedridden with gout, he sat on almost every *travail*, the king's weekly meeting with individual ministers. His presence in every important meeting with the king, who was nineteen years old at his coronation, indicated his influence. Maurepas also served as a filter between Louis XVI and those who desired audiences with him. Though he began his reign with many holdovers from his predecessor's administration, within a year of Louis XVI's ascent to the throne the entire French ministry was new, most of them replaced with Maurepas's chosen candidates, strengthening his influence upon the ministers themselves.[54]

Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes, served as Louis XVI's foreign minister from 1774 until the former's death in 1787. A career diplomat, Vergennes was the French representative to the 1752 Congress of Hanover, a British attempt to elect a successor to the reigning Holy Roman Emperor, and served as Louis XV's ambassador to the Ottomans from 1755 until 1768. In the Congress of Hanover, the thirty-three-year-old Vergennes demonstrated his mettle in diplomatic battle with the elder statesman of British diplomacy, Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle.[55] Vergennes represented France in the Porte for the entirety of the Seven Years War, where he fought Prussian

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Foundation, 1998), 4. Due to Maurepas's proximity and personal access to the king, there seemed to have been relatively little written correspondence between the minister and Louis XVI, and only one letter between the two exists today

[54] Hardman, *French Politics, 1774-89,* 120-121.

[55] Murphy, *Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes*, 30.

attempts to curry Turkish favor, and convinced the Ottomans to refrain from attacking Austria or Prussia and further disrupting France's war effort in 1757.[56]

After the war, Vergennes waged his portion of Louis XV's unsuccessful disruption campaign against the partition of Poland. Choiseul, the French foreign minister, demanded that Vergennes cajole the Ottomans into a war against Russia to help maintain the Polish buffer between Russia and Central Europe—a core French interest. Vergennes feuded with Choiseul via letter, arguing that an attempt to entice a Turkish war against Russia was a fruitless effort, as it was simply not in the national interest of the Ottomans. After Russia violated Ottoman territory in conspicuous fashion, the Turks declared war, but the conflict was an inconsequential loss for Turkey. The short war did nothing to prevent Austria, Prussia, and Russia from dismembering Poland.[57] Owing to the low opinion that Choiseul held of him, Vergennes was recalled in 1768 but managed to secure reinstatement as the French ambassador to Sweden in 1771. This return to the fold was made possible by the dismissal of Choiseul after his disagreement with Louis XV over challenging Britain during the Malvinas Crisis.

While Vergennes would serve as the architect for French involvement in the American Revolution, he was a little-known commodity to Louis XVI at the time of his coronation. Contemplating retirement while serving as French Ambassador to Sweden in 1774, Vergennes was surprised at his appointment as foreign minister. Both Louis XVI's aunt, Marie Adélaïde, and the elder Dauphin recommended Vergennes for the post, the

[56] Murphy, *Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes*, 116, 118-119.

[57] Ibid., 158-159.

latter calling Vergennes "methodical, wise, and capable" in a list of recommended ministry appointments that he left his son upon his death.[58] For Vergennes, this meant that, though he lived in constant fear of losing his job due to Versailles intrigue, he did not owe his position to Maurepas or to any of the prominent court factions.

Vergennes was a royalist to the core and possessed a healthy skepticism in the role of parliamentary bodies in crafting policy. Murphy's biography of Vergennes offers some lessons from his experience in the diplomatic area with Newcastle in Hanover, namely the central role of money to curry political influence, the relative importance of foreign policy in national budgets, and that public opinion, even in an absolute monarchy, was a potential spoiler to foreign policy initiatives. "As an aristocrat, Vergennes shared the view that only the ruling elite and the professional initiates were capable of real understanding of the complexities of international politics."[59] This likely shaped a perception on Vergennes's part of the Americans as amateur actors on the global stage, and as people who could be manipulated to serve French interests. It would have also made it difficult for him to comprehend the revolutionary American political system, where the Continental Congress had little real power over the individual colonies.

Beyond the lessons that Vergennes learned in his first real showdown with the British Empire, it is quite likely that he drew additional conclusions from his lengthy tenure in Turkey and three years in Sweden. From his time with the Ottomans, Vergennes must have seen the futility of a diplomat urging a course of action contrary to another

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[58] Murphy, *Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes*, 206.

[59] Ibid., 49. See also Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 208.

country's interests. The small war between Russia and Turkey emerged as a result of Russian aggression and Turkish response, and though Vergennes did his utmost to bias the Ottoman reaction toward one that favored war, the conflict did not inspire the results that Choiseul desired. Aside from its diplomatic exertion, France paid no dues in blood or treasure to inspire the war or to support its continuation. In this manner, Vergennes learned a lesson that he would apply in the American Revolution: if a cause furthered French interests, France must match ends with means by providing materiel support or intervening directly.

After rising to the position of foreign minister, Vergennes soon established himself as a trusted agent of the ruling regime. Hardman describes the daily rhythm that the king and Vergennes followed until the latter's death in 1787:

> Each would send the other the material he had received with comments; Louis, in particular, who read English fluently, avidly followed parliamentary debates, seeking clues to changes in policy and pressures of the British Government. Vergennes would generally draft Louis's letter to foreign rulers, the King making modifications which he designated either essential or optional. They would sometimes discuss the general situation by letter, but this was generally saved for chats in the early evening. Finally, they would decide when to use the *Conseil d'Etat*, the supreme council for the elaboration of foreign policy, and what to show it and, during the American War, make arrangements for the *comités* with the Service ministers.[60]

Maurepas presumably read much of Vergennes's correspondence before or simultaneously with Louis XVI, but the volume of the letters between the king and his foreign minister is striking. Hardman's description demonstrates the centrality of Vergennes to the policy process, and the fact that Vergennes replaced Maurepas as de

[60] Hardman, *Louis XVI*, 90.

facto first minister after the latter's death in 1781 is another indicator of his influence with Louis XVI.

Antoine-Raymond-Gualbert Gabriel de Sartine, comte d'Alby, served as Louis XVI's Minister of the Marine. Sartine's background as the commander of the Paris police—a position closer to that of a mayor in contemporary terms—endowed him with sound administrative skills that he wielded effectively. Though he had no background with the navy, he was a fast learner, no doubt aided by Maurepas, who had served as Louis XV's Minister of the Marine earlier in the century.[61] A reformer, Sartine moved quickly to trim excess within the navy while building a broader case for more funding to expand the French fleet.[62] Like Vergennes, Sartine was an alumnus of Louis XV's *Secret* and would not have felt out of place plotting to undermine British control of America.[63] Unlike Vergennes, Sartine was a protégé of Choiseul, and Marie-Antoinette was one of his patrons. Sartine and Vergennes developed a close friendship, but the Versailles intrigue must have created a natural tension between them, as the former represented the Austria-sympathizing Choiseul, who sought to replace Vergennes.[64] Finally, though Sartine was critical to the formulation of French policy during the American Revolution

[61] Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 14-15.

[62] Ibid., 15, 20-24.

[63] Johnathan R. Dull. *The Miracle of American Independence* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 80.

[64] Hardman, *French Politics, 1774-1989*, 43. For the friendship and political alliance between Sartine and Vergennes, see Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 150-151.

and shared Vergennes's hawkish view toward Britain, he was a junior player compared to the relative level of access and influence that the foreign minister exerted with the king.[65]

Jacques Turgot served as finance minister from 1774-1776. He was, in Hardman's words, both "a brilliant economist, almost the equal of Adam Smith" and simultaneously "the most distinguished and disinterested minister that [Louis XVI] ever employed."[66] Turgot was one of many reformers who served during the last reign of the *Ancien Régime*. French finances tottered from one disaster to another, and the complexity of taxable goods, tax exemptions, and entitlements was dizzying. Louis XIV had, according to Cobban, "endowed France with a modern system of government while retaining a semi-medieval system of financing it."[67]

Turgot was most famous for his proposed "six edicts" that sought to eliminate financial privilege for the nobility, the clergy, and residents of cities. In seeking to tax such entrenched special interest groups, Turgot ran into heavy resistance.[68] Turgot's

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[65] Sartine gave complete support to Vergennes's policy recommendations with regards to intervention in the American Revolution. See Edward S. Corwin, *French Policy and the American Alliance of 1778* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1962), 78. Vergennes, along with Maurepas, sat on the marine minister's *comites* with the king. See Hardman, *French Politics, 1774-1989*, 54-55. When the Bourbon powers negotiated the Treaty of Aranjuez, which established terms for Spanish entry in the American War, only; Vergennes, Maurepas, and Louis XVI were privy to the details. See Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 139.

[66] Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 56, 65. See also Malcolm Hill, *Statesman of the Enlightenment: The Life of Anne-Robert Turgot* (Portland, OR: Othilia Press, 1999).

[67] Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, 58-62. For the legacy Louis XIV's reign in subsequently convoluted French finance, see James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 85-94

[68] Hardman, *Life of Louis XVI*, 90-95.

initiatives and his career ultimately stalled after he annoyed the king with his self-righteous and overreaching attempts to influence other ministries and his feuding with Maurepas.[69] While he exerted nowhere near the level of influence of Maurepas, Vergennes or Sartine, Turgot's tenure was distinguished by his opposition to French support to the American Revolution and for his proposals of controversial economic reforms. This thesis's subsequent chapter will examine Turgot's arguments against intervention in detail, but suffice to say, he was unique for his relative willingness to argue against court opinion and against conventional wisdom of the time.

After the coronation of Louis XVI and the installation of Maurepas, the process for policy debate changed significantly. In Hardman's words, the decision-making process "was transformed by a politically inspired institutional change at the start of the reign: the transference of decision-making from the *conseil d'état* to ad hoc ministerial committees which were called *comités* when presided over by the king and conferences in his absence."[70] The transition from a large *conseil d'état* to more intimate meetings with trusted ministers likely encouraged more open dialogue on the part of the participants, to include the introverted king. This would have also increased the influence of Maurepas and Vergennes, who had the advantage of sitting on more *comités* than any of the other ministers.

Before examining the policy during the American Revolutionary War period, some observations about the 'triumvirate' of Maurepas, Vergennes, and Sartine, as

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[69] Hardman, *Life of Louis XVI*, 96-99.

[70] Hardman, *French Politics, 1774-89*, 15.

Murphy calls them, are useful. None of the three was a military man, and none was directly involved in the struggle against either Britain or Prussia during the Seven Years War. Though they acutely felt the humiliation of France from the war, none would have felt responsible for this. Two of the three had lived and served on the margins of the *Ancien Régime*—Maurepas in exile and Vergennes in diplomatic postings on the periphery of Europe. All three embraced a doctrine of prevention with regards to Britain. The surprise that came with the onset and the outcome of the Seven Years War seemed to weigh heavily on their psyches, and they sought to prevent it from happening to France again. Given this trauma, the risk posed by France's dire financial straits must have seemed far less critical than the British military menace.

By 1774, more than a decade had passed since the humiliation of the 1763 Treaty of Paris. The new king, coming of age at the nadir of French empire, was eager to reinvigorate the legacy of Louis XIV, the Sun King, and to reestablish the balance of power. While he might not be able to displace British preeminence everywhere, every British loss represented a French victory, no matter who was its author. The ministers themselves took power with an opportunity to strategize with a coherence that could not exist under the inconsistent leadership of Louis XV and his mistresses. If Louis XVI could avoid the protracted war that his grandfather had endured by maintaining at the periphery of the conflict until the time was right, France could maximize its limited naval and fiscal resources.

CHAPTER 3

FRENCH POLICY ON THE EVE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1774-1776

Louis XVI and Vergennes viewed war with Britain as inevitable, a perspective which underpinned their understanding of international events. France actively sought to weaken Britain before an eventual transition to general, overt war.[71] This chapter will examine French designs, short of the wider war, to co-opt and exploit the turmoil in British North America during the reign of Louis XVI. During the crucial period between 1774 and 1776, the Anglo-American schism deepened, and France effectively executed the first two doctrinal phases of UW. Louis XVI's government established the suitability of the Continental Congress as a partner and determined that materiel support to the American rebels was feasible and best-suited to French policy objectives.

France maintained a robust network of sources that reported on British military strength, defensive dispositions, and intent in the British Isles, Hanover, and in British North America. France also monitored the colonies' deteriorating relationship with London from 1763 onwards with special interest, employing a diverse roster of informants. In its eagerness to find an avenue to exact revenge upon Britain, the reporting from French agents exhibited a confirmation bias to satiate the wishes of Choiseul. According to Van Tyne, "Choiseul hoarded every document, every proclamation and revolutionary broadside, every seditious American sermon or clipping from a rebellious

[71] Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes, "Considerations on the Affairs of the English Colonies in America," memorandum, 12 March 1776, in Giunta and Hartgrove, *Documents of the Emerging Nation*, 22.

newspaper."[72] One of France's spies, Johann von Robais, baron de Kalb, provided one of seemingly few pessimistic reports on the colonies' immediate resistance potential in 1768:

> In spite of this restive spirit, however, they all, from the leaders down to the humblest citizen, seem to be imbued with a heart-felt love of their mother country. The inhabitants of this province [Massachusetts] are almost exclusively Englishmen or of English stock, and the liberties so long enjoyed by them have only swelled the pride and presumption peculiar to that people.[73]

Though Choiseul rejected Kalb's assessment in favor of a belief that America would soon be ripe for revolution and separation from Britain, France did not seek out pre-revolutionary leaders directly to offer support. After Choiseul's ouster in 1770, the French ministers lost an immediate interest in seeking to exploit discord in North America. The 1772 Swedish Revolution sparked a potential thaw in the cross-Channel relationship as Choiseul's successor sought rapprochement with Britain over a shared interest in keeping Russia out of the conflict.[74] This attempt had fizzled by mid-1773,

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[72] Van Tyne, "French Aid Before the Alliance of 1778," 24.

[73] Johann von Robais, baron de Kalb, to Étienne François, duc de Choiseul, quoted in George Washington Greene, "General John De Kalb," *Atlantic Monthly* 36, no. 216 (October 1875): 481.

[74] The Swedish Revolution was a bloodless coup, launched by King Gustavus III, who seized power in reaction to the Swedish Estates' encroachment on his remaining monarchical power. After the coup, Gustavus sought and gained French material assistance through Vergennes, Louis XV's ambassador to Sweden. The coup and ensuing crisis presented France with an opportunity for rapprochement with Britain. France wanted to maintain its newfound influence in Sweden, while Britain sought to prevent Russian military intervention in Sweden. A Russian invasion could have led to another costly European war—something that neither France nor Britain wanted in in 1772. See Michael Roberts, "Great Britain and the Swedish Revolution, 1772-73," *The Historical Journal* 1, no. 1 (1964): 1-46.

and the death of Louis XV the following year and the ascent of Vergennes as foreign minister returned animus toward Britain to the forefront of French foreign policy.

The second doctrinal phase of UW centers upon the initial contact between representatives of the potential state sponsor, known as a pilot team, and those of the insurgency. This meeting plays a critical role in the sponsor's decision to support the insurgency, as it serves as a political negotiation between the sponsor and the resistance organization. The pilot team reports its findings to national leadership, who can then make an informed decision about whether to begin assisting the movement..[75] The sponsor must determine the insurgent strategy and the degree of its alignment with the sponsor's objectives. The initial contact can occur during an especially delicate phase of an insurgency, so the sponsor state must weigh the extent of the support that it may immediately proffer the insurgency. Insurgents are naturally eager for external support to enable military objectives, as well as to provide political legitimacy that can help grow the movement itself. The sponsor must determine what support it can commit without overpromising, and ensure that it retains a clear exit strategy.

Two critical contacts between the *Ancien Régime* and American Revolutionary representatives took place between 1774 and 1776 that shaped the progression of French foreign policy: a French playwright's engagement with colonial representatives in Europe and France's dispatching an official mission to ascertain American intent and capabilities. Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, then an aspiring playwright, established his

[75] United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), *Unconventional Warfare Pocket Guide* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 5 April 2016), 12, accessed 5 October 2018, https://www.soc.mil/ARIS/books/pdf/Unconventional Warfare Pocket Guide_v1 0_Final_6 April 2016..

foothold in the *Ancien Régime* court when he was appointed music teacher to the daughters of Louis XV in 1759. His leap from obscurity brought about a friendship and business relationship with Joseph Paris-Duverney, France's preeminent arms manufacturer.[76] In addition to money and title, the partnership with Paris-Duverney earned Beaumarchais an officially sanctioned trip to Spain to serve as trade representative for a French financier consortium in 1764. The execution of this task earned Beaumarchais an introduction to Choiseul, who provided the playwright with letters of introduction for business in Spain.[77] Though Beaumarchais evidently needed little emboldening, his interactions in the French court and with Choiseul must have encouraged him to petition Louis XV's first minister. Beaumarchais wrote Choiseul from Spain to encourage France to facilitate the courtship of Spanish King Carlos III and a widowed French noblewoman.[78] The scheme went nowhere, and Beaumarchais returned to France after less than a year in Spain, but he developed a habit of trying to influence senior-level policy-makers.

After the coronation of Louis XVI, a disaffected former French spy threatened to publicly reveal French designs to invade Britain. Living in London in 1775, and having

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[76] The Paris brothers, and Joseph Paris-Duverney in particular, were titans of eighteenth-century France—the most powerful financiers in the *Ancien Régime*. They enjoyed significant influence throughout Louis XV's reign, having established key relationships with various court figures. Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, 36, 79.

[77] Brian N. Morton and Donald C. Spinelli, *Beaumarchais and the American Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 2.

[78] Ibid., 3. The widow in question was the niece of Louis Sextius Jarente de La Bruyére, Bishop of Orléans. Beaumarchais wrote to Vergennes that he could attest to the woman's qualities—having lived with her for six months.

refused a summons to return to France, Charles-Geneviève-Louis-Auguste-André-Timothée d'Éon de Beaumont had served as a member of Louis XV's *Secret du roi*.[79] Éon wrote Vergennes, requesting an exorbitant payment from the French government in return for handing over the compromising materials. Beaumarchais, a personal friend of Sartine's and a known commodity in the court, was assigned the task of recovering the documents without incident in exchange for the reinstatement of the playwright's French citizenship, which Louis XV revoked after Beaumarchais's public excoriation of corruption in the French judicial system that the playwright experienced firsthand.[80] His journey to Britain to meet Éon placed Beaumarchais in proximity to some of the leading liberal opposition figures in London. Through them, he learned of the extent of the deteriorating relationship between the British Crown and its North American colonies. Beaumarchais also met Arthur Lee, the Massachusetts colonial representative to Britain. Lee promptly sold Beaumarchais on the financial windfall that the playwright personally

[79] In a cast of complex characters in the *Ancien Régime*, Éon inhabited a level all his own. Remembered for a level of gender fluidity, having been born male but spending much of his life as a woman, Éon was directed to gather intelligence in support of a potential surprise Bourbon invasion of Britain. That he was trusted with this type of mission demonstrated the confidence that Broglie, his patron, had in Éon. Working under diplomatic cover, the spy attempted to join the London social scene, but was soon criticized and recalled for spending too much government money. Gary Kates, "The Transgendered World of the Chevalier/Chevalière d'Eon," *The Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 3 (Sepember 1995): 558-594.

[80] After Paris-Duverney's death in 1770, Beaumarchais feuded with the financier's nephew, Alexandre de Falcoz, Comte de La Blâche, over whether or not Beaumarchais was indebted to the estate or the other way around. This squabble led to a judicial official demanding a bribe from an imprisoned Beaumarchais. With a heavy dose of the humor that he employed so able in the Figaro plays, Beaumarchais published pamphlets that pilloried the system, drawing the ire of Louis XV. Harlow Giles Unger, *Improbable Patriot* (Hanover, CT: University Press of New England, 2011), 47-48, 60-66.

and the *Ancien Régime* as a whole would receive by France supporting the Americans.[81] As he shuttled between France and Britain, Beaumarchais continued to gather information to share with Vergennes and Sartine, much of it Lee's unfiltered opinion.[82]

As Beaumarchais overwhelmed Vergennes with correspondence advocating an active role in the North American turmoil, the French ambassador to Britain, Adrien-Louis de Bonnières, comte de Guînes, wrote Vergennes to recommend sending a French agent to North America to parley with representatives from the Continental Congress. The envoy, Julien Alexandre Achard de Bonvouloir, traveled as a merchant from Antwerp so as not to arouse suspicion and to provide France with a layer of plausible deniability.[83] Bonvouloir's timing was fortuitous, arriving shortly after the Americans had formally established the Committee of Secret Correspondence, chartered to secure foreign aid from British rivals. The French agent was bound by specific instructions from Vergennes, delivered by Guînes, that he would avoid making any French commitments to the American cause. Bonvouloir met with the committee, which included such Revolutionary luminaries as Benjamin Franklin and John Jay, and submitted a report in late December 1775 to Guînes that summarized his impressions. Claiming to have

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[81] Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 95-97.

[82] Beaumarchais's correspondence with Louis XVI, Vergennes, and Sartine is rich with breathless reporting on British defeats in the colonies and the ruling party's vulnerabilities at home. These letters, and some of those he received in response are transcribed and translated in Antoinette Shewmake, *For the Good of Mankind: Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais Political Correspondence Relative to the American Revolution* (New York: University Press of America, 1987).

[83] Guînes to Vergennes, September 29, 1775 in Henri Doniol, *Histoire de la participation de la France à l'établissement des Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie National, 1885), 139.

established "emissaries in more than one place whom I pay to keep me informed," Bonvouloir painted a very rosy picture of the Revolution's political and military progress.[84]

Bonvouloir's overall optimism reflected the heady nature of a year of considerable military gains by the upstart Americans. After the Battle of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the Continental Army seized Fort Ticonderoga in northern New York in May, bringing much-needed heavy cannon to the rebel cause.[85] In Boston the following month, American militia lost the Battle of Bunker Hill, insofar as they ceded control of the terrain, while inflicting more than 1,000 casualties on the British, at the cost of fewer than 500 Americans lost.[86] In his dispatch to Guînes, Bonvouloir called the Revolution "more powerful than you would think; it even surpasses the imagination, and you would be surprised. Nothing frightens them; be guided accordingly."[87] While this bombast may have been justified from Bonvouloir's interaction with some of the revolutionary leaders he met, the French agent grossly overestimated the size and capability of the Continental Army, citing "50,000 volunteers who do not want pay" who were "well clothed, well paid, and well commanded."[88] With figures like Washington,

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[84] Bonvouloir to Guînes, December 28, 1775, in Giunta and Hartgrove, *Documents of the Emerging Nation*, 10-11.

[85] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 277.

[86] Ibid., 292.

[87] Bonvouloir to Guînes, December 28, 1775, in Giunta and Hartgrove, *Documents of the Emerging Nation*, 12.

[88] Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes*, 234.

Henry Knox, and Benedict Arnold, the army was arguably well-led, but numbered less than 20,000 at the time, was generally ill-paid, and, as would become clear in the ensuing winters, was not particularly well-clothed.

Having sent dispatches of his own from far-flung postings, Vergennes probably retained a healthy dose of skepticism when reading correspondence from the untested Bonvouloir. It is impossible to know if Kalb, who had served as Choiseul's scout in America a decade prior, would have drawn the same breezy conclusions as Bonvouloir, but the mission undeniably deserved more military and political expertise.[89] Ultimately, both Bonvouloir and Beaumarchais were chosen for their convenience, but neither had expertise in military affairs or the political structure of the American Revolution. Ideally, the pilot team charged with determining the vitality of an insurgency ought to consist of hand-picked soldiers, spies, and diplomats, since so much weighs on their assessments. Additionally, the sponsor state government should be skeptical in weighing pilot team recommendations. Even if Bonvouloir had possessed some experience in war or in statecraft, he was surely operating under significant confirmation bias—looking for reasons to support the Americans, as opposed to looking for flaws in the Continental Army and the potential consequences for France.

Critically, Bonvouloir submitted no assessment of the viability of American Revolution as a political movement or the Continental Congress as a political

[89] The juxtaposition of the older, more seasoned Kalb's pessimistic, realistic worldview with that of the youthful and idealistic Lafayette if likely an applicable analogy for the difference between Kalb and Bonvouloir. See A. E. Zucker, *General de Kalb, Lafayette's Mentor* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 130.

organization. In his defense, American factionalism may not have been readily apparent at the time of his visit. Revolutionary spirit flourished in the face of the American military successes, and the Continental Army had yet to make great demands of the individual states for men and materiel, so relatively little strain would have been apparent in late 1775 and early 1776. However, for Bonvouloir to focus solely on military capabilities and requirements reflected a broader French failure to determine the overall resistance potential of the Americans—a measure that was more political than military in nature.

Beaumarchais's correspondence to Versailles contains the same arguments that Vergennes later presented to the king regarding the opportunity and viability of supporting the Americans. In his letters to Louis XVI, the playwright emphasized the dangers posed to French and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean by Britain. The Caribbean markets were essential components of the American colonial economy. According to Beaumarchais, the British had designs to seize them because it would provide them the power to economically coerce American obedience by controlling her exports—all without having to militarily defeat the rebellion.[90] The argument of the vulnerability of the Caribbean colonies and the importance of the American colonies to the British economy were a frequent driver for French strategy, and Beaumarchais played a significant role in these ideas gaining prominence.[91]

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[90] Morton and Spinelli, *Beaumarchais and the American Revolution*, 26

[91] Beaumarchais sent a bombastic letter to Louis XVI regarding an imminent British invasion of French and Spanish holdings in the Caribbean. Beaumarchais to Louis XVI, September 1775 in Shewmake, *For the Good of Mankind*, 67-69.

In late February 1776, Beaumarchais again wrote Louis XVI, insisting in his most strident tone yet that supporting the American rebels was an opportunity not to be missed:

> You will keep the peace you desire, Sire, only by preventing it between England and America, and by avoiding that one of them triumphs completely over the other; the only way to accomplish this is to give aid to the Americans, such as to balance their forces with those of England, and nothing more. And rest assured, Sire, that the savings of a few millions today may before long cost France a great deal of blood and of money.[92]

In March 1776, Vergennes penned "Considerations on the Affairs of the English Colonies in America," which amounted to a policy memo summarizing the potential risks and rewards in providing material support to the American Revolution. Vergennes presented "Considerations" to a French special council consisting of the foreign minister, the king, Maurepas, Sartine, Turgot, and war minister Charles Louis, comte de Saint-Germain, allowing them time to draft responses before the foreign ministry followed with another, more pointed memorandum the following month.[93] "Providence has marked this moment for the humiliation of England," wrote Vergennes.[94] The best scenario for France was a protracted war between Britain and its American Colonies. Extending this war for at least a year, in Vergennes's mind, would serve to sap British military strength and deny them the opportunity to strike at France's Caribbean colonies.[95]

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[92] Beaumarchais to Louis XVI, February 29, 1776, in Shewmake, *For the Good of Mankind*, 95-100.

[93] Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 31-32.

[94] Vergennes, "Considerations," 20-21.

[95] Ibid.

The bedrock of Vergennes's argument remained that war between France and Britain was inevitable. Even French inaction regarding the American turmoil would not absolve the *Ancien Régime* of having to fight a subsequent war against Britain. London was bound to see a French hand in the background of any setback and Europe would, also, assume the worst, wrote Vergennes: "The English, accustomed to conducting themselves on the impulse of their interest and to judging others by themselves, will always think that we will not let escape such a fine occasion to destroy them…and Europe would be persuaded of the truth of their imputation despite our denials."[96]

Vergennes framed his argument by placing France's "Sugar Islands" and Spain's Caribbean colonies as the central interest to protect, seeing three eventualities for a British attack against them.[97] In the first instance, Britain would make peace with its colonies and use its relatively unblooded army, conveniently pre-positioned in North America, against French and Spanish holdings. In the second, Britain would subjugate the Americans, which would require "encouraging national hatred and jealousy" that would spill into a subsequent attack against France. In the third instance, Britain might suffer defeat at the hands of the Americans, but the British Ministry, desperate for martial

[96] Vergennes, "Considerations," 22. Vergennes does not address French interests in Europe in "Considerations" but uses potential European perception of French actions to advance his argument: If European states will assume that France aided American separatists, Louis XVI ought to aid them, lest he see the reputation of France and his reign sullied without appreciable gain.

[97] "Sugar Islands" described the Caribbean islands that produced almost all of Europe's sugar, most prominently Cuba, Jamaica, and the French possessions of Saint Domingue and Martinique.

success, would strike at what seemed like low-hanging fruit in the Caribbean.[98] Every path led to British aggression, in Vergennes's telling.

Since war seemed imminent, financial and material contributions to the American cause, short of entry into the war, seemed a "small sacrifice" to Vergennes in 1776. A broader war would require French military intervention, so the *Ancien Régime* ought to place itself in a position to "contain the English, or render their attacks uncertain, or ensure the means to punish them."[99] Vergennes was unsentimental regarding the American cause, though he suggested that French support might aid the revolutionary cause in both moral and material fashion

> the courage of the Americans would be sustained by some secret favors and vague hopes which would prevent the steps that [the British] seek to induce them to take to reach an accommodation, and which would contribute to the budding of the ideas of independence which are still only germinating indistinctly among them [the Americans].[100]

Turgot provided a dissenting opinion in another, significantly longer memorandum, dated 6 April 1776. In it, he neatly dismissed a British attack against French or Spanish colonies in any case other than an immediate reconciliation between Britain and America. Turgot envisioned any British campaign against the recalcitrant Americans as a messy, protracted affair that would require the wholesale subjugation of British North America. British victory would create a longstanding insurgency in the colonies, denying Britain access to the American market and disrupting access to

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[98] Vergennes, "Considerations," 20.

[99] Ibid., 23.

[100] Ibid., 22.

American agriculture and natural resources.[101] According to Turgot, an American victory would make Britain unlikely to launch another military adventure in quick succession. Beyond the physical exhaustion of the force and the political exhaustion of the government, an American victory would deny Britain key supporting infrastructure in the Western Hemisphere to allow for an invasion of French or Spanish America.[102] Even in the case of a reconciliation between Britain and its colonies, a decisive attack against French or Spanish possessions seemed unlikely. Such a move would require most of the British troops in North America. Without British soldiers to serve as a mechanism for control or deterrence, Turgot thought it likely that the vacuum would only lead to further colonial revolutionary action.[103]

In addition to deftly skewering the defense of French and Spanish colonial holdings as a rationale for supporting the American Revolution, Turgot directly assailed the potential for a broader French war with Britain. "By preemptively using force, we risk perpetuating our weakness," he wrote, reminding Louis XVI of the poor state of the *Ancien Régime*'s finances. Were France to enter another ruinous war, unless it were "absolutely necessary" with "a probability of decided success," Louis XVI would risk worsening the country's financial crisis.[104] Furthermore, direct intervention by the

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[101] Jacques Turgot, "Mémoire sur la manière dont la France et l'Espagne devaient envisager les suites de la querelle entre la Grande-Bretagne et ses colonies," memorandum, 6 April 1776, in *Oeuvres de Turgot*, 553.

[102] Ibid., 556.

[103] Ibid., 555.

[104] Ibid., 571.

Bourbons against Britain at any stage of the conflict could be employed by Britain to draw her colonies closer together—not drive them further away.[105] Turgot's ultimate recommendation was to secretly prepare the French fleet for war with Britain, within the *Ancien Régime*'s financial means, while maintaining a deliberate neutrality in the conflict between Britain and its colonies. If the British threat increased, France could stage a demonstration on the Normandy coast with a part of its army to deter British action elsewhere.[106]

While Turgot practically eviscerated any rationale for preemptive war based upon maintenance of French colonial holdings, he did not forcefully argue against the provision of material support to the Americans.[107] Furthermore, he did not address Vergennes's overarching argument that war between France and Britain was inevitable. This provided an opening for Vergennes's first secretary Joseph Mattias Gerard de Rayneval in a subsequent to reiterate the foreign minister's assessment that war was inevitable. Turgot agreed, in principle, that the American Revolution presented an opportunity for French gains in power, commerce, and possibly the return of some of the French colonial holdings lost in the Seven Years War. Finally, and for the greatest consequence to the French state, Turgot did not adequately oppose naval rearmament—

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[105] Turgot, "Mémoire sur la manière dont la France et l'Espagne devaient envisager les suites de la querelle entre la Grande-Bretagne et ses colonies," 571-2.

[106] Ibid., 577-8.

[107] Ibid., 576-7. Turgot supports "turning a blind eye" to rebel purchases of ammunition, but argues against financial support to the revolution because of a difficulty concealing the act. Murphy also found that Turgot was too "oblique" and "compromised too much," ultimately weakening his argument against French involvement in the conflict. Murphy, *Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes*, 254.

an initiative far more expensive than any amount of material aid that the *Ancien Régime* could ever have wanted to provide to the Americans.

Though Turgot's memorandum is dated April 6, 1776, the exact date of Rayneval's work has been lost, though it is cited as "April 1776."[108] If Rayneval's work were not disseminated among the minsters after Turgot's, it is extremely likely that Turgot discussed or circulated his argument with Rayneval and Vergennes prior to its formal submission to the king and council. Rayneval's "Reflections" neatly sidesteps the question of a British threat to French and Spanish colonial holdings that Vergennes based his initial advocacy upon and which Turgot so ably dismissed. Instead, the body of "Reflections" considers the nature of potential French support to the insurgents, when France should openly aid the Americans, and what France could expect to gain from the campaign. Rayneval repeated Bonvouloir's inflated estimates of American troop strength, assessing that the Americans could hold their own against smaller numbers of British regulars and German soldiers fighting in the British army. By the foreign ministry's estimate, America required military supplies and a navy.[109]

Rayneval proposed exchanging munitions and other war materiel for American raw goods while using private merchants to give the French state a layer of plausible deniability. He estimated that the Americans might not require significant financial

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[108] Joseph-Mathias Gérard de Rayneval, "Reflections on the Situation in America," memorandum, April 1776 in Giunta and Hartgrove, *Documents of the Emerging Nation*, 26. Dull believes that Rayneval's work was "presented to the committee on or shortly after 6 April." Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 36.

[109] Rayneval, "Reflections," 26.

support, and that France could "modify" the revolution's monetary requirements, providing "those things that they might require from foreign countries" in place of cash, whenever possible. Last, Rayneval recommended transferring French merchant ships to the colonists that might be retrofitted for war, using Saint-Domingue as a transfer point and cut-out to limit French government exposure.[110]

In assessing the proper timing of open support to or alliances with the colonies, Rayneval revisited "Considerations" by emphasizing that France should avoid any binding commitments to the Continental Congress. Instead, France should give the impression that an overt partnership "could be set, at the latest, for the end of the next campaign." This would place France "in a position to strike decisive blows when matters appear to her sufficiently favorable for that action."[111] This demonstrated the French government's willingness to embrace a general war approach to unconventional warfare, where the *Ancien Régime* intended to expand covert efforts into overt war on its own terms—not those of the Americans or of the British.

In examining the benefits of French support to the revolution, Rayneval spilled the most ink in emphasizing that France could have much to lose by remaining neutral through the conflict. Whether Britain won or lost in America, every eventuality led to war between Britain and France, with Britain likely to focus efforts against French or Spanish

[110] Rayneval, "Reflections," 26-27.

[111] Ibid., 27.

colonial holdings.[112] With this reasoning, France ought to strike as soon as it had amassed adequate strength to challenge Britain.

Absent direct mention in both "Considerations" and "Reflections" was the ongoing tension between Spain and Portugal. Turgot's memorandum, on the other hand, identified Spain as the most likely actor to ignite an Anglo-Bourbon war. France received an October 1775 request that the Bourbon powers jointly threaten war against Portugal in response to a South American border dispute between Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Louis XVI and Vergennes rejected the proposal, knowing full well that it would lead to a broader European war with England obligated to assist Portugal and France aiding its Bourbon ally.[113] Turgot wrote that Spain had

> perhaps too great a confidence in its forces, an exaggerated idea of the embarrassments which England is causing her quarrel with her colonies, together with the resentment which the King of Spain maintains against the English nation, could bring this crown to steps which would not only furnish England with excuses, but which, perhaps, would force the British Ministry to wage war against her inclination.[114]

Ferreiro argues that preventing a Spanish-Portuguese war before either Spain or France was capable of fighting Britain was the center of Vergennes's calculations in 1776 and that support to the American rebels provided Spain an outlet without immediate risk of a

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[112] Rayneval, "Reflections on the Situation in America," 28-29.

[113] The Bourbon Family Compact established "unusual treaty obligations," which would require France to support Spain even in an offensive war. See Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 111.

[114] Turgot, "Mémoire," 569.

European war.[115] The absence of the Iberian conflict in either memorandum weakens Ferreiro's thesis, though "Considerations" was delivered to the French ambassador to Madrid, who shared the document's premise, if not the text itself, with the Spanish foreign minister.[116] Given his harsh criticism of the dangers posed by Spain, Turgot's memorandum was likely meant for internal debate only, whereas both Vergennes's and Rayneval's works were intended for dissemination to the Spanish court.

On the matter of provisioning military supplies, Rayneval wrote that France "would require an intelligent merchant, faithful and discreet, in each of the ports where the Americans should call."[117] This was likely a thinly-veiled reference to Beaumarchais, though discretion was hardly Beaumarchais's strong suit. In the American Revolution, Beaumarchais envisioned an opportunity to regain his citizenship and some semblance of his reputation in the French court, as well a chance to profit, all wrapped in a cause in which he believed.[118]

In an October 1775 letter to the king, Beaumarchais proposed establishing a trading company that could receive French government funds to be spent on munitions and military supplies for the Americans, who would in turn provide tobacco in

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[115] Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 87-90. Hardman also cites a Spanish "pressure for action" and material support to the American revolutionaries as a substitute for Spain's "impossible demands." See Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 111.

[116] Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 31.

[117] Rayneval, "Reflections," 26.

[118] Morton and Spinelli, *Beaumarchais and the American Revolution*, 327.

exchange.[119] In May of the following year, Louis XVI approved the establishment of the company, which Beaumarchais styled "The Roderigue Hortalez and Company." The following month, Beaumarchais received a one-million livre investment from Versailles and a matching one from the Spanish crown shortly thereafter.[120] With his decision to financially and materially support the American Revolution through a shell corporation, Louis XVI stepped beyond neutrality and beyond a gray area of willful ignorance with regards to American merchant activities in French ports. Though the one million livres supplied by France were, in Hardman's words, "less than Marie-Antoinette had spent on balls in the previous year," the king had set his country down a path that it would be successively less practicable to abandon.

French strategy nested neatly within the first two phases of contemporary US unconventional warfare doctrine. Under Choiseul, France had monitored the situation in America since 1763, awaiting the opportunity to turn a British family squabble to France's advantage. As the conflict continued to escalate, Vergennes relied upon reporting through agents in Britain to describe developments across the Atlantic. The *Ancien Régime* made incidental initial contact with the American insurgency through Beaumarchais and deliberately dispatched an emissary to ascertain the rebel's viability for success with or without French aid. In Beaumarchais, Louis XVI had a ready-made

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[119] Beaumarchais to Louis XVI, October 1775 in Shewmake, *For the Good of Mankind*, 75-81.

[120] The Livre was the *Ancien Régime*'s currency, literally French for 'pound.' In 1775, 23.5 livres was worth one British pound. See Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 340. For the receipt for the initial Bourbon investment in Roderigue Hortalez, see Beaumarchais, "Paris 10 June 1776" receipt in Shewmake, *For the Good of Mankind*, 134.

cut-out. By all indications, no one from the French court had planted any ideas in the mind of the playwright—he dreamed his scheme up himself while spending time with Americans and British opposition figures in England. Beaumarchais was a celebrity, but he was not the sort of figure whose fall would create significant problems at court, and Louis XVI could maintain some degree of plausible deniability regarding his actions. Perhaps most importantly, Beaumarchais was both convenient and cheap, a necessity for a government operating on significant financial constraints. He had a plan and asked for an initial investment—not a gift—from the crown and pledged a return on the investment. The decade-long French efforts to maintain an understanding of developments in North America enabled French covert support that disrupted British attempts to reassert control of its colonies.

Unfortunately for the *Ancien Régime*, French strategy regarding the American Revolution was inadequately articulated in May 1776 and placed undue emphasis on the inevitability of an open war with Britain. French ministers never considered the possibility that their objectives of protecting their colonies and disrupting British maritime dominance might be achievable through support to the Americans alone, without a wider Anglo-Bourbon war. French planning accepted the assumption that war was unavoidable and sought ways to increase French advantage in that war instead of looking for ways in which the *Ancien Régime* might avoid a costly overt war.

CHAPTER 4

THE MAKING OF THE FRANCO-AMERICAN ALLIANCE, MAY 1776-FEBRUARY 1778

From Louis XVI's decision to render aid to the Americans in May 1776 until February 1778, France implemented a policy of covert materiel assistance to the Continental Army. In addition to the funds delivered using Beaumarchais as an intermediary, France provided direct monetary aid to the American commissioners to assist with their procurement of military supplies. From spring 1776 until fall 1777 there was neither news of American victories nor indicators of conclusive British successes. The war was going as France had initially hoped—though Britain had the upper hand, it had been unable to destroy Washington's army.

By late 1777, the conflict was protracted and was clearly damaging to Britain in political, economic, and military terms. This is not to imply that the British were 'losing' or that the Americans were 'winning' in the objective military sense but that Britain was embroiled in an insurgent conflict that, in the opinion of William Howe, the British army's commander-in-chief, was bound to last at least through 1778.[121] Initially identifying Massachusetts as the hotbed of American radicals, the British first sought to coerce New Englanders into obedience. When this failed in 1775, Britain focused on

[121] Howe, in correspondence with Henry Clinton, his second-in-command, expressed his belief that the war would not be concluded in 1777 and required another year, at least. His request for reinforcements support this assessment—troops request could not be fulfilled for at least six months from time of request. William B. Willcox, ed. *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of 1775-1782* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971), 62.

seizing key population centers in New York, Newport, and Philadelphia.[122] Howe requested twenty-thousand additional troops for his 1777 campaign, with would allow him to trap and force decisive battle with Washington's army. In the end, the British army received only one third of the reinforcements that Howe has requested.[123] If the request for additional, sizeable bodies of troops was not proof enough of the protracted nature of the war, the inability of the British government to fulfill the request provided the impetus for Howe to delay his 1777 campaign and to shift his focus from a land campaign to fix and finish Washington's forces. Instead, Howe planned to move by sea to take Philadelphia, which effectively isolated each of the three main elements of the British army—one invading from Canada, one garrisoned at New York, and Howe's force seizing Philadelphia.[124] All of these developments ought to have been heartening to Louis XVI and Vergennes. The war was growing in length, requiring more troops and more ships, and Anglo-American commerce had diminished significantly.

Then, in succession, the Continental Army won a decisive victory at Saratoga in October, Britain sought to open negotiations with the Americans, a crisis over the succession of the ruler of Bavaria threatened to pull France into a continental war in January 1778, and the *Ancien Régime* completed its naval rearmament program. These

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[122] Jeremy Black, "British Military Strategy," in Donald Stoker, Kenneth J. Hagan, and Michael T. McMaster eds. *Strategy in the American War of Independence: A Global Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 58-61. See also Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 109-112.

[123] Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783*, 116-118.

[124] William B. Willcox, "Too Many Cooks: British Planning before Saratoga," *Journal of British Studies* 2, no. 1 (November 1962): 56, 68.

factors coalesced to make an alliance treaty with the Americans the preferred action for Louis XVI. France transitioned from a limited, UW-based effort which aimed to disrupt British strategy to a general war designed to overthrow the British government in America completely.

Appointed the first official emissary to France on behalf of the American cause, Silas Deane was charged with engaging Louis XVI's government for material support and exploring the potential for a commercial treaty or alliance.[125] In this capacity, he picked up the relationship with Beaumarchais where Arthur Lee had left off, and the French playwright and the former Connecticut Congressman were instrumental in supplying the Continental Army for the 1777 campaign season. In March 1777, the first of Beaumarchais's ships, the *Mercure*, arrived in New Hampshire, bearing twelve thousand muskets, gunpowder, and blankets. The *Mercure* and the ships that followed were instrumental in swelling the number of effective soldiers in the Continental Army and directly enabled American success at Saratoga.[126]

Despite the apparent efficacy of Beaumarchais's efforts, Louis XVI had second thoughts within months of approving the concept for Roderigue Hortalez, the shell company designed to funnel funds and materiel to the Americans. "I would like to finish the business of this man who would play us a few tricks in the long run," the king wrote

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[125] Committee of Secret Correspondence to Silas Deane, March 3, 1776, in *The Deane Papers,* 4 vols., edited by Charles Isham (New York: New York Historical Society, 1887), 1:123-126.

[126] Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 70-73.

to Vergennes regarding Beaumarchais.[127] It is apparent that Louis XVI felt sullied by supporting insurgents against the British crown through the playwright's shell company. Perhaps due to their Declaration of Independence, the king was more comfortable with direct discourse with the Americans, as Louis XVI authorized an interest-free loan of two million livres to the Americans in January 1777.[128] Despite the king's desire to keep Beaumarchais at arm's length, Vergennes authorized an additional one million livres to keep the shell company solvent. Beaumarchais initially promised to not only cover his own operating costs but also to earn a profit for the French crown by exchanging war materiel for raw goods from America. He seriously underdelivered from the perspective of a financial return on investment. Owing either to poor communication or to duplicitousness on the part of the Americans, Roderigue Hortalez never received the tobacco that had been promised as payment. Despite the cost overruns, the materiel that French and Spanish governments procured had a significant impact on Continental Army operations over the following year.[129]

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[127] Louis XVI to comte de Vergennes, 28 October 1776, Electronic Enlightenment, "Electronic Enlightenment Project Scholarly Edition of Correspondence," University of Oxford, accessed October 4, 2018, http://www.e-enlightenment.com/item/gravchVF3640095a1c.

[128] American Commissioners to the Secret Committee of Correspondence, January 17, 1777, in Willcox, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 23:194-198.

[129] In an illustration of the fiscal hazard of dealing with insurgents, Beaumarchais understood that the Continental Congress would exchange tobacco, in lieu of gold or silver, for the materiel that *Roderigue Hortalez* provided. Deane shared Beaumarchais's understanding, but his letter to Congress introducing the arrangement claimed that everything that Beaumarchais "says, writes or does is in reality the action of the Ministry." This created an unshakeable belief on the part of Congress that anything from *Roderigue Hortalez* was a gift, courtesy of Louis XVI. Morton and Spinelli,

In August 1776, Vergennes received word of the American Declaration of Independence. Shortly thereafter, he penned another memorandum and presented it to a council consisting of himself, the king, Maurepas, Sartine, and Saint-Germain. This memorandum advocated a far more aggressive stance by the Bourbons toward Britain. Vergennes attempted to employ Spanish malice toward Portugal in support of French objectives, suggesting that Carlos III might initiate a war with Portugal on grounds that the French minister previously sought to dissuade Spain from using as pretext for war. According to Vergennes, once this Iberian war began, Britain would have to declare for Portugal and "France, then showing herself only in the character of an auxiliary, while doing her utmost, plays the part of a Power faithfully and exact in fulfilling its engagements."[130] As usual, the memo reemphasized the inevitability of war and argued that the time was ripe for the Bourbons to jointly begin their war against Britain. The council approved the memorandum and Vergennes sent it onward to his Spanish counterpart.[131] Hardman argues that this blusterous document was meant to gauge Spanish reaction, as Vergennes wrote simultaneously to the French ambassador to Spain that "nothing in the moment could justify war…what could we desire more than England

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Beaumarchais and the American Revolution, 62. For the king's discomfort with Beaumarchais, see Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 115.

[130] Vergennes, "Considerations read to the King in Committee on the course to be taken with regards to England," memorandum, August 31, 1776, in B. F. Stevens, *Facsimiles of Manuscripts in European Archives Relating to America, 1773-1783: With Descriptions*, *Editorial Notes, Collations, References and Translations* (London: Maltby & Sons, 1891) 9:897.

[131] Doniol *Histoire de la participation de la France à l'établissement des Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, 1:567-578.

should fight against herself?"[132] Furthermore, the Spanish foreign minister's answer to Vergennes asked for more details from the French council's deliberation of the document, implying that the French court submitted the memorandum to its ally in an incomplete fashion.[133] Spain proved unenthusiastic about an overt war, and responded as such.

Even after naval rearmament was complete, the French ministers required Spanish participation to be able to match the size of the British fleet.[134] At a strategic level, Spain's tepid response to an overt war against Britain ought to have inspired one of two French approaches: on the one hand, Louis XVI could halt, or at least better conceal, aid to the Americans. If the French ministry truly feared British military action and knew that Spain would be unenthusiastic about war, halting France's ill-disguised aid to the rebels should have been the French court's primary recourse. Alternatively, realizing that it was the focal point of desire for war with Britain, France could double down on its support to the Americans. If a wider war were both inevitable and fast-approaching, France might as well expand support to increase the Continental Army's ability to sap British strength. Louis XVI chose the latter course, opting to provide the Americans with a direct infusion of cash in January 1777.

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[132] Hardman, *Life of Louis XVI*, 121-122.

[133] Pablo Jerónimo Grimaldi to Vergennes, 1776, quoted in Hardman, *Life of Louis XVI*, 122.

[134] Although the French navy could match the British in early 1778, in terms of numbers of manned ships of the line, France would not be able to hold the advantage for more than a year, without Spanish support. Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 97-99.

The American victory and a lack of aggressive action by the British in the face of ill-disguised French support to the insurgents provided three general paths for Louis XVI in winter 1777-1778. First, France could maintain the flow of aid to the Americans and allow the military situation to develop, unless Britain threatened France with war. The financial cost of French aid to the Americans was tiny, paling in comparison to the expenditures required to rebuild the French navy to a level where it was capable of challenging Britain.[135] Second, France could cease supporting the Americans, perhaps extracting some form of concessions from Britain in exchange for diligently ensuring that no war material bound for America left either France or its Sugar Islands. Third, France could seek a commercial treaty with America, subsequently growing to an alliance and overt war against Britain.

If France hoped to keep its aid to the Americans clandestine, Beaumarchais was a poor agent to execute its policy. At minimum a minor celebrity in France, and certainly a known commodity to British diplomats, he attracted the attention of British intelligence wherever he went. He fraternized with William Nassau, Earl of Rochford, a long-serving British diplomat, who had worked as the British ambassador to both France and Spain. Before retiring in 1775, Rochford had served as Britain's Southern Secretary, responsible for the coordination of policy toward the Bourbon powers. Rochford was relatively moderate in his approach toward the Bourbon powers and toward unrest in America.[136]

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[135] Dull's estimates that the "minimum probable expenditures" of the French Navy in 1777 and 1778 were 47 and 59 million livres, respectively. Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 349.

[136] Until 1782, when the British Foreign Office centralized responsibility for the country's foreign relations, the country had two ministries with domestic and foreign portfolios. The Southern Secretary was responsible for policy toward Catholic and

While this interaction made Beaumarchais more useful from an intelligence perspective, it also made him about as far from a low-profile figure as the French could find to coordinate assistance for the Americans.

Arriving at the French port of Le Havre in December 1776, ostensibly to supervise loading of Roderigue Hortalez's first ship, Beaumarchais failed to keep a low profile. Though he traveled under a pseudonym, Beaumarchais assisted the local theater's production of one of his plays. His presence at Le Havre, combined with the ill-disguised loading of ships with war materiel, made a January 1777 story in the London Chronicle and prompted an angry exchange between the British Ambassador, Lord Stormont, and Vergennes.[137] The French minister flimsily repudiated the accusation of a coordinated French effort to supply the Americans, but sent an emissary to the port to stop Beaumarchais's ships from departing and to comply with British demands, thus delaying Roderigue Hortalez's first delivery.

France thus performed a balancing act, intending to maximize the disruptive effect of the American Revolution to British interests while staying beneath the threshold of provocation that would elicit a reciprocal British military response. In this regard, Beaumarchais's penchant for the spotlight and the American commissioners' poor

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Muslim powers, while the Northern Secretary was responsible for diplomatic relations with Protestant countries. Until 1782, the Secretary of State for the Colonies was responsible for implementing colonial policy. Scott provides an account of the changing of the guard in Britain, which, while nowhere near as Byzantine as the changing ministers and ministries within the *Ancien Régime*, was remarkably complicated. Unlike his French counterpart, George III did not hold a monopoly on deciding appointments. H. M. Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 217-217.

[137] Morton and Spinelli, *Beaumarchais and the American Revolution*, 85-86.

choices in administrative staff proved extraordinarily unhelpful. Throughout his life, Beaumarchais possessed an insatiable thirst for publicity. The extent to which he was known by Louis XVI's ministers indicate that he was not chosen for his discretion. Having already met with some American colonial representatives in London and possessing a high level of motivation, it seems that Beaumarchais was simply in the right place at the right time—the most convenient agent available to the French crown.

However, though Beaumarchais's magnetic attraction to publicity was disruptive for Vergennes, far more damaging was the extent to which British intelligence penetrated the American diplomatic mission. Three of Franklin, Deane, and Lee's primary administrative staff were, at one time or another, active British agents, while a fourth met with British officials without the American commissioners' knowledge.[138] This meant that the British government was privy to every interaction that the American mission had with France and the commissioners' correspondence with the Continental Congress. That Britain never responded militarily, despite its full knowledge of French support to the Revolution, was a validation of Vergennes's UW approach.

By mid-1777, French material support and the potential for French intervention helped keep the American cause afloat, thus prolonging the war for Britain. London was well aware of France's support to the American separatists but found itself in a conundrum, having no option, short of threatening war, to stop French support.[139] The October 1777 American victory at Saratoga shocked both Britain and France. The British

[138] Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*, 77-78.

[139] Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 243.

defeat brought the relief of its army and navy commanders in America, sowed turmoil within the British ministry, and brought about a reappraisal of British strategy. Troop requests for the campaign increased significantly, but London could spare relatively few soldiers, dispatching a meager 3,000 to join the army in Philadelphia while sending another force to shore up defenses in Canada.[140]

This was a critical moment for France's UW campaign. By all outward indicators, the *Ancien Régime* could gain the most and risk the least by continuing to fan the flames of the conflict without intervening directly. Britain had yet to impose any cost for France's meddling, and the American victory at Saratoga was a potential indicator that French aid was working. Until this point, France had executed a limited war UW effort without exposing itself to significant risk of a broader war.

The American victory at Saratoga occupies a central place in the myth of the French intervention in the American Revolution. At face value, one event followed another—news of the American victory reached France, and the two parties soon began official treaty negotiations. Beneath France merely wanting to pick a sure winner in the conflict lie successively deeper explanations. There are three general arguments for the alliance: one driven by a fear of peace terms between Britain and France, one that the expanded war was preordained by earlier French policy, and one that Louis XVI opted to escalate the war directly to avoid a potential conflict in Europe. In the first, Franklin and the Americans were catalysts for the treaty negotiations and hoodwinked the French government into making a deal by pretending that Anglo-American rapprochement was

[140] Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783*, 155-156.

at hand.[141] In the second telling, Vergennes is the primary actor, and French entry into the war in early 1778 is a byproduct of his continued narrative that Anglo-Bourbon war was inevitable and predicated on when the French naval buildup would be complete.[142] Dull argues that, as early as 1776, the French identified early 1778 as the most opportune time to open hostilities with Britain, as it would allow ample time for French naval rearmament. The American victory at Saratoga was fortuitous timing, and it added to the justification for intervention, but to Dull, France's intervention was a foregone conclusion.[143] In a third narrative, Hardman sees the king as a far more clear-eyed figure than most historians give him credit, with a deeper understanding of the political dynamics of Britain than any of his ministers. If the *Ancien Régime* were embroiled in a war in America, France could not be expected to participate in an Austro-Prussian conflict brewing over the succession of the Electorate of Bavaria.[144]

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[141] Alexander Deconde, "The French Alliance in Historical Speculation," in *Diplomacy and Revolution: The Franco-American Alliance of 1778*, eds. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 6-7.

[142] Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*, 57-58, 91. Dull's analysis indicates that Vergennes consciously exaggerated both the threat that Britain posed to Bourbon holdings in the Caribbean and the potential for an Anglo-American rapprochement, specifically to manipulate Louis XVI to adhere to Vergennes's policy aims.

[143] Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*, 91-92.

[144] John Hardman, "Louis XVI, Vergennes and the American Independence" *Bulletin du Centre de recherche du château de Versailles*, accessed 29 September 2018, https://journals.openedition.org/crcv/14051#ftn10. After the death of the Bavarian Elector, Austria quickly invaded Bavaria and inked an agreement with the elector's heir to annex the territory. This led to the Austro-Prussian War of Bavarian Succession, where Frederick II invaded Bohemia in response. There was little actual fighting over a year of declared war between Austria and Prussia and much of the effort centered upon the diplomatic exchange between Frederick and the Habsburgs, with Russia and France

On December 7, 1777 Louis XVI approved Vergennes's proposal to officially recognize American independence. Vergennes met with the American delegation in mid-December to notify them of the pending French recognition and France's desire to agree upon treaty terms. Treaty negotiations began in earnest on 8 January 1778, with Conrad Alexandre Gérard, one of Vergennes's deputies, serving as Louis XVI's lead negotiator. After securing an American agreement that a Franco-American treaty would dissuade the Americans from seeking terms with Britain, Gérard announced France's intention to conclude two treaties with the United States: the first a commercial one and the second a treaty of alliance. The treaties were limited to the French half of the Bourbon Family Compact, and terms reached with France would not automatically extend to Spain.[145]

In addition to funding and material assistance, the arrival of professional French army officers significantly advanced the American army's capability. After the Battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775, a trickle of French volunteers came from France, from Canada, and from French islands in the Caribbean to fight alongside the Continental Army.[146] The Continental Congress recognized the lack of professional soldiers within the army and sought to overcome this by finding foreign military engineers who could provide technical expertise. Beaumarchais convinced Deane that the Continental Army

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mediating. Blanning, *Frederick the Great*, 325-331. Vergennes and Louis XVI informed Austria that their treaty did not compel France to come to the aid of the Habsburgs, as this was a war of territorial expansion where Austria was not the aggrieved party. See Murphy, *Charles Graveier, comte de Vergennes*, 295-301.

[145] "The American Commissioners' Interview on January 8 with Gérard," January 9, 1778, in Willcox, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 25:440-449.

[146] Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 122-124.

would also need artillery officers, as the Americans would need technical expertise to employ the cannon that Roderigue Hortalez would be sending.[147] Without specific instructions from America to determine who and how many officers that America needed, Deane loosed a flood of European volunteers, quickly outpacing both the available billets and the desire of the Continental Army to find commands for them.[148] By March 1777, the Continental Congress's Committee of Secret Correspondence went so far as to direct the American mission in France to discourage any more foreigners from coming to America expecting to receive commissions in the Continental Army.[149]

At first glance, the French government seemed generally ambivalent about its officers and men volunteering to fight alongside the Americans, but that opinion soon changed, to the benefit of the American war effort. In the wake of defeat during the Seven Years War and the appointment of Saint-Germain as a reforming war minister, the French army had attempted to significantly reduce the size of the officer corps.[150] This idle group of soldiers certainly saw opportunity in the fawning depictions of the American soldiers that ran in leading French newspapers of the time.[151] Not only were

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[147] Beaumarchais to Deane, July 26, 1775 and Deane to Beaumarchais, July 27, 1776. Both in Isham, *The Deane Papers*, 1:164-166.

[148] Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 128-129.

[149] The Committee of Secret Correspondence to the American Commissioners, March 25, 1777, in Willcox, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 23:519–520.

[150] Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 141-142.

[151] An April 1777 issue of the *Gazette de Leyde* gives breathless treatment of Washington crossing the Delaware. Another, from August 1777 quotes a South Carolina solider as saying of Washington that "that this Great Man was born for the salvation of America." 18th Century European Gazettes, *Gazette de Leyde* in Le gazetier universel,

the American soldiers portrayed as hearty fighting men, but Washington, Horatio Gates, and the other Continental Army generals were described as a genteel sort that would not be out of place in France.[152] Also, switching from one country's military to another was a common practice in the period.[153] Four French officers would have an outsized impact on the war and would occupy key seats in Washington's war council as his army wintered at Valley Forge.

One of the most impactful French officers in the Continental Army was Louis Lebègue de Presle Duportail. Duportail led efforts to reform France's engineer corps as part of Saint-Germain's broader reforms. When the American delegation met with Vergennes in December 1776, it specifically requested four military engineers to augment the Continental Army. Saint-Germain selected Duportail, allowing him to pick three other engineers to accompany him, and granting all four men a two-year furlough

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April and August 1777, accessed March 30, 2019, http://www.gazettes18e.fr/gazette-leyde/annee/1777.

[152] Julia Osman, "The Citizen Army of Old Regime France" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2010), 171-174. See also Catherine Prelinger, "Less Lucky than Lafayette: A Note on the French Applicants to Benjamin Franklin for Commissions in the American Army, 1776-1783," *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History, March 14-15, 1974*, ed. Edgar Leon Newman (Las Cruces, NM: New Mexico State University Press, 1974).

[153] For European soldiers as mercenary professionals, prior to the explosion in nationalism, see Peter Paret, "The Relationship Between the Revolutionary War and European Military Thought and Practice in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," in *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays*, ed. Don Higginbotham (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 146.

from the French army.[154] Arriving in July 1777, Duportail spent most of his first six months arguing for the creation of a separate engineer branch, pressing his case the he should be a general officer, and bickering with another French officer to whom Deane had promised command over both artillery and engineers in the Continental Army. The accidental drowning of Duportail's rival eliminated the conflict, and Duportail was eventually promoted to brigadier general and the Continental Congress, through Washington, created an independent engineer department under Duportail's command.[155]

Though Duportail can hardly be credited with saving the American Revolution, his direction of defensive fortifications at Valley Forge helped deter an attack by the British in winter 1778. British forces under Howe occupied Philadelphia, less than twenty-five miles away from Washington's starving army, and could have decided to attack with their 17,000 regulars—outnumbering the Continental Army by almost two to one. Conventional military sense and Howe's conservatism certainly dissuaded any British winter offensive, but Duportail's efforts also served as a deterrent to the British and a provided a confidence boost to the Continental Army.[156]

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[154] Elizabeth Kite, *Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail, Commandant of Engineers in the Continental Army, 1777-1783* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1933), 1-3.

[155] Paul K. Walker, *Engineers of Independence: A Documentary History of the Army Engineers in the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (Washington: Historical Division, Office of Administrative Services, Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1981), 17-21, 34, 36.

[156] John Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 289. For more detail on Howe's decision not to attack see Troyer Steele Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers During the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 299-301.

While Horatio Gates won a decisive victory at Saratoga, Washington lost battles at Brandywine and Germantown, and had to watch the Continental Congress evacuate Philadelphia for York, Pennsylvania. He was under significant pressure from Congress, especially in light of Saratoga, to attack the British in Philadelphia.[157] This was the moment, in November 1777, at which Duportail joined Washington's army and participated in multiple war councils, where the commanding general repeatedly asked the men to submit their written opinion of the "expediency of an attack upon Philadelphia."[158] In his letter considering an offense against Philadelphia, Duportail lightly stroked Washington's ego while strongly dismissing the ability of the Continental Army to defeat British soldiers in a prepared defense, given the American defeat at Germantown:

> the Battle of German Town ought to be a Lesson to us—if our Army had proceeded with vigor on that occasion, would not the English have been completely defeated—The Disposition was excellent—Your Excellency in that instance really conquered General Howe, but his troops conquered yours . . . what would happen before a Line of Redoubts well-disposed in all appearance?[159]

Though his place in history was eclipsed by names like Lafayette and Steuben, Duportail provided valuable technical competence to Washington's council, established Valley Forge, and administered the army's engineers.

Kalb, the aforementioned French spy who reported to Choiseul on developments in the American colonies in 1768, was another leading French general in the Revolution's

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[157] Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 257-258.

[158] Kite, *Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail*, 35-36.

[159] Louis Lebègue de Presle Duportail to George Washington, December 3, 1777 in Kite, *Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail*, 42-43.

early years. Bavarian by birth, he spent three decades in the French service before joining the Continental Army.[160] Charles-François de Broglie, marquis de Ruffec, former head of the *Secret du roi* under Louis XV, commanded an army garrison in Metz in 1776. Ruffec encouraged the retired Kalb to volunteer for American service in 1775 and wrote Saint-Germain to express his endorsement. Saint-Germain re-inducted Kalb into the French army and immediately granting him a two-year furlough from French service to "go abroad and look after his personal business."[161]

In 1775 Lafayette was serving in Ruffec's garrison in Metz, when the Duke of Gloucester, brother of George III, happened to stop for two days on his way to Italy. Lafayette, a nineteen year-old French nobleman, was invited to attend the dinner that Ruffec hosted in Gloucester's honor. Gloucester, who differed politically from his older brother, painted a sympathetic, heroic picture of the American rebellion.[162] Gloucester's views, combined with Ruffec's encouragement, certainly spoke to Lafayette's thirst for glory. Kalb and Ruffec facilitated an interview for Lafayette with Deane, who was quick to recognize the upside of enlisting a French nobleman in the cause, despite the marquis's youth, offered him a major general's commission in the Continental Army. Though Lafayette's family tried to prevent the marquis from going to America, he and Kalb sailed for America together in March 1777.[163]

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[160] Zucker, *General de Kalb, Lafayette's Mentor*, 19-20.

[161] Ibid., 84-85.

[162] Charlemagne Tower, *Marquis de Lafayette in the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1901), 17-20.

[163] Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 130-132.

Ruffec proposed to Deane that a highly-experienced French soldier like himself could serve as a term-limited American commander-in-chief, exercising control over military and foreign policy, in a position intended to be akin to the Dutch stadtholders.[164] Deane dutifully asked the Committee of Secret Correspondence if "a great general of the highest character in Europe, such, for instance, as Prince Ferdinand, Marshal Broglie, or others of equal rank to take the lead of your armies, whether such a step would not be politic, as it would give a character and credit to your military and strike perhaps a greater panic in our enemies."[165] "Ruffec's Intrigue" demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the American independence movement. Ruffec's meeting with the American commissioners to recommend French officers for service apparently came at the direction of Vergennes.[166] However, it is unlikely that Ruffec's scheme had any official approval from Louis XVI or his ministers. It demonstrated a lack of control over France's support to America and it could have easily stoked fears in America of French overreach and driven the Continental Congress closer to a compromise with Britain. If implemented, overall leadership of the American military by a Frenchman would be seen as an act of war by the British and irrefutable aggression by the other European powers. Despite their association with Ruffec and his proposal, both Kalb and Lafayette ascended

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[164] Zucker, *General de Kalb, Lafayette's Mentor*, 94-107.

[165] Deane to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, December 6, 1776, in Isham, *Deane Papers*, 1: 404-405. Deane confused two brothers from the House of Broglie brothers, erroneously referring to the Victor-François, duc de Broglie, when he had been corresponding with Ruffec. Broglie was a Marshal of France and was intended to lead the invasion of Britain in 1779. Ruffec, while also a solider, was known more for his leadership of the *Secret du roi*.

[166] Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 129.

to powerful positions over the course of the war and commanded American soldiers in battle.

Another of the more influential soldiers who came to the Continental Army by way of France was a Prussian, Frederick William Augustus Henry Ferdinand, baron Steuben. Having served under Frederick II and attained the rank of captain, Steuben was jobless in spring 1777. A friend of the French war minister, Steuben sought, and received, Saint-Germain's endorsement for his service in the Continental Army. When he met with Franklin, however, the Americans declined to offer him a position because of the earlier deluge of European officers. After this rejection, Steuben volunteered for service in both the French and the Spanish armies, but his offer was not accepted.[167] In summer 1777, Steuben tried again with the Americans. Passing himself off as a lieutenant general, Steuben offered to serve without pay or any commitment of a position, only that he receive the opportunity to offer his services to Washington. Franklin accepted Steuben's offer and Beaumarchais financed the Prussian's passage to America.[168]

At Valley Forge, Washington was initially wary of Steuben, but the Prussian established a quick rapport with two of the commanding general's aides, Johns Stephens and Alexander Hamilton. Through them, he convinced Washington of his expertise, and in March 1778 Steuben was appointed Acting Inspector General for the Continental Army. He implemented a "train-the-trainer approach," writing his own drill regulations and teaching a single company of 100 soldiers the Prussian-inspired close-order drill. The

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[167] John M. Palmer, *General von Steuben* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1937), 89-91.

[168] Ibid., 95-96.

members of this "guard company" could then return to their respective units and serve as instructors, germinating drill proficiency across the Continental Army.[169]

Another French soldier, Irish-born Thomas Conway, recommended to Washington earlier in 1777 that the Continental Army adopt French methods for training and integrating large groups of soldiers in a short time. Steuben employed these French techniques while adding a uniquely American twist. In the words of Ferling, "in Europe, the men were simply told what to do, and they did it. In America, Steuben quickly discovered, it was necessary to tell the men why they were to do something."[170] This seemingly small action was a dramatic innovation on Steuben's part. The Prussian's military experience revolved around conscript armies with a consequence-based model of discipline, where the Continental Army's volunteer soldiers had to be enticed to join the army and to continue fighting

The officers dispatched from France with the tacit support of the crown were far from a contemporary image of Special Forces infiltrating a hostile area and advising an insurgency. They did, however, fulfill many of the same doctrinal roles that would be expected of a sponsor in doctrinal UW. Lafayette, Duportail, Steuben, and Kalb all sat on Washington's council of war, worked to increase the organization's effectiveness, and took part in hostilities against the British. Steuben adapted to the unique requirements of the Continental Army to provide an effective training regimen, while Duportail's technical expertise made him a blessing at Valley Forge. A noble and wealthy

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[169] Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms*, 151-153. For more specifics about Steuben's methods, see Palmer, *General von Steuben*, 140-146.

[170] Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 286-288.

Frenchman, Lafayette became a beloved figure in America because of his willingness to turn his back on an easy life in France in favor of martial glory or the cause of liberty, depending on one's interpretation. Either way, he played a prominent role as a symbol of French support to the insurgent cause.[171] He was the embodiment of Vergennes's earlier desire to nurture "vague hopes" among the Americans of an impending French direct intervention in the war; hope that encouraged the Continental Army to soldier on.[172]

The French officers were not without fault. In October 1777, Conway wrote Horatio Gates, the victor of Saratoga, and voiced his opinion of Washington's poor generalship—implying that Gates ought to replace the commander-in-chief.[173] At this point in the war, Kalb shared Conway's opinion regarding Washington, but the difference was that Kalb had the sense to share his written opinion with Ruffec, his patron in France, while Conway confided in Gates, a Continental Army general who would be the most likely candidate to replace Washington, were the Congress to consider such an initiative.[174] Washington received a copy of Conway's letter and wrote to ask an

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[171] Deane and Franklin requested that the Committee of Foreign Affairs extend the greatest "civilities and respect" to Lafayette because of the Marquis's importance "not only to his powerful Relations and to the Court, but to the whole French Nation." Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane to the Committee of Foreign Affairs, May 25, 1777, in Willcox, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin,* 24:73–77.

[172] Lloyd S. Kramer, "America's Lafayette and Lafayette's America: A European and the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (April 1981): 228-241.

[173] Thomas Conway to George Washington, November 5, 1777," in Frank E. Grizzard, Jr. and David R. Hoth, eds., *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series,* vol. 12 (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 130–131.

[174] Kalb to Broglie, September 24, 1777 in Kapp, *The Life of John Kalb*, 124.

explanation. Conway's response was that he had been misquoted, but he defended himself by arguing that he had no malicious intent against the commander, that Washington's aides-de-camp might be conspiring against Conway, and that the army benefitted from an open dialogue between general officers, as "from this intercourse of ideas something useful might arise."[175] The incident, referred to by historians as "Conway's Cabal," contributed to Conway's eventual resignation in 1778 and helped fuel Washington's belief that some of the generals were actively undermining him.[176]

The incident was an indictment of France's approach to supporting America, and demonstrated the lack of centralized control that the *Ancien Régime* exerted over French officers in the United States. The timing was fortunate, in that it occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Franco-American Alliance. In a less opportune moment, accusations of a French officer attempting to have the commanding general relieved might have fueled rapprochement between America and Britain.

All the senior French officers sent regular correspondence back to France regarding the war and the American's chances of victory, each writing his respective

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[175] Thomas Conway to George Washington, November 5, 1777," in Grizzard and Hoth, *The Papers of George Washington*, 12:130–131

[176] In February 1778 Virginia Congressman Patrick Henry sent Washington a letter, attaching an unsigned letter that claimed of that the Continental Army with a "Gates—a Lee, or a Conway would, in a few weeks render them an irresistible body of men." It was unlikely that Conway had any role in this letter, but Washington believed in a conspiracy to the extent that he wrote to Henry regarding the "relentless zeal" of a "cabal" that was dead set on replacing the commander-in-chief. For the original letter, see Patrick Henry to George Washington, February 20, 1778," in Grizzard and Hoth, *The Papers of George Washington*, 14:609-611. For Washington's reply, see Washington to Henry, March 28, 1778," in Grizzard and Hoth, *The Papers of George Washington*, 14:336–337.

patron. Kalb wrote to Ruffec, while Duportail wrote to Saint-Germain. More than any of his achievements during the war, Duportail is most noted for a passage in his November 1777 letter to Saint-Germain, stating that, "There is a hundred times more enthusiasm for this revolution in a single cafe in Paris than in all the united colonies."[177] In the same letter, Duportail also recommended the potential for a French invasion of Canada, since the presence of French troops in the United States would be so objectionable to the American people that it would drive them towards reconciliation with Britain. He finally noted that, "if France does not declare war on England, she must so manage it, by all the means that statecraft employs, that the English cannot have more than 25 to 30,000 men at most" so as to give Washington a chance at victory.[178] Unfortunately, few of Duportail's letters to the French War Secretaries have survived, but it is likely that each contained updates on the current intelligence picture and his best assessment of the Continental Army to aid French decision-making.[179] This intelligence was a form of support that the French volunteers provided to Louis XVI's government, but there are no indicators that the information was shared in an effective manner. Kalb's dispatches to Ruffec were likely shared in selective fashion with Vergennes both because the foreign

[177] Duportail to Saint-Germain, November 12, 1777, in Arthur P. Watts, "A Newly Discovered Letter of Brigadier-General Duportail," *Pennsylvania History* 1 (April 1934): 103-106.

[178] Ibid., 105-106.

[179] Kite quotes a passage from a mid-1778 Duportail letter to Montbarey that the letters Duportail had sent earlier must have been lost at sea or captured. Kite, *Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail*, 59.

minister and former head of the *Secret* were friends and because Ruffec would have wanted to maximize his influence with the French court.[180]

Though Duportail and Kalb were hand-picked to volunteer for American service, there is no evidence of a coordinated effort to employ French volunteers to steer the American Revolution in a course that would be most advantageous to France. Among the French officers who sat on Washington's war council, Lafayette's aggressive and offensive-focused mindset was an aberration. Duportail, Kalb, and Steuben had far more patient and conservative attitudes toward American objectives, and all counseled a deliberate approach that, especially before the French army joined the fight in 1780, focused on the survival of the Continental Army. This approach generally reflected French priorities, where the worst-case scenario was a total collapse of Washington's army, which would allow Britain to turn its undivided attention towards France. Short of a complete military defeat, France feared the Americans reaching a private settlement with Britain, enabling either unilateral British or combined Anglo-American aggression towards France. The presence of senior French officers in Continental Army uniforms served as a deterrent to a settlement and as a symbol for a measure of French resolve—before and after a Franco-American alliance was established.[181]

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[180] After Vergennes was recalled from his post as French representative to the Ottomans, Ruffec continued to consult him on matters relating to Turkey and Eastern Europe, evidence of a longstanding relationship. Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes*, 175.

[181] Before he was dispatched to America, Rochambeau commanded units training for the planned cross-channel invasion of England. Though he was not selected for overall command of the force, Rochambeau was to command the landing force that would secure the beachhead and allow successive waves of Spanish and French soldiers to land. Arnold Whitridge, *Rochambeau* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1965), 54-61. Rochambeau never evinced the desire to volunteer for service in the American army. He

It is impossible to tell what might have happened in the American Revolution without French support between 1776 and 1778. It seems clear that the infusions of arms and experienced officers increased the cost of the conflict for the British. However, by late 1777, Louis XVI had determined that he was no longer content to prolong the war for Britain, and an overt French war was necessary. France rebuilt its navy, at enormous cost, at the same time it was supplying the Americans. The year 1778, with the British reeling from their defeat at Saratoga, might well have been the *Ancien Régime*'s last opportunity to strike Britain before George III could make a face-saving diplomatic deal or turn the conflict back to his advantage.

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was an experienced soldier and an actual general officer in the French army—he would have outranked all of the other volunteers, who were younger and tended to inflate their French rank, while in America.

CHAPTER 5

FRANCE TRANSITIONS FROM SPONSOR TO ALLY

French action after the Franco-American Alliance cannot be considered unconventional warfare. France, arguably the second-most powerful country in the world at the time, openly recognized the United States as an independent country and signed a treaty with America as a coequal. This action marked the transition away from UW—external state support to a non-state insurgent actor—and toward regular war within an alliance structure. As a result, this chapter will not examine the progression of the war from 1778 until its 1783 conclusion in detail. However, the conduct of French strategy produced three central consequences that are deeply intertwined with the preceding two years of UW. The first was the cost for France of not securing Spanish participation in the war before entering into an alliance with the United States. Getting Spain to ultimately join the war forced France to significantly widen the scope of the conflict. The second component was an inadequate French understanding of American politics, brought about by insufficient French efforts to understand the political terrain prior to the alliance. This created many obstacles to French efforts to guide the war in coherent fashion. The third was the introduction of French troops under Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, enabled in part by the history of French volunteers and Washington's high opinion of them.

With the French signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce and the Treaty of Alliance, the die had been cast. Though the latter treaty remained secret for a time, the former's terms stipulated French recognition of America as an independent state and

granted each other most favored nation trading status.[182] Due to the penetration of the American mission, the British government was privy to the negotiations between America and France, but feigned ignorance and shock when Vergennes announced the treaty to the British ambassador at Versailles in March 1778.[183] Spain was genuinely surprised by the announcement of treaties because of its repeated and forceful rejection of joining in overt entry into the war when France floated the idea in 1776 and 1777.[184]

France entered the war hoping to gain decisive victory by destroying the British fleet in North America and blockading the British army in New York.[185] In the absence of a French triumph, and knowing that France was unlikely to be able to maintain naval parity with Britain for more than a single year, Vergennes hoped that Spain would soon join the war. The combined Bourbon fleet ought to be enough to defeat Britain at sea, sealing the fate of George III's army in America.[186] Under the Family Compact, each Bourbon power was obliged to provide twenty ships of the line, six frigates, and more than 10,000 soldiers, if either was attacked.[187] However, Spain knew well that France

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[182] The United States of America and the most Christian King, Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and France, Paris, 6 February 1778, in *Treaties Between the United States of America and Foreign Nations*, 12-31.

[183] Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*, 98.

[184] Frank W. Brecher, *Securing American Independence: John Jay and the French Alliance*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 100. See also Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 86.

[185] Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*, 107.

[186] Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 135.

[187] Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 11.

had picked this fight with Britain, and Carlos III was especially reluctant to enter the conflict before the Spanish treasure fleet had returned from America in June 1778 with a cargo of silver from the Spanish colonies' booming mines.[188] Furthermore, the Spanish king felt that his pride, and thus the prestige of the Spanish state, had been wounded by France's leaping into this alliance despite the clear concerns of its closest European ally.[189] Spain intended to remain neutral for as long as possible and thus stalled, even agreeing to a British request that Spain mediate the conflict.[190] Spain's dalliance allowed the country to wait until 1779 to enter the war in earnest.

Though Spain had been an early supporter, through Beaumarchais's shell company, of the American Revolution, France failed to integrate its plans with those of Spain. Part of the Spanish reluctance to more broadly support the Americans was due to the problematic nature of recognizing the independence of a breakaway colony in the Western Hemisphere. Spain's empire was built on American bullion, and acknowledging the newfound sovereignty of the United States seemed a slippery slope that might lead to the dissolution of the Spanish empire.

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[188] Murphy, *Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes*, 262. What were once large Spanish fleets sailing annually from the Western Hemisphere back to Spain were, had by early eighteenth-century, decreased to one every two or three years. The Spanish crown's ability to make war was heavily dependent on the gold and silver extracted from mines in the Central and South America. In 1761, Carlos III entered the Seven Years War only after 16 million pesos in silver arrived, convincing him that Spain had enough cash to fight. Timothy R. Walton, *Spanish Treasure Fleets* (Sarasota, FL: Pineapple Press, 1994), 165, 173.

[189] Corwin, *French Policy and the American Alliance of 1778*, 174-176.

[190] Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 113-114.

Spain's central preconditions for entering the war included a cross-channel invasion of England and the ejection of Britain from every portion of the Americans, save Canada.[191] These actions were entirely contrary to Vergennes's view of requirements for a sustainable balance of power. From a French perspective, the war ought to be fought and won in America—or at least in the Western Hemisphere. By enabling U.S. independence, France would topple a principal pillar of British economic dominance. This would right the balance of power, delivering a sustainable outcome that would not invite another war in subsequent years. A cross-channel invasion could antagonize other European countries, who would turn on the Bourbons.[192] Unfortunately for Vergennes, France had no recourse but to accept most of Carlos III's demands. The *Ancien Régime* wished to avoid a protracted conflict, and saw Spain as the only possible means by which to secure a quicker victory.

Though mounting a cross-channel invasion of England soon became a pressing matter for France, almost as troubling was the Spanish stance toward the United States. Though Spain was willing to join the war, alongside France, Carlos III was unwilling to recognize American independence until final victory over Britain. This placed France in the awkward position of having to protect Spanish interests with the Americans and American interests when dealing with the Spanish—all while attempting to coordinate

[191] Spanish aims are convoluted. Miralles, the Spanish unofficial representative and spy in Philadelphia suggested to Gerard in 1778 that France ought to seize Canada, while Spain took Florida and other British Caribbean possessions. Corwin, *French Policy and the American Alliance of 1778*, 244-245.

[192] Brecher, *Securing American Independence*, 100. See also Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 140.

operations on both sides of the Atlantic.[193] Spanish objectives were expansive. In America, Spain hoped to expel Britain from everywhere in the Western Hemisphere except for Canada. In Europe, one of Carlos III's central priorities was retaking Minorca and Gibraltar. Spain dangled a willingness to remain neutral in conflict to incentivize Britain to willingly cede Gibraltar or to coerce France into taking part in a joint Bourbon seizure of the island. The French failure to secure Spanish participation in the war prior to the alliance increased the cost for France.[194]

France's difficulty with Spain exposes a principal difficulty in UW, though building and managing coalitions is a generalized component of war when working through an insurgency. Without a coalition, a single state sponsor can exert the maximum level of influence upon an insurgency. However, if a sponsor transitions from limited/UW to general war and continues to advance the cause of creating an independent state for the insurgents, expanding the coalition can become problematic. Coalition states may not support independence for the insurgent, or they may support independence far sooner than the sponsor state believes practicable.

Gérard, the French negotiator, served as France's first ambassador to the United States and arrived with the French fleet in July 1778. What may have appeared a monolithic revolutionary movement on the other side of the Atlantic was actually a

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[193] William C. Stinchcombe, *The American Revolution and the French Alliance* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1969), 35. France's management of both Spanish and American interests was difficult during the initial strategy-making but would prove far more difficult during the peace negotiations with Britain. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of American Independence*, 142.

[194] Dull, *The Miracle of American Independence*, 111-112.

deeply factionalized American political scene. Though the American people of 1778 were relatively homogeneous, their interests were not. Popular enthusiasm at the outbreak of war in 1775 began to wane long before the French fleet reached America. Beneath a veneer of feverish American patriotism that France saw from afar lay an American populace that had yet to coalesce and individual colonies held far more political power than French officials understood.[195]

The Continental Congress reflected these divisions, having a radical and a moderate wing. The former, drawing most of its support from New England, represented the most vociferous advocates for complete independence from Britain. Some of the moderates believed that America might reach an acceptable compromise with George III short of complete independence. Both parties generally welcomed the alliance with France, though a portion of moderates thought it might unnecessarily prolong the war and make reconciliation with Britain more difficult.[196]

The factionalism within the Continental Congress and the war-weariness of the American people, in general, came as a shock to Gérard. After a short honeymoon period, he was quickly acquainted with the peculiarities of American political life. A month after his arrival in Philadelphia, Gérard wrote to Vergennes to illuminate the almost

[195] John Shy, "American Society and its War for Independence," in *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays*, ed. Don Higginbotham (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 78-80.

[196] Stinchcombe, *The American Revolution and the French Alliance*, 18-19. See also John Meng, *Despatches and Instructions of Conrad Alexandre Gerard* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), 92-93.

unworkable divisions between the thirteen states.[197] Gérard was too cozy with moderate Americans while failing to cultivate productive relationships with radicals.[198] He also entangled himself in the Silas Deane controversy, one that pitted the former American commissioner against Arthur Lee, still working as an American emissary to the *Ancien Régime* in 1778. Deane was recalled due to accusations of financial irregularities and the plethora of French officers who he had allegedly promised commissions in the Continental Army.[199] He sailed back to America with Gérard, who he knew well by 1778, to face an investigation by the Continental Congress. Both Gérard and Beaumarchais disliked Lee because of the American's duplicity regarding Spain's contributions to the American Revolution and his regular invectives to American politicians against the French.[200] Though French interests certainly aligned with Deane more than the Francophobic Lee, Gérard's involvement in the dispute and public support for Deane served only to deepen a broader American distrust of France.[201]

That these conditions came as a surprise to the senior French diplomat in America was a demonstration of the poor communication of ground truth to French leaders. Foremost in this failure was a dearth of reporting on domestic political developments in

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[197] Gerard to Vergennes, August 12, 1778 in Meng, *Despatches and Instructions of Conrad Alexandre Gerard*, 206-210.

[198] Stinchcombe, *The American Revolution and the French Alliance*, 45.

[199] Louis W. Potts, *Arthur Lee: A Virtuous Revolutionary* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University State Press, 1981), 194.

[200] Ibid., 213.

[201] Stinchcombe, *The American Revolution and the French Alliance*, 39.

America. For military men of the *Ancien Régime*, confusion was a natural state of mind after exposure to the nascent form of American government. Unlike Vergennes, Gérard had not spent his entire adult life outside of France, but he had served as a diplomat in Austria and Mannheim.[202] This experience abroad, working with foreign governments, ought to have given him a better ability to read local political developments—even if those countries were less politically chaotic than the United States. If a man like Gérard had "volunteered" for service as a civilian in America in the same spirit as a Lafayette or a Duportail, it might not have made French diplomats' jobs any easier, but they certainly would have been better-informed about potential obstacles in the negotiation process.

Spain provided a ready-made template for this sort of mission in Juan de Miralles. Operating from Havana, Spain had conducted extensive intelligence-gathering efforts in British Florida and throughout southern Louisiana in the aftermath of the Seven Years War—mostly focused on ensuring the loyalty of American Indian tribes to the Spanish crown and to monitor potential British encroachment on Spanish territory.[203] Though Spain had funneled money and some materiel to the Americans, both through Beaumarchais and unilaterally, Spanish contacts with the United States were limited to engagements with the American commissioners in Europe or geographically limited to

[202] By Meng's accounting, Gerard spent nine years as a diplomat abroad, most of it in Austria. Mannheim was the capital city of the Electorate of the Palatinate, and it would have been an important assignment for an eighteenth-century French diplomat. Meng, *Despatches and Instructions of Conrad Alexandre Gerard*, 36-42.

[203] Light Townsend Cummins, *Spanish Observers and the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), x.

contacts with Americans in the Florida and Gulf areas.[204] Seeing the drift of France toward an alliance with America in 1777—one that Spain was not ready to support—the Spanish colonial minister sought to cultivate a Spanish source of firsthand informant in the American capital. Miralles was selected for the task due to his status as a merchant and his experience collecting intelligence on the movement of the British fleet in during the Seven Years War.[205]

Miralles arrived in Philadelphia in June 1778 and quickly worked himself into the social circles of leading American politicians. He occupied an ambiguous position—he carried no official status as a Spanish official, though he was clearly lobbying for Spanish interests. Miralles passively collected information through conversation and through local newspapers, which he consolidated and sent back to Havana.[206] Miralles was effective in painting a comprehensive picture of developments in America. An English-speaking Frenchman could, and should, have filled a compatible role in America long before the alliance. An unofficial observer, even one identifiable by British intelligence, could have delivered critical information and would have been no more provocative to England than Beaumarchais's efforts to arm the Americans.

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[204] Arthur Lee traveled to Spain in March 1777 and met with Spanish representatives, who provided the Americans with 400,000 livres and some military materiel to be delivered through New Orleans. Potts. *Arthur Lee*, 169-171.

[205] Cummins, *Spanish Observers and the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, 98-99. For the Spanish requirement for an independent source of intelligence in Philadelphia, see also Buchanan P. Thompson, *Spain: Forgotten Ally of the American Revolution* (North Quincy, MA: The Christopher Publishing House, 1976), 83-85.

[206] Cummins, *Spanish Observers and the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, xi, 117-120.

Despite a lack of a designated Frenchman to report on developments in the American political scene, the French volunteer officers had all the access they needed. Layfayette, Duportail, and Kalb were all members of Washington's war council by early 1778 and had front-row seats for the dialogue between the Continental Army's commander-in-chief and civilian leadership. Even accepting the requirements of a long voyage from America to France for any correspondence, the situation should have been evaluated and relayed. At worst, a contingent of French officers ought to have received Gérard shortly after his arrival in Philadelphia and delivered an inbrief on the political conditions. Fortunately for France, Gérard's replacement was both proactive and resourceful.

There was a natural bias to focus on the evolving military picture and diplomatic developments between America and Britain. The limited reporting would naturally lead to the one convenient mouthpiece on the American political scene: the American commissioners in France. Franklin, Lee, and Deane naturally assumed a diplomat's imperative and attempted to cast their country in the best, and most united, light. This is an omnipresent hazard for UW—the emissaries that the insurgency dispatches will naturally depict the situation as the most hospitable and advantageous for intervention.

Gérard was recalled to France due to illness and his replacement Anne-César, Chevalier de la Luzerne, set sail from France in June 1779. Before he even set foot on American soil, Luzerne gained a better understanding of the American political situation, for sailing with Luzerne and his staff was John Adams, returning to America after Franklin's appointment to lead America's embassy to France. During their voyage, Adams discussed the leading men and the central political issues in the Revolution, and

he specifically warned the French diplomats not to attach their country to a specific faction within the Continental Congress.[207]

Luzerne proved far more active and far more effective than Gérard. The new ambassador established personal relationships with both ends of the American political spectrum, avoiding Gérard's mistake by befriending radicals and moderates alike. Luzerne placed American writers, including Thomas Paine, on Louis XVI's payroll to trumpet French views, as well as paying Continental Army general and congressional delegate John Sullivan to provide the French embassy with timely insider information on political debates.[208]

Luzerne's public diplomacy was especially important given prevailing American sentiment toward the French military by 1780. The American public, and the Continental Army in particular, were deeply disappointed by the initial performance and commitment of the French military. The French fleet got a late start on the 1778 campaigning season but arrived to blockade the British fleet at New York in July. Unable to enter the harbor because New York's channel was too shallow, the French fleet sailed to Newport, Rhode Island, where it was to participate in a combined offensive with the Continental Army against a British garrison in the city.[209]

Newport was a secondary objective, not a confidence target, but less formidable than New York—a ready opportunity to demonstrate Franco-American unity. However,

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[207] Stinchcombe, *The American Revolution and the French Alliance*, 78-79.

[208] Ralph L. Ketcham, "France and American Politics, 1763-1793," *Political Science Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (June 1963): 205-206.

[209] Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 309-310.

the British fleet at New York received reinforcements and sailed to Newport, drawing the French fleet away from their objective and into an inconclusive battle. A storm struck in the midst of the battle, causing both sides to break contact and forcing the French fleet to sail to Boston to refit.[210] The fleet's primary objective was the destruction of the British fleet, so the French navy's actions were reasonable, but this did not stop many Americans from interpreting the event as France abandoning its ally.

From a French perspective, working with the Continental Army was a similarly frustrating experience, as the American attack against Newport was delayed for days as the Continental Army organized the militia required to support it.[211] In Stinchcombe's words, "Although the first attempt at military cooperation was an unmitigated failure, it was not enough to disillusion Americans with their ally."[212] This is faint praise, at best, but France publicly demonstrating its willingness to join the war may have made Americans more comfortable with the subsequent presence of French troops on American soil.

The preponderance of French planning for 1779 focused upon a joint Bourbon invasion of Britain. There was precedent for this, as one of the documents that survived Louis XVI's destruction of his grandfather's *Secret du roi* was an invasion plan dating to Choiseul's ministry, which the Bourbons used as a template.[213] A combined Franco-

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[210] Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 123.

[211] Stinchcombe, *The American Revolution and the French Alliance*, 50-51.

[212] Ibid., 61.

[213] Hardman, *Life of Louis XVI*, 106-107.

Spanish fleet was to destroy or drive away Britain's home fleet, enabling a flotilla of merchant ships to land 40,000 French soldiers. After the landing, the army planned to seize Portsmouth, Britain's most important shipyard. The Bourbon fleet captured one British ship but was unable to confront the British fleet, as a combination of disease and a seven-day storm drove the Bourbons back to port in France.[214] The failed cross-channel offensive was the last attempted invasion of the British home islands during the war, though the largest naval and land battles of the war took place between Bourbon and British forces at Gibraltar.

The participation of both the French navy and the *Ancien Régime*'s army were critical to the eventual success of the Continental Army. Americans had no qualms about accepting French money or supplies. They could stomach the French fleet operating in American coastal waters. The American people had even become accustomed to small groups of French volunteer officers serving in Continental Army uniforms. However, the American attitude toward large groups of French soldiers, fighting under a French flag though in support of the Continental Army, was far less certain. The legacy of the Seven Years War still weighed heavily on the American psyche.[215] Duportail's 1777 dispatch to Saint-Germain said that, while French soldiers were probably required to win the war,

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[214] Agustin Guimera Ravina and Jose Maria Blanco Nunez, "Spanish Naval Operations," in *The American Revolution: A World War*, eds. David K. Allison and Larrie Ferreiro (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2018), 68-71. See also Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 156-157.

[215] Lee Kennett, *The French Forces in America, 1780-1783* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 37-38.

their presence in America would be unacceptable, and that the *Ancien Régime*'s army ought to invade Canada, instead.[216]

In 1778, Lafayette saw potential for glory in leading an invasion of Canada. In light of Washington's reservations regarding the feasibility of such an operation, Lafayette took leave from the Continental Army and set out for France to drum up support for a Franco-American invasion.[217] In July 1779, with the Bourbon invasion of Britain having failed and momentum seemingly lost in America, Vergennes asked both Lafayette and Luzerne about the feasibility of a French army contingent deploying to America.[218] Luzerne arrived at Washington's camp in September 1779 and asked the commander-in-chief if a detachment of the French army augmenting the Continental Army would be agreeable to the Americans. Washington welcomed this initiative, setting the stage for the integration of French army forces the following year.[219]

In February 1780, Louis XVI approved a plan for the *Expédition Particulière*, the moniker by which the expedition became known. Although initial plans called for larger bodies of French troops, the ministers eventually determined that a four-thousand-man

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[216] Louis Lebègue de Presle Duportail to Saint-Germain, November 12, 1777, in Watts, "A Newly Discovered Letter of Brigadier-General Duportail," 103-106.

[217] Louis Gottschalk, *Lafayette Joins the American Army* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 290-291.

[218] Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence*, 155.

[219] Louis Gottschalk, *Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 60-61. Lafayette and Washington continued their correspondence while the former was in France. After his meeting with Luzerne, Washington responded to one of Lafayette's letters, saying that he would welcome the sight of French troops joining the campaign. See Kennett, *The French Forces in America, 1780-1783*, 9.

force would strike the right balance between mass and sustainability.[220] Lafayette provided continuous input during every portion of the planning of the operation—probably much more input than the ministers would have liked. However, his firsthand knowledge of the war and the intimate relationship that he and Washington shared lent his opinions much credibility. Perhaps in an attempt to structure the force in a fashion that would make it easier for him to personally command, Lafayette recommended that the expedition's officers not include any members of the nobility or officers over the rank of lieutenant colonel, so as to work harmoniously with the more egalitarian Continental Army.[221]

Lafayette openly sought to command the expedition, but expressed his willingness to return as a volunteer officer in the American service. Of the requirements of a commander, he wrote

> If the French commander should not know how to deal with the sentiments in Congress and the different sentiments in each state, if he should understand neither the prejudices of the people nor the parties formed in the government, nor the way in which to please the army, nor the proper mode of dealing with the civil authorities—if he should talk to an officer from Boston as he would one from New York, to a member of the Assembly of Poughkeepsie as to one from the self-styled state of Vermont—he would be absolutely sure to give offense, absolutely sure to defeat the purposes of his voyage.[222]

There is no question that Lafayette constantly angled for personal glory. However, his clear understanding of American culture, his ability to articulate this to Vergennes and

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[220] Kennett, *The French Forces in America, 1780-1783*, 9-11.

[221] Ibid., 10.

[222] Lafayette to Maurepas, January 25, 1780, in Gottschalk, *Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution*, 62-63.

Rochambeau, among others, was truly remarkable. French leaders listened to Lafayette, despite his being only twenty-two years old in 1779. In addition to advising Rochambeau on the pitfalls of navigating American culture, he also provided some essential information on items that the French army needed to take on their voyage to America.[223]

Lafayette lusted for command of the *Expédition Particulière*, but Alexandre Marie Eleonor, prince de Montbarrey, Saint-Germain's replacement as war minister, thought Lafayette far too young for the command.[224] To his credit, after delivering all his advice to Rochambeau, Lafayette volunteered to lead an advance party where he would link up with Washington to inform him of the French army's impending arrival, while a quartering party would prepare for Rochambeau's men.[225]

Lafayette, before and after France openly aligned with America, represents an outstanding example of the potential efficacy of individual soldiers executing UW. Though his nobility certainly allowed him access that would have been more difficult for a Frenchman of common extraction, a young man was able to establish himself as a protégé of the Continental Army's commander-in-chief, lead American soldiers in battle, quickly learn the English language and American culture, and serve as the personal representative of the potential for Franco-American relations—nourishing the "vague hopes" that Vergennes has proposed sustaining in 1776.

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[223] Whitridge, *Rochambeau*, 74-75.

[224] Kennett, *The French Forces in America, 1780-1783*, 12-13.

[225] Gottschalk, *Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution*, 69-70.

Even after conferring with Lafayette, Rochambeau took the potential for a poor reception by the Americans seriously enough that he requested ministerial instructions on what to do if his army was unwelcome. Vergennes directed Rochambeau and the French naval commander to sail for the West Indies if not well received. If the Continental Army made amends with Britain and turned on the French completely, Rochambeau could seize Rhode Island, if practicable.[226]

Despite, or perhaps reflecting, this hesitant attitude regarding the American commitment to the alliance, Vergennes issued orders that directed Rochambeau's army to serve under Washington's command:

> The French troops shall be simply auxiliaries, and with this title they shall act only under the orders of General Washington. The French general shall receive the order of the American commander in chief in all things, except what pertains to the internal management of his own troops, which ought to be regulated according to the laws of their own country . . . As the operations must depend on circumstances and local possibilities we forbear to give any instructions on the subject. It must be left to General Washington and his council of war to decide what shall be the most useful.[227]

That the *Ancien Régime* would, in 1780, place a body of its troops under the command of an upstart general in a five-year-old army is truly remarkable. Without the attestations by the French volunteer officers, and Lafayette in particular, it seems unthinkable that Louis XVI would have agreed to this arrangement. Washington did not invoke his ability to

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[226] Kennett, *The French Forces in America, 1780-1783*, 13-14.

[227] Vergennes order to Lafayette, March 5, 1780 in DeB. Randolph Keim, *Rochambeau. A Commemoration by the Congress of the United States of America of the Services of the French Auxiliary Forces in the War of Independence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1907), 269. Lafayette carried a copy of these orders to deliver to Washington and to the president of the Continental Congress, while a second copy was sent separately to Luzerne.

direct French troops, and relied on his influence and good relationship with Rochambeau to make matters work. The two generals would regularly collaborate on strategy by letter or in person, seeking general consensus on what action the combined force should take. When British forces capitulated after the Battle of Yorktown, the British general attempted to surrender to Rochambeau, who refused, calling the French army "only an auxiliary" in America, and directing the British to surrender to Washington.[228]

The combination of the Continental Army and the French army and navy were ultimately successful in defeating British forces. The successful integration of the two armies, American and French, was directly aided by the French officers of the Continental Army—most prominently Lafayette. Without officers of the *Ancien Régime* serving under the American flag before France joined the war, Rochambeau may not have given Washington the same amount of deference. Without Lafayette's counsel, the French ministers might have selected a commander without the humility to allow the Americans to lead. This could have been disastrous, potentially souring the Franco-American relationship and even driving the Continental Congress towards reconciliation with Britain.

The French UW effort established a foundation for actions after the alliance. In the case of Lafayette and the other French officers who worked within Washington's high command, their conduct was extremely beneficial to the subsequent campaign. However, French inattention to their political surroundings forced Luzerne to have to play catch-up

[228] Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, *Memoirs of the Marshall Count de Rochambeau*, *Relative to the War of Independence of the United States*, trans. M.W.E. Wright (Paris: Belin and Co., 1838), 72-73

in order to inform Vergennes and allow Louis XVI to craft policy. Finally, France did a poor job of building its coalition while simultaneously conducting UW. Vergennes anticipated a transition to general war but was ineffective in assimilating Spanish interests into the French plan. Despite this, due in no small part to its employment of UW, France was successful in driving a permanent wedge between America and Britain, successful in prolonging the conflict for George III, and unsuccessful in minimizing the cost of the conflict for the Bourbon powers.

CHAPTER 6

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE APPLICATION OF UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

For two years during the American Revolution France pursued a policy of unconventional warfare, seeking to weaken Britain, while allowing time for the French fleet to rebuild. This was an effective economy of force operation, in which Louis XVI covertly provided funding, war materiel, and some volunteer French officers to the rebels. Taken together, these factors increased the military efficacy of the Continental Army, directly supporting the American victory at Saratoga, while indirectly supporting subsequent combined victory at Yorktown. In working through the insurgents, France minimized financial cost and reduced its exposure to British attack. Before the alliance, French support to America never exceeded the threshold at which Britain would make war.

French UW was successful, within a limited war model, but Vergennes and other French policymakers were fixated on transitioning to general war. France waited for triggers to enter the war, as opposed to evaluating events to see if an overt intervention would support French interests. Had the *Ancien Régime* dispatched more capable people on their initial contact with the insurgents, and had Vergennes centralized reporting from key French volunteers, to include commentary on American political developments, this would have provided a more holistic picture of the war—one that might have stimulated more strategic patience on France's part.

French and Spanish interests converged in the shared desire to use UW to disrupt British strategy. In 1778 Louis XVI embraced of the overthrow of British control in

America—a divergence from Spanish opinion. In failing to adequately consider Spanish interests before signing the Franco-American Alliance, France expanded the scope, cost, and likely the length of the war.

French involvement in the American Revolution was an application of unconventional warfare almost two centuries before the concept was enshrined in American military doctrine. It would be disingenuous to cite 'lessons learned' here, but despite the intervening years, there are some key considerations from the French experience that inform the contemporary application of UW. Ultimately, French UW efforts allowed the French navy to build strength and for France to collaborate with Spain.

The most significant single consideration that the French experience emphasizes is the transition from a limited war scenario, where UW constitutes the primary effort, to a general-war scenario, where the sponsor is engaged in overt war with the enemy regime. This decision has tremendous consequences—the decision to transition from covert to overt war is even more consequential than the decision to begin UW in the first place. It is far more difficult to cut ties with a state ally, however fledgling it may be, as opposed to ceasing support to an insurgency. Whatever the strategic aim, the sponsor must consider a time or conditions-based approach to openly entering a conflict, though it must avoid triggers. In the case of France, Louis XVI arguably articulated that once his naval rearmament was complete, he would enter the war. Though Saratoga was not the primary cause for French entry into the war, the *Ancien Régime* could have set the insurgency's demonstration of unilateral effectiveness as a condition for general war.

In addition to considering the expansion to general war, a sponsor must have an alternate plan for contraction, and even a complete exit strategy. At every opportunity, sponsors ought to seek reasons not to expand a war and must verify whether preestablished triggers are still relevant. For instance, instead of jumping into the Franco-American alliance, fearing potential Anglo-American rapprochement in 1778, France could have reduced or even ceased its support to the United States. It had already prolonged the war and strengthened its navy, making it more capable of defending the Sugar Islands—the French interest that motivated French support to America, in the first place. While reducing its role in America, France could have focused more of its military and diplomatic effort toward a comprehensive strategy with Spain. A consideration of multiple 'ends' for a campaign is helpful, and may prevent a quagmire.

The second consideration is that unconventional warfare must be considered as much a diplomatic endeavor as a military one. After transitioning to general war, France found itself in a difficult position with Spain. Carlos III provided aid to the Americans, both unilaterally and through France. Spain thus embraced UW to disrupt British strategy but was not committed to the overthrow of British rule over America. This became Louis XVI's problem when France entered into the Franco-American Alliance. France needed Spain to win an overt war with Britain and failed to secure Spanish commitment, to that end.

Before and during the early stages of a UW campaign, the integration of other state partners can diminish the sponsor's influence with the insurgents. The insurgency's objectives and broader strategy may change. However, if the sponsor is counting on a transition to general war, it makes the most sense to built the coalition as early as possible

so as to ensure the greatest likelihood that the sponsor will not enter the general war alone. Had France demanded greater Spanish influence in the American war, Spain might have entered the war alongside France in 1778—potentially placing greater emphasis on an American campaign, which France valued, versus a European campaign, which it did not.

Even if the sponsor intends to limit assistance to an insurgency to disruptive or coercive effects on the enemy regime, there is always a chance that the insurgency may succeed in overthrowing or even settling its differences with the constituted government. The sponsor's diplomatic efforts must account for these initiatives and must consider when, and if, it must treat the insurgency as a fellow state. The sponsor also needs to consider the reaction of its allies, evidenced by the Spanish role in the American Revolution. Though Spain was content to fight alongside France, Carlos III was unwilling to recognize American independence, complicating the relationship between the Bourbon allies and America.

The third consideration is that what begins as clandestine or covert action on the part of the sponsor will not remain hidden. In the French example, British intelligence had thoroughly penetrated the American commissioners in France and knew the support that France had delivered and the extent of Franco-American diplomatic negotiations. Even if the American mission had not been so porous, America and Britain could have settled their differences diplomatically at any point during the crisis. The Americans could easily have exposed French efforts, and France might have faced an irate Britain. Assuming that the enemy is aware of the sponsor's action in UW will create more risk-aversion, but it will also help the sponsor stay below the threshold of enemy response.

The fourth consideration are the types of people a government employs to conduct UW. Hand-picking members of the pilot team is especially critical. Since this element will conduct an early, if not initial, contact between the sponsor government and an insurgency, the team must be purpose-built. Besides the contextually-relevant military expertise, it is important that the team include members that understand the diplomatic sphere, and who are forward-thinking enough to foresee international issues that may arise from partnering with a particular insurgent group. All team members must be politically savvy and seek to understand local political dynamics and their consequences for the broader movement. France might have dispatched a Luzerne and a Duportail to American in 1775, allowing them time to understand the political dynamics before submitting their findings. These two would have provided diplomatic acumen and military expertise, enabling them to gather essential information on the political context that would inform the French government.

The French application of unconventional warfare was to unique to its time and place, and any 'lessons' cannot be heedlessly applied to other contexts. However, appreciating the political landscape of allies as well as enemies, ensuring the right people are in place for critical engagements with potential partners, assuming that covert actions will eventually be exposed, and constantly considering the reduction, as opposed to the expansion, of a campaign are critical considerations that can be applied anywhere. The French experience ought to illuminate the timeless viability of supporting insurgencies for limited objectives and at limited cost, so long as the campaign aligns with the sponsor's national interest.

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