A 1782 political cartoon titled *The British Lion Engaging Four Powers* shows a lion confronting a spaniel, representing Spain, a fighting cock, representing France, a rattlesnake, representing America, and a pug dog, representing Holland. (Image originally published by J. Barrow, courtesy of the Library of Congress)

First Alliances

The Importance of Allies and Partners during the American Revolution

Col. Nicholas R. Marsella, EdD, U.S. Army, Retired

America's alliances and partnerships have played a critical role in our national security policy for eight decades, and must be deepened and modernized to do so into the future.

—National Security Strategy

In an era of great power competition, and as reflected in the current *U.S. National Security Strategy* and *National Military Strategy*, leaders and policymakers view alliances and partnerships as critically important to deter war and to win in conflict. Others have questioned the benefit and value of the Nation's alliances and partnerships, specifically in terms of cost-benefit.[1] This divergence of opinions on the value of alliances and partnerships is not a new phenomenon.

Historically, forming alliances and partnerships with other nation-states was viewed with suspicion by both U.S. policymakers and the public. Some viewed alliances as entangling the United States in conflicts of little or no relationship to U.S. national interests, threatening the solvency of the Nation by diminishing its resources in endless wars, or expending American lives in wars that couldn't be justified to the American people. Even George Washington warned of establishing permanent alliances in his farewell address.[2] Yet, American attitudes can shift quickly.

Even after experiencing the benefits of World War II alliances, postwar America was skeptical of entering military alliances. After Winston Churchill's 1946 famous "Iron Curtain" speech calling for a military alliance among the "English speaking peoples," only 18 percent of Americans polled agreed, while 44 percent disapproved of forming a military alliance with England and others.[3] Yet, by 1948, with an aggressive Soviet Union, public opinion would change to where two-thirds of Americans agreed to U.S. participation in a "permanent military alliance" with countries that participated in the Marshall Plan.[4]

Throughout history, the United States has vacillated between isolationism and a foreign policy in which full engagement within alliance and partnership structures are the norm.[5] Yet, among historians and political scientists, there is little doubt that alliances and partnerships are often critical in history. One of the most important alliances and partnerships in American history aided colonial America in achieving its independence from the most powerful "great power" of the day—Great Britain.

Background and Interests

When conflict began between American patriots and British forces in 1775, the major European states took different policy stances based on the outcome and consequences resulting from the Seven Years' War (1756–1763, also known to Americans as the French and Indian War). For Great Britain, the victory in the Seven Years' War meant acquisition of new territory but at a cost—an increased national debt forced Great Britain to downsize its army and navy. To help pay its debt, the British government looked to its colonies to pay their fair share of the costs of the war and for their future defense. In North America, dissent and protests grew into outright rebellion over taxes and the issue of the right of Americans to govern themselves.

American colonial leaders quickly but reluctantly recognized the need for political, military, and economic assistance from external sources. As early as February 1776, John Adams noted in his diary the need for an alliance with France and Spain.[6] Benjamin Franklin went further: "The Army had not five rounds of powder a man. The world wondered that we so seldom fire a cannon; we could not afford it."[7] Washington realized that without a foreign ally such as France to provide supplies, funding, expertise, and military forces—especially to neutralize British naval power's abilities to project forces

Col. Nicholas R. Marsella, EdD, U.S. Army, retired, served in intelligence, foreign area, and education and training positions for nearly thirty years and is now an independent researcher and consultant. As a Department of the Army civilian, he served as the codirector of the Army's Red Team School and led TRADOC's Red Team until 2020. He holds a doctorate in education from the College of William and Mary, an MA in political science/international affairs from Villanova University, and an MSEd from Old Dominion University. He is a graduate of the Army War College and other special training to include the JFK School of Government Senior Fellows Program.

at their own time and place of choosing—success of the revolution could not be assured.[8]

Many scholars, to include Larrie Ferreiro in *Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It*, noted the motivation to pass the Declaration of Independence was in part to gain French and Spanish support for the American "Cause."[9] John Adams noted that given its passage making the united colonies a sovereign power, Congress could make treaties with other nations, especially since "now we were distressed for want of Artillery, Arms, Ammunition, Clothing and even for Flints."[10] On 26 September 1776, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Silas Deane were appointed as commissioners to the Court of France and cautioned that "no Member be permitted to say any Thing more upon this Subject, than that Congress have taken such Steps as they judge necessary for the Purpose of obtaining foreign Alliance."[11]

France, the traditional enemy of Great Britain, lost its possessions of Canada and Louisiana because of the Seven Years' War.[12] French leaders judged the war cost them prestige, power, and influence in Europe as the leading continental land power and arbitrator. The French reasoned that by supporting the American cause, it could weaken British control over its colonies and force it to expend military resources at great financial cost to restore the colonies' loyalty while minimizing British threats to its own valuable colonies in the West Indies.

By May 1776, prior to the declaration, King Louis XVI and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes, were convinced of the value of assisting America and in June provided one million livres in aid—half in equipment and half cash.[13] France, with Spanish assistance, established and funded a fictitious business under the name of Roderigue Hortalez & Co. for the purpose of funneling funds and supplies to the Americans while concealing their source in order to buy time to build up the French navy and prepare for war. While estimates of French (and Spanish) support vary, they were essential—for example, 90 percent of all the arms, weapons, equipment, and clothing used at the critical battle of Saratoga (October 1777) were supplied by covert means.[14]

Americans also needed expertise, especially engineers, and French officers, among many nationalities, offered their services to the American cause. Some colonial leaders were suspicious of their motives to include Washington. Given a steady stream of French officers, Washington wrote to John Hancock in May 1777, "I am afraid we shall never be able to find places vacant, equal to the expectations of the french Gentlemen who are now here, much less for those that will follow."[15] Many officers would offer and provide invaluable service to America, including the Marquis de Lafayette and Louis Antoine Jean Le Bègue de Presle Duportail, Washington's chief engineer.

Don José Moñino y Redondo, Conde de Floridablanca, Pompeo Batoni, circa 1776, oil on canvas, 98 x 75 cm (Painting from the Art Institute of Chicago, courtesy of Wikimedia)

Spain's interests and interaction during the American Revolution were also influenced by the past. Spain entered the Seven Years' War late as an ally of France based on a "family compact" between the two Bourbon kingdoms. Spain began seizing British shipping and consequently Britain declared war on Spain on 4 January 1762—capturing Havana and Manila and defeating Franco-Spanish forces in Portugal and in South America. As a result of its loss, Spain was forced to cede Florida (which included parts of the current states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and all Florida) to England in 1763.

Spain, a major colonial power in the Americas, had little interest in supporting American independence and rebutted French requests to enter the war as their ally as early as 1775. However, with his accession as the new chief minister, José Moñino y Redondo (known simply as Conde de Floridablanca) continued the policy of joint covert assistance and loans in addition to deliveries of military supplies directly from

Europe and through New Orleans. With the king's approval, based on Floridablanca's recommendation, Spain would initially pursue a policy of neutrality. Shortly before 4 July 1776, one million livres were covertly provided as aid by the Spanish ambassador in Paris to purchase arms and supplies needed by the Continental Army.[16]

Floridablanca initially reasoned that pursuing a policy of neutrality and negotiating diplomatically with Britain could enhance Spain's position with Britain for a negotiated return of its lost Seven Years' War territories. The Spanish secretary was also wary of being drawn into an expensive and long war that would increase Spain's dependence on France. Lastly, an independent United States or worse, a reconciled America supported by Great Britain, might expand westward into Spanish colonial territory.

The Dutch Republic remained neutral throughout the Seven Years' War, benefiting from its commercial exchanges with both Britain and France. Dutch merchants had long maintained commercial interests in North America with American ships loading gunpowder, muskets, and cannonballs from the Caribbean island of St. Eustatius. As tensions increased between England and its colonies, the British protested the exportation of munitions to America and supplies to the French.

The War Expands to a World War (1777–1779)

With the United States' declared independence and its major victory at Saratoga in October 1777, French Foreign Minister Vergennes saw an opportunity to further weaken Britain by recognizing American independence and establishing a military alliance.[17] Vergennes desired Spain to join in this alliance, but Spain was unconvinced of allying itself with the Americans. Spain would "assist and collaborate with their Burbon ally against England" but would neither pursue an American military alliance nor recognize the new nation.[18]

Although the supply of arms and supplies began arriving, Washington suffered repeated losses in 1777 and moved the weak and ill-supplied Continental Army into winter quarters at Valley Forge. Recognizing the men's hardships, his General Order of 17 December 1777 was designed to encourage his soldiers and expressed his hope for an increase in support from France:

> that by a spirited continuance of the measures necessary for our defence we shall finally obtain the end of our Warfare—Independence—Liberty and Peace—These are blessings worth contending for at every hazard—But we hazard nothing. The power of America alone, duly exerted, would have nothing to dread from the force of Britain—Yet we stand not wholly upon our ground—France yields us every aid we ask, and there are reasons to believe the period is not very distant, when she will take a more active part, by declaring war against the British Crown. Every motive therefore, irresistibly urges us—nay commands us, to a firm and manly perseverance in our opposition to our cruel oppressors—to slight difficulties—endure hardships, and contemn every danger.[19]

The answer to Washington's prayers would soon come with the 5 February 1778 signing of a treaty of amity and commerce, a secret military treaty of alliance, and an exchange of ambassadors recognizing American independence by France. The treaty pledged France "not to lay down their arms, until the Independence of the United States shall have been "formally or tacitly assured."[20] Hearing of the news of the Franco-American alliance, Washington included in his General Order of 5 May 1778,

> It having pleased the Almighty ruler of the Universe propitiously to defend the Cause of the United American-States and finally by raising us up a powerful Friend among the Princes of the Earth to establish our liberty and Independence upon lasting foundations, it becomes us to set apart a day for gratefully acknowledging the divine Goodness & celebrating the important Event which we owe to his benign Interposition.[21]

In April 1778, Adm. Jean Baptiste Charles Henri Hector, comte d' Estaing, left France with twelve ships of the line and two frigates to attack English forces in North America, support American land operations, and sail to the West Indies to protect French islands and shipping.[22] To the Americans, French operations in 1778–1779 were underwhelming and

disappointing—neither defeating British naval forces in New York and Newport, Rhode Island, nor retaking Savannah, Georgia, from the British during a failed joint Franco-American effort. But at the strategic level, France's entry into the war led the British to alter their strategy by surrendering the initiative, abandoning their blockade of the American coast, and redistributing their forces from fighting the rebels to meeting this new threat.[23] For example, approximately eight thousand men were diverted to reinforce British possessions in the West Indies and Florida from North America.[24]

Spain still resisted siding with the American cause but increasingly recognized that a combined Franco-Spanish alliance would weaken Britain, enabling it to achieve its strategic goals to gain repossession of Gibraltar, Minorca, and Florida. On 12 April 1779, France and Spain signed the Treaty of Aranjuez, committing Spain to support France during the American War for Independence and in turn, committing France to support Spanish efforts to gain its lost territories.[25] Spain's declaration of war on Great Britain on 21 June 1779 expanded the conflict zone for England, forcing further dispersal of its dwindling North American based forces.

To secure the Treaty of Aranjuez, France agreed to the proposal to conduct a joint limited invasion of southern England. In July 1779, a combined Franco-Spanish fleet of 150 ships, larger than the original Spanish Armada of 1588, failed in its attempt to invade.[26] While the invasion failed, it forced the British to reprioritize naval assets to protect the homeland rather than being used abroad.

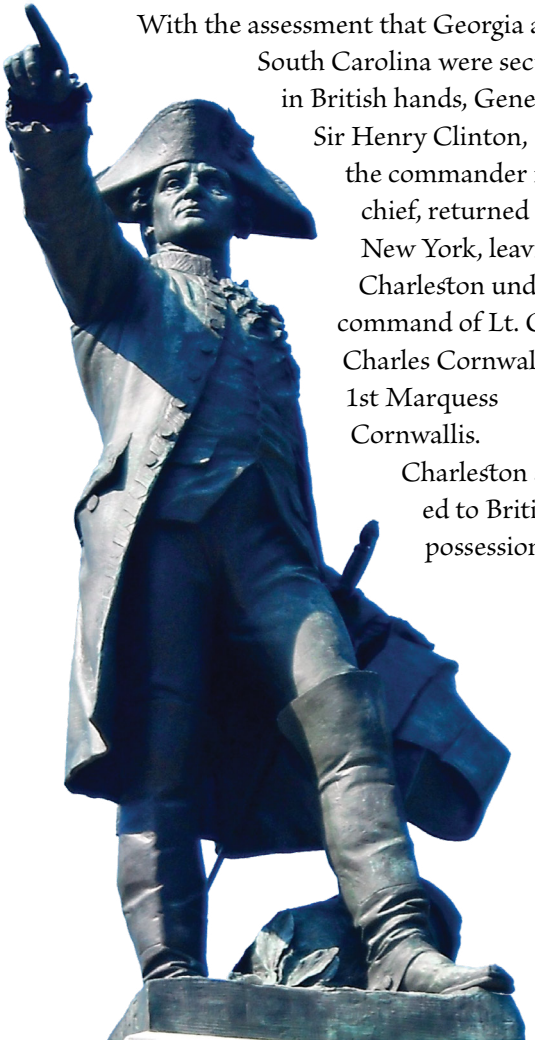
Britain's war shifted from one of battling an insurgent force in North America to a world war with the entry of France (1778), Spain (1779), and later the Dutch Republic (1780). While France and Spain continued their economic and logistical support to the Americans, supplying for example 90 percent of the gunpowder used, it was only after a meeting between French Ambassador Luzerne and Washington in September 1779 that they agreed to send French troops to America.[27]

Enter Rochambeau (1780–1782)

With the war in its fifth year in 1780, Washington faced a stalemate. Lacking resources and soldiers, there was little chance of Washington conducting a major operation against the British, specifically against New York, in 1780 without external help. Washington assessed that capturing New York would result in a decisive victory, resulting in Great Britain acknowledging American independence.

The British also faced challenges as they fought worldwide in European waters, the Mediterranean, and in distant colonies ranging from the West Indies to India. London also recognized that the war had stagnated, and British military strategy shifted to a "Southern Strategy" in the perceived loyalist enclaves of Georgia and the Carolinas.[28] British forces, taken from New York, seized Charleston, South Carolina (April 1780), resulting in the largest surrender of Continental forces in the war.[29]

With the assessment that Georgia and South Carolina were secure in British hands, General Sir Henry Clinton, the commander in chief, returned to New York, leaving Charleston under command of Lt. Gen. Charles Cornwallis, 1st Marquess Cornwallis. Charleston added to British possessions



Closeup of the comte de Rochambeau statue in Lafayette Park, Washington, D.C. (Photo by AgnosticPreachersKid, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

“While most histories focus on the alliance with France, actions by Spain and the Dutch Republic directly influenced the course of the war.”

along the southern coast, which included Wilmington, North Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, from which it could resupply and redeploy its forces with British naval assets. Cornwallis would soon have a major victory over Continental forces at Camden, South Carolina, in August 1780 and would move into North Carolina. Soon Cornwallis's attention would be paid to Virginia to cut off the flow of patriot supplies to the Carolinas.

Pressed by the American delegation in Paris, King Louis XVI approved Vergennes plan to send a French fleet and five thousand soldiers to North America.[30] Departing on 2 May 1780 with a fleet of thirty-two transports and escort ships, they arrived at Newport, Rhode Island, on 10 July 1780. After their arrival, the British blockaded Newport's harbor, and any chance of using the French fleet to support an attack against New York, as envisioned by Washington, soon vanished.

In their first meeting in September 1780, Washington pressed Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, for a joint attack against New York. Rochambeau, while not disagreeing, noted they needed additional ground and naval forces for any attack to be successful, as well as time and funds to conduct a siege. Furthermore, given his soldiers' condition from months at sea, no major operation could occur in 1780.[31] Washington was at a low point with enlistments running out, little supplies, little support from the states, an ineffective Congress, and a reluctant ally.

While most histories focus on the alliance with France, actions by Spain and the Dutch Republic directly influenced the course of the war. For example, the Spanish king in February 1781 commanded a renewed effort be made to expel the English from the Gulf of Mexico and an immediate assault against Pensacola. On 9 March 1781, Spanish forces, under the leadership of Spanish Gen. Don Bernardo de Gálvez, began a siege of Pensacola.[32] The two-month siege proved to be one of the longest battles of the American Revolution resulting in 1,500 British soldiers killed or surrendered. The loss of Pensacola meant Spanish control of western Florida and an improved capability to monitor sea traffic while preventing these British forces of being redeployed to fight against the Continental Army.

After Britain declared war on the Dutch Republic on 31 December 1780, its strategy was simple: blockade the coast and ports of the Netherlands to prevent shipping of contraband to Britain's enemies and to seize Dutch possessions and their ships, causing further British dispersal of limited naval resources. On 5 February 1781, the British captured the island of St. Eustatius in the Caribbean, which was a major pipeline of supplies and arms to the Continentals since the beginning of the war. Adm. George Rodney confiscated two hundred ships, captured two thousand Americans, and seized goods valued at three-million-pound sterling.[33] Rodney highlighted that without the “infamous island of St. Eustatius,” the American rebellion could not possibly have subsisted.[34]

In March 1781, Cornwallis continued his offensive campaign in South and North Carolina. Cornwallis beat the Continental Army under Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene at Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina (March 1781), but at the cost of one-third of his force. Withdrawing to Wilmington, North Carolina, to resupply, he decided to move into Virginia against the intent of his senior commander, General Sir Henry Clinton. There is an extensive narrative about the flawed command relationship between Clinton and Cornwallis in historical literature—Cornwallis assumed Virginia was the key to controlling the south, while Clinton believed success was holding the major towns of Charleston and New York.[35]

In Virginia, Cornwallis conducted raids to destroy rebel supplies and arms, moving as far west as Charlottesville and Richmond, before returning to the Tidewater region alongside Chesapeake Bay. Cornwallis was instructed to establish a naval base in Virginia, and after dismissing options at Portsmouth and Old Point Comfort (where Fort Monroe stands today), he moved

to Yorktown and began to leisurely establish a defense against a vastly inferior small Continental Army force under the Marquis de Lafayette supported by Virginia militia.

Last Major Battle—Yorktown (October 1781)

The Franco-American siege and victory at Yorktown in October 1781 is well known, but events leading up to it and the decisions made by key allied participants made this allied victory possible. As a result of French, Spanish, and Dutch actions around the world, British forces were continually dispersed and unable to mass in North America. For example, the successful Franco-Spanish invasion of Minorca in the summer of 1781 prevented the British from redeploying naval forces from the Mediterranean to the Americas.

The French Adm. François Joseph Paul, comte de Grasse, sailed from France on 22 March 1781 with 190 merchant/transport ships to include twenty ships of the line and two regiments with the mission to protect French possessions in the West Indies and to assist Spain in the conquest of Jamaica.[36] Arriving in Martinque in April 1781, de Grasse received various dispatches from Rochambeau, Adm. Louis Jacques Barras in Newport, and the French minister to American colonies, Chevalier de La Luzerne, updating him on the situation and recommending a joint French-American operation in conjunction with naval forces at Newport under Barras.

Washington's and Rochambeau's decision-making processes to shift focus from an attack on New York to one focused on a combined operation in the Chesapeake Bay has been controversial, with historians debating as to whether Washington was deceived or mislead by the French. There is little doubt that Rochambeau viewed an operation against well-entrenched forces in New York as challenging given their limited resources, but the preference of destination and decision to sail to the Chesapeake was made by de Grasse.

Rochambeau's dispatches clearly provide the choices available to de Grasse, noting,

> The enemy is making his most vigorous efforts in Virginia. Cornwallis marched from Wilmington near the Cape Fear to unite on the Roanoke at Halifax with the troops of Phillips and Arnold. With this army of 6,000 men he proceeded to Portsmouth and fortified a position at the mouth of the Elizabeth River whence he ravages in small armed boats all the rivers in Virginia. Washington assures me that he has no more than 8500 regulars and 3000 militia for carrying on the campaign against New York. He requested Barras to convey his [Rochambeau] troops to Chesapeake Bay, but Barras showed him it was impossible. He then asked that our troops march to the North River and join him in threatening or perhaps attacking New York to ease the pressure at the South …
>
> There are two points at which an offensive may be made against the enemy: Chesapeake Bay and New York. The southwesterly winds and the state of distress in Virginia will probably, make you prefer Chesapeake Bay, and it will be there where we think you may be able to render the greatest service, whereas you will need two days to come there to New York. In any case, it is essential that you send, well in advance, a frigate to inform Barras where you are to come and also General Washington that the first may be able to join you and the second may cooperate with you with his army.[37]

Nevertheless, it became clear to Washington by early August 1781 that an attack on New York was infeasible. The news of a large French naval force with additional ground forces in the Chesapeake made the decision easier. In part, Washington's decision to accept this shift of objectives was enhanced by the long period of collaboration, which built some level of trust and confidence, as well as the subordination of French forces communicated by Vergennes to Rochambeau to be under Washington's command.

The French accepted the role of auxiliary as directed by the secretary of state on the orders of Louis XVI. These orders noted,

> The French corps of troops will be purely auxiliary and as such will only act under the orders of General Washington. The French land general will receive orders from the American chief general for anything that would not be accept able to the internal

> police of his corps, which must have its justice and be governed by the laws of his country. The sea general [i.e., admiral] will be required to assist with all his powers in all operations where his assistance is requested. Of course, they will have the attention to combine them, to discuss them with him [Washington] and to listen to any objections he may have to make to them.[38]

As noted by French historian Olivier Chaline,

> Great confidence was therefore placed in the ability of the French commander, Rochambeau with Ternay, later Barras, and finally de Grasse, to explain their point of view to Washington and make him accept it. This meant getting to know each other better than in 1778, and the long period of French settlement in Newport was certainly not in vain. Then it meant knowing how to argue and convince Washington to renounce operations that the French would consider inopportune or infeasible, such as the attack on New York in 1781. [39]

The arrival of a large French fleet under de Grasse to the Chesapeake on 29 August 1781, consisting of twenty-six ships of the line in addition to other vessels, outgunned the available British naval forces in North America. The deployment of this large French fleet was only made possible by the Spanish agreeing to provide four Spanish ships of the line to guard French possessions in the West Indies that otherwise would not have been available to the French in the Chesapeake. In July 1781, agreement by the Spanish and French commanders to release 3,500 French troops under Spanish control at Pensacola enabled the deployment of these additional allied forces transported by de Grasse to Yorktown.[40]

Financial support provided by the Spanish was critical. Rochambeau requested de Grasse bring sufficient funds in the form of hard currency to support his operations as well as to assist the Americans. Washington requested Rochambeau's assistance in supplying one month pay in hard currency to his soldiers as an inducement for marching south from New York—the first time for some of the soldiers to be paid in coin. De Grasse, pledging his own property as collateral, was unsuccessful in securing the funds and requested support from Francisco de Saavedra, the Spanish royal commissioner in Havana, who in one day secured more than 1.2 million livres on 17 August 1781 to meet this immediate need.[41]

On 1 September 1781, the British fleet with nineteen ships of the line sailed from New York to intercept the French fleet and on 5 September discovered the French fleet at anchor offloading troops and equipment in the Chesapeake. In one of the most consequential naval battles in history, the "Battle of the Capes," the French victory solidified French naval control of the Chesapeake and major rivers to include the York and James Rivers, which were integral to the allied plan to prevent Cornwallis's rescue or reinforcement.[42] As a result of the French victory, the defeated British naval forces sailed back to New York. In the meantime, Barras sailed from Newport with an additional eight French ships of the line escorting a convoy of ships carrying siege guns, supplies, and other equipment critical to the siege. With the Chesapeake fully under French control, Cornwallis and his British force were trapped at Yorktown.

Cornwallis selected Yorktown as a naval base given its deepwater port. Four years earlier, Washington had counseled Brig. Gen. Thomas Nelson Jr., a future governor and leader of the militia at the Battle of Yorktown, not to locate stationary forces at Yorktown, noting,

> These by being upon a narrow neck of land, would be in danger of being cut off. The enemy might very easily throw up a few ships into York and James' river, as far as Queens Creek; and land a body of men there, who throwg up a few Redoubts, would intercept their retreat and oblige them to surrender at discretion.[43]

By 9 October 1781, American and French siege guns and artillery began pounding British positions in a classic siege planned and directed by the experienced French. Forces in the battle included over seven thousand British and German troops against nearly eighteen thousand allied forces arrayed around Yorktown and across the York River at Gloucester.[44] On 17 October 1781, Cornwallis signaled he was ready to negotiate his surrender, having been repeatedly promised that he was going to be rescued by his senior commander. Two days later, British forces marched out of their positions and surrendered to Washington based on his approved terms. A British

Battle of the Virginia Capes, 5 September 1781, v. Zveg, 1962, oil on canvas, 35 x 46 cm. The painting depicts the French fleet (*at left*) engaging the British fleet (*at right*) off the mouth of Chesapeake Bay. In this tactically inconclusive but strategically decisive battle, the French successfully prevented the British fleet from entering Chesapeake Bay and relieving Maj. Gen. Lord Cornwallis's army at Yorktown, Virginia. (Painting courtesy of the U.S. Navy Art Collection, U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command)

relief force of twenty-five ships of the line and forces under Clinton arrived off the coast of Virginia a few days later only to receive news of Cornwallis's surrender.

The "So What"

For most Western national security and military practitioners, Carl von Clausewitz is often central in their study of war. One of Clausewitz's greatest contributions is linking war with its political context, and embedded in this context is the value of alliances in international relations. Alliances are means by which states can pursue particular objectives provided they have common interests. The weaker the interests among the allies, the easier it is to disrupt the alliance.[45]

Yet, alliances are not entered into without consideration of a nation's own interests. Clausewitz would agree with Washington's assessment, who wrote to Henry Laures in 1778 that "it is a maxim founded on the universal experience of Mankind, that no Nation is to trusted farther than it is bound by its interests, And no prudent Statesman or politician will venture to depart from it."[46] As one scholar noted, "Alliances are always about overlapping interests; they are never purely altruistic."[47]

In America's revolutionary alliance and partnership structure, each nation came with different expectations of outcomes, length of commitment, and capabilities.[48] In the case of France, regaining prestige, weaking Britain, and restoring the balance of power as Europe's major continental power were the primary motivators for supporting the American cause. France was committed to U.S. independence while Spain was not. France was committed to a longer war than Spain, while Spain valued its alliance as a means to protect and regain additional territory. The Dutch Republic simply wanted to maintain freedom of navigation and the freedom to trade with any nation without restriction.

Conversely, Britain had no allies and was isolated partially based on its actions during the Seven Years' War and its operations after that time. As early as 1777, the American commissioners in Paris, headed by Benjamin Franklin, reported to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, "All Europe is for us," and "Every nation in Europe wishes to see Britain humbled having all in their Turns been offended by her Insolence, which in prosperity she is apt to discover on all occasions."[49]

For England, fighting without allies, the war in North America was only one theater of a wider war. As John L. Gray of the National Museum of American History noted, "The Revolution on American soil was not even the most critical to Britain."[50] England was forced to continually shift forces—specifically naval forces—to respond to emerging threats from its enemies. Noted historian Barbara Tuchman attributed Britain's failures to a "fatal underestimation" of the Americans and its allies combined with a sense of superiority.[51] In sum, as noted by Edmund Burke, a member of Parliament and a critique of British policy, "A great empire and little minds go ill together."[52]

Relationships among allies are difficult. With differences in language, culture, and procedures as friction points to operations, perhaps the most difficult component of combined operations is working through the issue of command relationships. But beyond the mechanical components of command and control is the criticality in the relationships among commanders. While poor relationships fostered a lack of trust in the Franco-American alliance early in the war, the arrival, cooperation, and collaboration of such individuals as de Grasse, Rochambeau, and the French officers serving in the Continental Army, supported by the collaborative decisions and actions of Saavedra and Bernardo de Galvez (governor of Louisiana), all lubricated the complex machinery of combined operations.

Was the outcome of the American Revolution inevitable regardless of alliances? Historians hold varying views. Some like Joseph Ellis noted the outcome was inevitable, with Great Britain never having a realistic chance to win the war with victory foreordained.[53] Washington noted it was "Providence" and a miracle that victory was won by the united colonies. At the other end of the spectrum, David McCullough held the view that nothing in history is preordained and noted,

> One of the hardest, and I think the most important, realities of history to convey … is that nothing ever had to happen the way it happened. Any great past event could have gone off in any number of different directions for any number of different reasons. We should understand that history was never on track. It was never preordained that it would turn out as it did.[54]

The letters, dispatches, and memoirs of many of the key American political and military leaders clearly show the French alliance was critical to the American victory. Until recently, Spain's contributions have been unmistakably absent in most histories. From the beginning, Spain was courted by American leaders such as Arthur Lee in 1777, while Spain recognized the dangers of an independent United States to its own interests. Yet, Spain and the Americans were united against a common enemy so as to have Lee receive the assurance that "the fate of the colonies interest us very much, and we shall do for them everything that circumstances permit," with Charles III providing an immediate influx of equipment and funds.[55] Spanish forces under Galvez (later named one of eight foreigners, such as Churchill, granted honorary American citizenship) provided invaluable supplies from New Orleans up the Mississippi to patriot forces. Spanish operations in east and west Florida tied down significant British forces that otherwise could have been deployed in the colonies.

The American War of Independence serves as a classic case study of alliance warfare. We need to study and acknowledge the role of allies and partners who supported America's interests and security in the past and continue to learn how to work with others for common shared purposes to strengthen old alliances and to build new ones. We need to remember and honor past alliances simply to avoid a sense of arrogance and hubris arising from an attitude of American exceptionalism. The count of Aranda, the Spanish ambassador to France and a signer of the Treaty of Paris ending the war, wrote to King Carlos III of Spain in 1783, noting,

> This Federal Republic was born a pigmy, as such, it needed the aid and strength of two powerful states like Spain and France to accomplish its independence. The day will come when it will grow up, become a giant

and be greatly feared in the Americas. Then it will forget the benefits that it had received from the two powers and only think of its own aggrandizement.[56]

We need to heed the words of Allison and Ferreiro who stated, "Our future, like our past, requires we pay close heed to our international relationship, and we nurture them carefully."[57] ■

Notes

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13. José Manuel Guerrero Acosta, ed., *Unveiling Memories: Spain and the Hispanic Contribution to U.S. Independence* (Iberdrola, 2019), 170.

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27. Timothy G. Heck and Walker D. Mills, *Armies in Retreat: Chaos, Cohesion and Consequences* (Army University Press, 2024), 279; "Substance of a Conference with La Luzerne, 16 September 1779," Founders Online, National Archives, accessed 2 May 2025, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-22-02-0361.

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