The Development Of The French Alliance And Its Diplomatic Consequences 1763-1783

Kim Anders
Carroll College

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRENCH ALLIANCE AND ITS DIPLOMATIC CONSEQUENCES 1763–1783
by
Kim R. Anders

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This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of HISTORY.

Joseph F. Ward
(Signature of Reader)

Thomas A. Church
(Signature of Reader)

Dr. John J. Freytag
(Signature of Reader)

March 29, 1971
(Date)
This thesis is dedicated to my Mother.
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INTRODUCTION

The French Alliance with the United States during the Revolutionary War grew out of numerous political forces operating upon the international arena. French struggle with England for domination of the North American continent can be traced back to the late seventeenth century with the initiation of four major conflicts (taking place partially in Europe, partially in America) and which continued down to the year 1783. The last of these conflicts, the Seven Years' War, resulted in France losing her major possessions in North America, notably Canada, to Great Britain and giving Louisiana to her ally, Spain. These were long and costly struggles, with commercial domination and leadership in international affairs at stake. It is the central thesis of this paper, that the American Revolution constituted a continuation of this struggle between France and Britain for international domination.

The Treaty of Paris of 1783 which ended the French and Indian war left the French political leaders with a feeling of deep humiliation and discontent with being placed in a secondary role to Britain in international affairs. France emerged from this war as a second rate power and had lost its once influential role on the international stage. In the efforts of the Duc de Choiseul, the French Foreign Minister
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immediately following the French and Indian War, the beginning can be seen in an effort to restore France to its once favored role in the family of nations. It can also be seen that the guiding force in Choiseul’s diplomacy was a desire to thwart England. This desire manifested itself on Choiseul’s part in a belief that English power depended upon its commerce and that if America became independent this commercial supremacy would be destroyed and much of the trade diverted to France. This blow would be fatal to England’s world dominance and place France in the ascendancy. In attempting to implement this policy Choiseul strengthened France’s international alliances and rebuilt France’s navy and army. He also sent agents to the British colonies in America but his plans failed largely because America was not yet ready for independence at the time.

Vergennes, who became the French Minister of Foreign Affairs with the accession of Louis XVI in 1774, held a similar desire to Choiseul of rebuilding France’s greatness. In his efforts to implement this, however, he tended to work much more cautiously than did Choiseul. Vergennes worked very cautiously building up support for his policies by allying strongly with the king and his ministers notably the Prime Minister, Maurepas. To a large extent, Vergennes was an heir to the policies of Choiseul and the most important inheritance from the past was the
Spanish and French alliance called the **Pacte de Famille**. Vergennes constantly worked to build up this **Pacte de Famille** between the two Bourbon powers, and, in so doing, laid the basis for one of the most important diplomatic moves of the American Revolutionary war, the entry of Spain into that war in 1779.

When England attempted to put into effect the Intolerable Acts of 1774, Vergennes felt that the opportunity had at last come of which Choiseul dreamed. The rebellious American colonies provided an opportunity for France to continue the commercial and diplomatic rivalry with Britain. He worked with Beaumarchais in an effort to win the king over to a policy of aiding the American rebellion. France sparked the rebellion by sending secret monies and war supplies. It must be noted that Vergennes was never motivated by great republican sentiments but saw, in the Americans, only an instrument to be used against Britain. Louis XVI actually admired George III's defiant stand against rebels. Vergennes saw, in America, only an opportunity for smashing Britain's commercial domination and, by doing this, to move France into the primary role in international policies. With the victory at Saratoga, Vergennes saw that America could be a capable military ally to be used against England. The Franco-American alliance of 1778 was the direct result of the sentiments upon the part of France.
France, then, proceeded to use the American Alliance in a policy of building up her international position. She did this by drawing Spain into the war in 1779 and then by working to create a League of Armed Neutrality against Britain which was accomplished by 1780. The aid which France gave to the United States was vital in American victory in the Revolution but it only resulted from the desire on the part of France to weaken England.

Throughout the diplomatic negotiations from 1774 to 1783, France continually worked to ally with various nations of Europe in order to affect the political isolation of Great Britain. Vergennes always played a giant game of world diplomacy for the betterment of France and detriment of Great Britain.

Thus in the negotiations for the Peace of Paris which ended the war in 1783, France worked to support the interests of Spain in maintaining her most powerful ally. Vergennes showed himself desirous of American independence, but wished to see the United States restrained to a small territory east of the Appalachians. In this fashion, the United States would remain weak and dependent upon French interests. Vergennes also willingly supported the Spanish who feared a large United States because it posed a threat to her colonial territories. Spain also desired Gibraltar, for which reason France struggled to gain this area and attempted to stall peace negotiations until
Spain had control of Gibraltar. It was only after putting French interests aside, and opening two-way talks with Britain that the United States was able to negotiate independence.
Chapter I. Choiseul and the Peace Treaty of 1763.
The American Revolution, in one sense, is a culmination of a struggle between France and Britain for the domination of the North American continent. Toward the close of the seventeenth century, North America became the stakes in a game of European diplomacy in a great world struggle for power. The European subjects had little to say concerning the wars of their kings and these struggles automatically involved colonists in North America who often knew little of what they were fighting about. These wars, however, dramatically altered the course of American history.

There were four major conflicts between Britain and France preceding the American Revolution and these were King William's War (The War of the League of Augsburg) fought between 1689 and 1697, Queen Anne's War (The War of the Spanish Succession) fought between 1701 and 1713, King George's War (The War of the Austrian Succession) fought between 1740 and 1748, and The French and Indian War (Seven Years' War) fought between 1756 and 1763. The important point to be noted here is that these wars were fought simultaneously in both Europe and North America, showing that America even in this early period was never isolated from events in Europe.

In the struggle for North America, England enjoyed several advantages. The English navy was almost always superior to that of France; English colonists greatly outnumbered those of France, and the English colonies, situated along the coast, were
in a much more easily defended position than the scattered settlements in the French colonies. The French were heavily supported by Indian allies which helped to maintain some equilibrium in the power struggle.

Of these wars, it was the French and Indian War which proved to be of the most lasting significance in the development of American history. By virtue of the Treaty of Paris of 1763, ending the French and Indian War, the map of North America was entirely remade. France was driven out of her major holdings in North America transferring Canada and all French territory east of the Mississippi except New Orleans to Britain. France was forced to dismantle her naval works in the port of Dunkerque and forced to abandon her hopes for conquest in India. "In the West Indies, France retained the western part of the island of Santo Domingo, Guadeloupe, Desirade and Marie Galante; Martinique, and Santa Lucia; and Great Britain kept her other conquests there."¹ Spain was also forced to give Florida and all Spanish possessions east of the Mississippi to Great Britain. "A few hours after the signature of the Treaty of Paris, France transferred to Spain all of Louisiana west of the Mississippi and the 'island' of New Orleans."² The motive of France in this act "was an

²Ibid., p. 11.
effort of the French Foreign Minister, the Duc de Choiseul, to induce Spain to sign the general peace promptly before the victorious English should change their minds and themselves demand Louisiana and perhaps the remaining French islands."³

The French had not only been defeated in the Seven Years' War, they had been humiliated and this humiliation profoundly affected French political leaders after 1763. "France had become a negligible factor in European politics. She was forced to stand unconsulted while former client states like Turkey and Poland were partitioned."⁴ The once great French empire had been reduced and, after the Treaty of Paris of 1763, France became a much reduced power, "she now saw her ministers walk at the heels of those of Britain in every chancellery on the continent."⁵

Choiseul, the principal minister of Louis XV and in charge of foreign affairs during and after the period of the Seven Years' War, worked diligently to restore France to its former position of greatness. This would require a reorganizing of France's battered army, a rebuilding of the navy, and a restoration of finances in the nation. Choiseul in his diplomatic

³Ibid.
⁴Ibid., p. 17.
and foreign policies was always guided by a desire to thwart England in every manner possible. He did this first by strengthening diplomatic alliances in Europe.

He counted on the Hapsburg alliance of 1756 to bolster up the French sentinels in northern and eastern Europe and maintained his country's traditional position as arbitrator of the continental balance, while through the Family Pact with Spain he would realize his most grandiose scheme of a joint Bourbon dynamic thrust against England, their enemy in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. Charles III of Spain favored his plans, and in the Spanish foreign minister, Grimaldi, France had "the shadow of Choiseul's sun."

Choiseul found further opportunity to humble England in England's own dissatisfied colonies of America. The French and Indian War had removed Canada as a threat to the British colonies and so the colonials no longer had to fear the prospect of an enemy to the north. While Canada had been in French hands, the colonists relied on the military backing of Great Britain but now they were more free to wander from the nest of imperial control. After 1763, the British also became more determined to tax their American colonies to help pay for the war and to provide defense. The obnoxious taxes to the colonists were initiated by George Granville, the Prime Minister, in 1763, and Charles Townshend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1767. Granville insisted on strict enforcement of the Navigation Acts which had not been enforced up to this time largely because of the fact that England had been dis-

tracted from colonial affairs by internal strife in the
seventeenth century and foreign wars in the eighteenth
century. The Navigation Acts were the embodiment of the
mercantile economic philosophy and their attempted en-
forcement resulted in a violent reaction on the part of
American colonists. British taxation of colonists was
equally obnoxious since the colonists had no voice in de-
termining the taxation. The French looked upon these British
colony affairs with a great deal of interest as a possible
breach in England's might. Choiseul, convinced of a possible
revolt in England's colonies, sent secret observers into
America in the hope of gaining information and also, if
possible, of igniting trouble. The Stamp Act of 1765 certainly
raised the hopes of the French until its repeal as it nearly
brought on war.

Choiseul made every effort to solidify his nation and his
intentions for a renewed struggle against England became more
obvious. The French navy was enlarged from "40 ships of the
line to 64 and from 10 frigates to 45." Naval bases were
built up in Santo Domingo, Martinique, and Guadeloupe while
naval stores were enlarged in France herself. The army was
also reorganized and incompetent officers were removed and
discipline was restored in the ranks. The payment systems of

7Ibid., p. 166
the men and the recruiting system were regularized while manufacture of arms was increased. "In specialists of the stamp of Bourcet, the great advocate of dispersion, and (Choiseul) Gribeauval, the artillerist, he had extraordinarily able technicians who reorganized tactics and undertook the training of younger and more progressive officers."8

Efforts were made to tighten the dynastic alliances between the Bourbons and Hapsburgs.

Joseph, the eldest son of Maria Theresa, was married to the Bourbon infanta Isabella of Parma; his sister, Maria Amelia, to the Duke of Parma, and another sister, Maria Carolina, to the ruler of Naples; his brother, Leopold, married the Spanish Bourbon heiress of Tuscany, and his ill-starred youngest sister, Marie Antoinette, was betrothed to the future Louis XVI.9

Thus Choiseul cemented France's international alliances leaving him free to cause war with Britain at any time. That England mistook French intentions is highly unlikely. French naval bases in the Mediterranean were being refitted to war capacity and French agents were exciting insurrectionary tendencies within the American colonies. The British were even aware of a projected Channel invasion. "For a brief moment William Pitt was again at the helm of the foreign office, 1766-1767, energetically alive to counter the growing

8Ibid., p. 167.
9Ibid., p. 166
naval strength of the Bourbon allies, but he was followed by the more sanguine Charles Townshend.\textsuperscript{10}

The signing of the Treaty of Paris of 1763 and the events which immediately followed it were of immense importance to a growing, or rather, I should say, a continued conflict between France and Great Britain. The treaty in which France lost Canada, many West India islands, and the dominance of India was as much censured in England as well as France. The English believed that they should have gained more. France had retained the rights to two small fishing islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence but England felt that France should not be allowed even this foothold upon North America. Opposition to accepting the treaty was vented in the British parliament where Pitt resigned rather than accept. Henry Fox moved into the ascendent position in British politics and through his ability to lead and also his corrupt politics prevailed upon Parliament to accept the treaty. To many in England, however, the treaty still seemed to be an unworthy surrender while at the same time it was seen in France as a humiliation. The seeds for war between France and England were thus sown with the treaty of 1763 and only awaited an excuse for further conflict.

The French reaction to the treaty was very bitter. The pride of the nation had been wounded and this fact was never forgotten. The French army had been disgraced

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 167.
by defeats in Germany, the navy had been destroyed, Canada passed to England, the magnificent fortifications of Louisbourg upon which France had spent so much money were British and even upon France's own territory was the humiliation to be seen as France agreed not to fortify Dunkirk. France's ally, Spain, to whom she was bound by family ties had received the indignity of the imposed retention of Gibraltar by Britain. Choiseul's efforts following the peace were always directed toward re-establishing France as a first class power.

The loss of the French North American territories proved to be of great advantage to the United States in the subsequent struggle with England. If France had controlled both Canada and the Mississippi valley during the decades of the 1760's and 1770's, it would have been doubtful that she would have followed a course of freeing the British American colonies and much of her resentment toward Britain after 1763 would have been abated. "Burke insisted that the conquest of Canada was of doubtful value to Britain, as by removing France from North America it would weaken the community of danger which bound Britain to her American Colonies and would participate the division of the British empire." If France had retained

the Mississippi valley, this area would have never been claim-
ed by the United States and the subsequent growth of that new
nation would have been thwarted.

Choiseul noted the importance of the colonies to England
and directed his policy toward weakening the bond between
colony and mother country, England, in holding the North
American colonies maintained a capacity for dominating world
trade. If the Colonies should revolt and their independence
secured, France saw an opportunity to challenge England's
maritime supremacy. This desire to regain maritime supremacy
and also a strong urge to eradicate the humiliations suffered
in the Seven Years' War caused France to take a deep interest
in the discontent which was surfacing in the British North
American colonies.

Up to the year 1770, the French fared better in Europe
than they did in the Western Hemisphere. "They failed to break
the trade of the American colonials and the British merchants
with their own West Indies colonies and they were unsuccessful
in colonizing French Guiana, which, along with the islands of
the Antilles, was to have been the core of a restored colonial
empire."¹² The one bright spot in the west for the French was
the British American colonies. Dissatisfaction with the mother
country continued to surface in the British colonies and the
French maintained their policy of giving the discontented

¹²Gershoy, From Despotism to Revolution, p. 167.
American leaders hints of possible foreign aid which might be received in the event of fighting. Louis XV also maintained an extensive secret service system which continuously supplied him with reports which he personally scanned. Louis was especially well served by his representatives in London in reporting American dissatisfaction. M. Durand and M. de Chatelet or in their absence, M. Francais, Louis's first secretary, all were incessantly on the search for news regarding the British Colonies. Their correspondence reveals an abundance of knowledge about hopes, desires, and forces of dissatisfaction within the Colonies. These particulars were derived from many sources, writings and conversations of Franklin, the reports of M. de Pontleroy (a naval officer whom Choiseul had planted in the Colonies secretly from 1764 to 1766 under the name of Beaulieu), American newspapers, merchant letters, reports of meetings or assemblies, political statements, and other sources. News of the bitter reaction to the various British acts most notably the Sugar Act (1764), the Currency Act (1764), the Stamp Act (1765), the Quartering Act (1765), and Granville's and Townshend's attempts to enforce the Navigation Acts must have delighted both the Duc de Choiseul and his king. In Europe, France penetrated into Egypt which threatened the eastern Mediterranean, and also acquired Corsica in 1768, which gave Choiseul a major naval base in the western Mediterranean, which could be used in possible operations against
Minorca and Gibraltar. During the years from 1765 to 1770, however, Choiseul encountered opposition from friends of the Jesuits, critics of his military reform, and the chancellor Rene Nicholas Maupeou. Madame de Pompadour who had been one of his supporters died in 1764 and her successor, Madame du Barry, became his ardent enemy. Choiseul was dismissed from office on December 24, 1770 and exiled to his estates in Touraine. "The final cause of Choiseul's fall from power was criticism of his plans for war with England in 1770 over the Falkland Islands at a time when France was passing through one of its periodical financial crises."\(^{13}\)

Despite the fact that Choiseul was dismissed in 1770, he had built up French naval and military strength so that that nation could successfully compete with Britain as a world power. He had also helped to create a French interest in the American colonies. Both of these accomplishments would be of the greatest importance in the subsequent War of the American Revolution. Choiseul came to believe, as did most of the French politicians of his time, that the strength of the British empire depended upon commerce, and that the independent Thirteen Colonies would help divert trade from England to France. The wound would be fatal to the British empire and bring wealth to France.

\(^{13}\)Albert Goodwin, "Choiseul, Etienne Francois de," Encyclopdedia Britannica, 14th ed., V, 673.
As of 1773, the American Colonies were not yet ready for independence. In believing that they were, Chatham had been somewhat deceived by his paid agents in these colonies. His work, however, had not been in vain for the American question had been completely studied, and ways of aiding the colonies had been developed in minute detail awaiting a future date when they could be put to use.

In America opposition to the British continued. In March of 1770, a group of British troops were confronted by an angry mob in Boston, and this resulted in the Boston Massacre in which five Americans were killed. It is clear that up to that time bitterness toward the British had reached very little. On the same day as the Boston Massacre, the British Prime Minister, Lord North, repealed all of the colonial taxes except the one on tea and an era of some tranquility began between Britain and America. Old tensions were renewed and the old wounds were once again ripped open in 1773 when the Boston Tea Party occurred as a reaction to the hated Tea Act (1773) which allowed the British East India Company to sell tea in the colonies at a reduced rate. The British reaction was the Intolerable Acts of 1774. These Intolerable Acts united the colonies in a hatred of Britain and the colonists began to realize that they had common problems. The port of Boston was closed until the destroyed tea could be paid for, royal officials accused of crimes in the colonies could be tried only
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from the scene of the crime, the Boston town meeting was closed, colonists were required to quarter British troops, and the Catholic Church was tolerated in Quebec and Canadian boundaries were extended down to the Ohio River in the west. The colonial reaction to the Intolerable Acts became the First Continental Congress of 1774 which brought together representatives of all the colonies. Most Americans still hoped for reconciliation with the mother country but France became interested in these events as a possibility of destroying the British Empire. France, however, could make no move until the final break had taken place. Fighting finally came at Lexington and Concord in April of 1776. British diplomatic bungling continued and in July of 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. The scene was finally set for greater foreign involvement in the British American Colonies.

During the Revolution, the responsibility for foreign affairs fell directly under the Congress. As early as November of 1775, the Congress had created a secret committee of correspondence to maintain foreign contacts. Arthur Lee, of Virginia, was appointed as its confidential correspondent and "on March 3, 1776, still four months before independence was declared, Congress decided to send one of its members, Silas Deane, as a 'commercial' agent to France."\footnote{Bailey, \textit{Diplomatic History}, p. 27.} Deane became the first of
the "militia diplomats" sent out by Congress to obtain the aid desperately needed to maintain war with England. These militia diplomats were often totally without experience in diplomatic matters and were generally uninvited and unwanted in the courts of Europe. France proved to be the exception to this rule secretly welcoming them.

Deane received his orders on March 3, 1776 and arrived in Paris the following July. He took up a semi-official relationship to the French ministry and reported to Congress all that he learned of European politics with regard to the Revolution. He had to deal with Beaumarchais in arranging supplies for the colonies and also with many overly enthusiastic French officers who were searching for commissions in the American army. Soon his lack of training and diplomatic experience began to surface in his indiscreet arrangements with French officers, many of whom proved to be incompetent and caused Congress embarrassment as it was unable to retain them in employment. His offer to make Count Broglie commander-in-chief proved to be his primary indiscretion and showed him to be most inarticulate on the international stage. "This, however, was but a temporary diversion, since on Franklin's arrival, Deane's diplomatic functions, such as they were, came to an absolute end."\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) Wharton, introduction to *Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence*, p. 560.
Arthur Lee arrived upon the scene and showed himself unwilling to submit to the supremacy of Franklin's diplomacy and continually collided with Deane. Lee, Franklin, and Deane were appointed by Congress as the first official commission to France on September 26, 1776. Lee pointed out that Deane had a considerable amount of business patronage in France of a suspicious nature and demanded that the "business side of the mission be placed in the hands of his brother, William Lee."16 "Arthur Lee's suspicions of Deane were communicated to Congress and, after much discussion, a resolution was passed on December 8, 1777 recalling him to America, the reason being the importance of obtaining information as to the state of affairs in Europe."17 Deane set sail for America and obtained notes of esteem from Franklin and the French Minister, Vergennes.

Lee, like Deane, was a militia diplomat and his inexperience surfaced in his dealings with foreign powers. Lee left London for Paris in December of 1776. According to the militia system of diplomacy, it was thought acceptable to send ministers to foreign courts and demand recognition and loans without first inquiring whether or not they would be received. "The most indefatigable advocate and exponent of this system was Arthur Lee."18 He urged against the counsels

16 Ibid., p. 560.
17 Ibid., p. 561.
18 Ibid., p. 523.
of Franklin and the advice of Vergennes that envoys be sent out to various nations to gain American recognition and funds. For this purpose Arthur Lee and his brother, William Lee, "were commissioned to the courts of Madrid, of Berlin, and of Vienna." The failure of their efforts proved the ineptness of the policy and the judiciousness of Franklin's and Vergennes' advice. Lee was humiliatingly ordered to remove himself from Madrid, in Berlin his papers were stolen by order of the British ambassador, and Frederick the Great treated him as an unwelcome intruder. Had Lee listened to advice of Vergennes and Franklin these humiliating repulses would not have occurred, indeed no minister would have been sent to Madrid or Berlin until his reception had been guaranteed. Vergennes soon excluded Lee from a close informal social relationship because he could not abide Lee's disregard of the rules established for diplomatic usage and courtesy.

But such was the invitation produced by his habitual discourtesy, and the distrust produced by the disreputable character and suspicious dealings of his secretaries, that Vergennes, always patient and considerate, felt bound to interpose, and on October 29, 1778 wrote to Gerard, the French Minister at Philadelphia, that his fear of Lee and of his surroundings (ses entours) precluded the communication to him of state secrets.  

Silas Deane and Arthur Lee are important in pointing up one of the major deficits in the American diplomatic system in the Revolutionary War period. Both of these men were

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examples of the untrained, incapable and awkward militia diplomats upon whom America was forced to rely in this period. These men did not have the diplomatic knowhow nor the political experience to operate effectively in international dealings. This factor put America at a disadvantage in its diplomatic dealings. Benjamin Franklin proved to be the exception in the American diplomatic corp. A more skilled diplomat than he could not have been found and it is to his credit that much of America's success in negotiations with France is due.

Franklin was popular in France from the moment that he first landed. He was the American most familiar with European politics which he had acquired in his previous dealings in England as a colonial agent in London and by his vast knowledge of human nature. He was already well known in European circles for his experiments in electricity and was believed to be the guiding light behind the patriot cause. His personality typified a young nation struggling for its independence against a force of tyranny long despised by the French. He seemed to sum up the American cause — justice, common sense, liberty. To the intellectuals in Paris, such as Diderot and D'Alembert, he was an equal, a true embodiment of practical reason and enlightenment thinking.

Franklin quickly took Parisian society by storm. He seemed to be the simple natural man described by Jean Jacques
Rousseau with his unpretentious manner, his benevolent countenance, and lovable eccentricities. He dressed simply and modestly, avoiding artificiality and affection, thus fitting Rousseau's image of the unspoiled children of nature. His conventional wig was discarded and replaced by "a fine fur cap." He soon became the rage among the fashionable ladies of Paris through his gallantry and wit.

Franklin, always the pragmatist, took advantage of all opportunities to enhance his position. He associated with fellow scientists, fraternized with fellow Masons in the French lodges; knowing that Quakers were held in high esteem in France, he never made public his religious views. He presented himself as a majestic figure of republican simplicity in his plain brown coat and his face appeared everywhere on watches, medallions, snuff boxes, rings and miniatures. "Gentlemen wore 'Franklin' hats, ladies kid gloves dyed of a 'Franklin' hue, and cotelettes a la Franklin were served at fashionable dinners."^21

The first fruit of Franklin's negotiations was an agreement on the part of the French government to furnish two million livres a year in quarterly installments, to assist the American cause. Three ships loaded with military supplies were fitted out for America and American privateers were allowed to be fitted out in French ports. A million livres were also advanced to the American commission on account of a quantity of tobacco to be

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delivered. The French, however, were unwilling to go further in their aid of the American Colonies until America proved herself a more capable military ally. It was during Franklin's first months in Paris that a number of French volunteers were won over to the American cause (the first part of the year 1777). Among these enthusiastic Frenchmen was one Marquis de Lafayette who sought youthful glory. It was only after his American experience that Lafayette became a dedicated republican, but his enthusiasm, supported by Vergennes, warmed the spirits of the French for the American cause.
Chapter III. Beaumarchais and Roderique Hortalez & Co.

It now became necessary to discuss one of the most interesting and important supporters of the American revolutionary cause in France, Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. Beaumarchais had a very remarkable life encompassing numerous careers. By the time he was nineteen, he had become a watchmaker and invented an escapement mechanism still used on modern watches. He later became involved in espionage and finally became a playwright. Today he is primarily noted as the author of Le Barbier de Séville and La Mariée de Figaro.

When it became known that the Thirteen American Colonies had gone to war with Britain, the Comte de Vergennes was in charge of the French foreign office. With the report of the Battle of Bunker Hill, Vergennes became convinced that at last the opportunity which had eluded Chaisaul had arrived.22

In September 1775, he sent to Philadelphia a special agent, Mr. Achard Bonvouloir, to encourage colonists and to intimate that they would be permitted the free use of French ports. Almost simultaneously, he entered into close association with Caron de Beaumarchais, a trusted French agent, who was eager to offer help to the Colonials for the benefit of France. Beaumarchais had become sponsor of the American cause.

In 1775 when he had contacted the militia diplomat Arthur Lee, "who discussed plans for assisting the rebellious Americans

It now becomes necessary to discuss one of the most interesting and important supporters of the American revolutionary cause in France, Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. Beaumarchais had a very remarkable life encompassing numerous careers. By the time he was nineteen, he had become a watchmaker and invented an escapement mechanism still used on modern watches. He later became involved in espionage and finally became a play wright. Today he is primarily noted as the author of *Le Barbier de Seville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro*.

When it became known that the Thirteen American Colonies had gone to war with Britain, the Comte de Vergennes was in charge of the French foreign office. "With the reports of the battle of Bunker Hill, Vergennes became convinced that at last the opportunity which had elluded Choiseul had arrived." In September 1775, he sent to Philadelphia a special agent, M. Achard Bonvouloir, to encourage colonists and to intimate that they would be permitted the free use of French ports. Almost simultaneously, he entered into close association with Caron de Beaumarchais, a trusted French agent, who was eager to offer help to the Colonials for the benefit of France.

Beaumarchais had become enamored of the American cause in 1775 when he had contacted the militia diplomat Arthur Lee, "who discussed plans for assisting the rebellious Americans

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against Britain." He was the first political writer of his day to develop in popular terms, the position that it was through America that the balance of power in Europe could be readjusted. For nearly a year prior to the arrival of Franklin, he became the exclusive business agent under whose authority military munitions and supplies were channeled into America. Without these materials the American cause of Independence would have been almost irreparably hampered.

Beaumarchais came to believe that America must be saved if France wished to preserve its possessions in the West Indies. If peace should come between the colonies and the mother country they would unite against France. The only way to preserve peace between France and England was to aid the American colonies thus counterbalancing the force of both parties. He proposed to preserve America through a medium of private individuals who were pledged to secrecy and thus would not embarrass the government of France. Beaumarchais bombarded both Vergennes and Louis XVI with letters asking for assistance for America. These appeals for action were vigorous and vivid but Louis XVI was still a young man and slow witted. The king feared to engage England in a war but

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23 Bailey, *Diplomatic History*, p. 29.
did wish to inflict damage if he himself were not hurt. The French wished to encourage the rebels with needed shipments of money and war supplies. On May 2, 1776,\textsuperscript{24} it was determined to organize a dummy corporation to cover the process of supplying American revolutionaries, with Beaumarchais as its head. The corporation was given the name of Roderique Hortalez \& Co. "To encourage the enterprize France and Spain each gave to the 'mercantile house' one million of francs, while the house was permitted to purchase an unlimited credit military stores to be forwarded to Congress. On the face of the transaction according to the principals of international law, no breach of neutrality."\textsuperscript{25} "Ninety per cent of the powder used by the colonials during the first two and one half years of the war came from Europe. Most of it came from Roderique Hortalez et Compagnie."\textsuperscript{26} Thus it was that the busy French playwright provided Washington with the supplies he needed to keep his tattered army going.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{25}Wharton, introduction to \textit{Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence}, p. 370.
\item \textsuperscript{26}Bailey, \textit{Diplomatic History}, p. 30.
\end{itemize}
On May 10, 1774, Louis XVI died after having been King of France for nearly sixty years. The man who succeeded him, Louis XVI was twenty years old and was inexperienced in matters of kingship. Throughout the remainder of his life Louis would remain a weak and inept king, much preoccupied to spend his time at his hobbies, hunting and tinkering with locks, rather than at duties of state. He tended to rely on advisors to govern realizing much of his own inadequacy. From his father, the late Dauphin, Louis had gained what knowledge he had of administrative matters, but was shy natured and that he should turn for advice to the old friend of his father, and place in the position of Prime Minister the Comte de Maurepas.27 Maurepas proved to be adequate and prudent in his advice to the king and the sincerity of his manner made his advice always of primary importance to the young king.

The Duc de Choiseul, although he had been removed from power in 1770, desired to return as Minister of Foreign Affairs and in this regard was supported by the king's wife, Marie Antoinette, whose marriage he had helped to arrange thus ingratiating himself to her. Choiseul's primary desire at that

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time was the withdrawal from the alliance with Austria. "Though ardent and brilliant in the conduct of business, Choiseul possessed a somewhat frivolous attitude towards life and relations. This attitude was distasteful to the king." 28 Louis XVI wished sober, serious, sincere men in his cabinet rather than men of brilliancy and chose Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes for the office of Minister of Foreign Affairs. "In 1774, the Comte de Vergennes was fifty five years old with thirty three years of diplomatic experience to his credit." 29 The king came to rely on the experience of Vergennes and on matters of foreign policy did act on his advice. Vergennes' success in influencing the king resulted not from his use of the king's confidence in furthering his own ends but rather used it as a means of fitting the king for a successful reign. Vergennes did not try to force the young king to his way of thinking but rather worked toward training Louis in a grasp of foreign affairs. Such confidence did Louis place in Vergennes that, when in 1776 the Duc de Choiseul's supporters attempted to displace Vergennes, the king rendered the position of his Foreign Minister secure and, from that point on, Vergennes maintained control over the development

28 Ibid., p. 33
29 Ibid., p. 34
of foreign policy. Vergennes was also capable in preserving a close friendship with the Prime Minister, M. de Maurepas. The two men's thoughts were similar on most important matters and this accord between M. de Maurepas and Vergennes had a great deal to do with the successful outcome of Vergennes' foreign policy.

The Duc de Choiseul had been succeeded as Foreign Minister by the Duc d'Arguillon, whose tenure of office produced nothing of consequence (to the growth of French American relations). The Compte de Vergennes then, while not the immediate successor of Choiseul as Minister, was to a large extent the heir of his policies.\textsuperscript{30}

The most important inheritance of Vergennes from the foreign policy of Choiseul was the \textit{Pacte de Famille}. This was an offensive and defensive alliance with Spain based upon the family relationship between the Spanish and French royal houses. Each of these nations had a Bourbon monarchy. The primary aim of Vergennes' foreign policy was a desire to recover the prestige of France and the diplomatic action most important to this end was his establishment in 1780 of the League of Neutrality which completed the diplomacy of the \textit{Pacte de Famille} isolating England politically and commercially and making successful France's aid toward the cause of American independence.

Upon taking office, Vergennes centered interest upon relations between Spain and France. Both Charles III of Spain

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 38
and Louis XVI of France held each other in mutual high regard. The primary problem in observing the Pacte de Famille was the lack of identity of interests between the two courts. This resulted because of the fact that the minister of France was more interested in expression of friendship to Spain, than was Spain's minister interested in a similar expression to France. Spain's primary interest was in the preservation and welfare of its vast colonial empire. England always worked to divert Spanish interests from the French alliance in order to weaken important opposition to herself. In this regard England was too ready to support Portugal in any confrontation she might have with Spain. The English knew that Spain could be diverted from close co-operation in the Pacte de Famille by her personal quarrels with Morocco, Algiers, and most important, Portugal. Struggle broke out between Portugal and Spain in July 1774 over a boundary line separating the provinces of Buenos Aires and Paraguay. These outbreaks proved to be common but were dangerous in that they could result in a general war because Spain always had the desire to unite the two nations of the Iberian peninsula under its crown. Vergennes, at this juncture, worked to avoid conflict with England over this matter believing that France must preserve a status quo in order to build up great enough defense to re-establish France as the deciding force in the European balance of power. France did not wish to waste itself on a fruitless struggle.
During this time, Vergennes was watching events in America very seriously. The reaction to The Intolerable Acts had resulted in the assemblage of the First Continental Congress (September 1774). In January 1775, England began to transfer heavy military supplies to her American colonies and these events required close watching by both France and Spain. Vergennes at this point still desired to give no reason to suspect either France or Spain and so instructed his representatives.

During the summer of 1775, England, who had maintained an apparently peaceful attitude, began to think of engaging in open hostility with France. The British reasoned that their American colonies would ally with them in such a struggle for fear of French success which would establish Catholicism as a dominant religion in North America. The Bourbon powers began to think seriously of struggle and on August 7, 1775, Vergennes hinted at a possible American alliance in a dispatch to the French minister in Madrid, Ossun. Toward the middle of the month, in dispatches between the courts of France and Spain there was increased discussion of possible action against England including enumeration of military forces. In these dispatches both nations bound themselves to a colonial attack on Britain in the hope of diminishing the political ascendancy of that nation and, more importantly, it was stated that the American colonies were, if
necessary, to be treated as independent nations. Spain, however, was not totally sincere in her statements and Grimaldi, the Spanish Prime Minister, hoped to use troops being gathered for colonial campaigns in an attack on Lisbon. Vergennes immediately realizing that such an attempt would disturb the European political balance and gain him nothing in the most profitable field of action for the French, British North America, thwarted the plans of Spain placing his country in direct opposition to them.

In January, 1776, Spain proposed joint action with France to attack England but Vergennes refused the plan still feeling that his nation was not yet prepared for aggression and that his policy would be best served by allowing England to become involved in a war with her colonies. Vergennes proposed the use of Louisiana (Spanish colony) as a supply depot for American colonial insurgents but Spain refused to help America through Louisiana.

In May, 1776 occurred an incident which threatened the existence of the Pacte de Famille. "A French ship, the Septimane, sailing from Constantinople to Algiers, was seized and taken to Carthagena by two Spanish men of war on the pretext that she was dealing in contraband." Negotiations began with Spain. The situation was eased in June when news of a Portu-

31 Ibid., p. 54.
guese attack on the LaPlata River in South America was received. The Spanish prime minister came to believe that England was supporting Portugal in the attack. Vergennes sent a harsh protest to Spain imputing that Spain had too long considered herself dominant over France and that the French ship and cargo must be immediately returned. Spain, facing the Portuguese threat, was forced to comply with France and the **Pacte de Famille** was reaffirmed. Vergennes pointed out to the Spanish king the importance of aiding the American rebellion as opposing a common enemy and on March 14, 1776, Spanish support to America became a solid grant of one million livres.

On August 13, 1776, Vergennes was informed of the American Declaration of Independence and "on August 31 he issued a report to the king's council entitled *Considerations sur le parti qu'il convient à la France de prendre vis à vis de l'Angleterre dans la circonstance actuelle.*"\(^{32}\) This proposed the immediate declaration of war against England by both France and Spain. On January 4, 1777, Vergennes again submitted a declaration of war against England and alliance with America. The Spanish reply was favorable, pointing up that the Colonists were losing ground fast, and once the fighting ended, England would pose a common threat to France and Spain. Also in May 1777, the King

\(^{32}\)Ibid., p. 57
of Portugal died and Spain's prospects of war with that nation disappeared. Both of the Bourbon powers were thus prepared to face England in open war.

Vergennes was an unyielding Anglophobe who looked upon England as the natural enemy of France. Unlike Choiseul, Vergennes had no illusions about the ease of destroying the British empire nor underestimated its strength. As has been shown, he worked diligently to build up the support of Spain in any operations against England. Vergennes did not put a great deal of reliance upon the bond between the Hapsburgs and Bourbons. He planned to use the alliance with the Hapsburgs only as a continental defensive measure, and did not wish to resume the mistake of involving France in the territorial ambitions of Austria.

On the contrary, his (Vergennes') long range policy of appeasement was to involve making discreet advances to Prussia and effecting a rapprochement with the estranged Russia; of giving financial aid to the Rhenish clients, such as the Palatinate and Zwei brucken, of contracting new marriage alliances, eg. with Genoa, Piedmont, and Saxony; and of supplementing his country's diplomatic friendships with commercial allies. This policy encompassed sacrifice but Vergennes was willing to undergo these in order to achieve his primary goal of destroying Britain's power by cutting off its source in American trade. When this link had been broken, Britain's decline would begin and France would once again move into a preponderance in world affairs.

33 Gershoy, From Despotism to Revolution, p. 168.
In the days following immediately upon the outbreak of fighting in the American Revolution, the Continental Congress turned to the important question of gaining support from Europe.

While many factors guided the delegates' thoughts into this channel, three major ones were obvious of course to any man surveying the state of the Thirteen Colonies. First, to survive, financial aid was essential, since Britain had not encouraged the accumulation of capital in the colonies. Next, supplies of all kinds must be found and a steady flow arranged from Europe into America for British policy had reduced these old colonial manufactories. Act of 1750 which shut down on the American production and processing of iron. And finally, to prosecute a war with the colonies was certainly had to obtain the support of a large, efficient, up-to-date fleet to checkmate British control of the seas and waterways.

Chapter V. The French Move Toward an American Alliance.

The news of Louis XVI's accession to the French crown arrived in Boston on the same day that the state men closed by British orders. One can only speculate on what was going on in the minds of American patriots, as they looked with anxiety upon this new king of France who held so much of their future at stake. The Americans had helped to defeat Louis XVI in 1789, but was the new king a friend or enemy? Among the members of Louis' cabinet were Martine, minister of the navy, Vergennes, minister of the treasury; Malespa, prime minister, and Vergennes as foreign minister. It must be noted that Vergennes was a

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royalist and that all of his skill was dedicated to the greatness of France. Vergennes looked upon the American revolutionaries as instruments in breaking down the British empire, never as proponents of a glorious republican sentiment. Louis XVI was even less friendly to republican ideals than was his minister of foreign affairs. He was a believer in divine right of kings, an absolute monarch by upbringing, and an admirer of George III, whose respectability of character and whose determination not to yield one inch to rebels must have appealed to an absolute monarch. France in 1770 couldn't be sure that the Colonies, no matter how much at odds with the mother country, would not support England in any war with France. This apprehension of the king suspended French involvement in America for a time. During this time, however, Franklin, as colonial agent in London, discerned a possibility of close relations with France which could be of the most benefit in the future.

"In 1774, however, Vergennes became convinced that a final rupture between England and her Colonies was at hand."35 This was the period when the first coercive acts (intolerable acts) were put into effect and aroused the colonies. By December 1774, various London based Americans, probably including Arthur Lee, were hinting of great colonial interest in French aid if a

35 Wharton, introduction to Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, p. 333.
conflict broke out with England. England had, not long before, aided Corsican insurgents against France and Vergennes availed himself of this opportunity to acquaint Louis XVI with the idea of intervention in America. Bonvouloir, a soldier of some distinction, was selected by Vergennes as secret agent to America by September of 1775. Bonvouloir's orders were to seek out the most important insurgents and gain all of the information he could without committing his country to any course. Arriving in Philadelphia in December of 1775, Bonvouloir met "Franklin, Harrison, Johnson, Dickinson, and Jay, members of the secret committee instituted by Congress." What Bonvouloir told them was that he promised them every service and they could depend upon him, but that he was not responsible in any way for events. Would France aid them? Possibly she might.

In March of 1776, Bonvouloir's accounts of his mission became known and Rayneval, chief clerk in the French department of state, issued a report on them to Vergennes. The ideas contained in this paper are very important. Rayneval called England the natural enemy of France which was a greedy, ambitious, unjust, and faithless enemy, the invariable and cherished object of whose policy was the impoverishment, humiliation, and ruin of France, and that it was the business of France to take every

\[36\] Ibid., p. 334

\[37\] Bonvouloir's report is found in Wharton, introduction to Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, p. 334.
opportunity of weakening England. To aid the Colonies would diminish the power of England, cause a diminution in England's commerce and a great increase in French commerce, and bring the eventual recovery of French possessions which had been taken by England including Canada. America could not be dangerous to French colonies because, once independent, it would form itself into a republic which usually are not given to conquest and it would be too exhausted by war to attack its neighbors.

The proper way of assisting the Colonies was an exchange of arms and stores conducted by confidential agents not openly involving the government. Money assistance could either be direct or indirect. England, if successful in maintaining her colonies, would attack French colonies out of revenge for supplying the aid. In the advent that England was defeated, she would attempt to take the French West Indies as indemnification. France must avoid committing herself until ready to strike but, since war was inevitable in any case, France must obtain the sympathy of the colonies and make common cause with them.  

By the fall of 1775, Vergennes was also working hand in hand with Beaumarchais. Beaumarchais, advised by the minister, wrote letter after letter to Louis XVI urging him to grant the American colonies aid. Beaumarchais emphasized that Britain's policy sought to degrade and undermine France. France must

38Rayneval's report is found in Wharton, introduction to Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, pp. 335-336.
take the opportunity to injure England at so slight expense. Encouraged by the report on Bonvouloir, Vergennes and Beaumarchais worked to gain support. Vergennes efforts to draw Spain into the conflict have already been noted.

The ideas of Vergennes and Beaumarchais were eventually embodied by Vergennes into official memoranda to be read before the king. The most important of these was written in April 1776 and entitled: "Reflections on the Present Situation of the English Colonies, and on the conduct which France ought to hold in regard to them." The wording of this paper is close to that of the Rayneval report. England was branded as the natural enemy," a rapacious, unjust, and fruitless enemy." The advantages of aiding the colonies listed are those mentioned in the Rayneval report.

On March 17, 1776, Vergennes had issued his paper "Considerations." This reflects upon the advantages for the two crowns of Spain and France to be gained by a continuing civil war in America. Spain and France must render assistance to the Americans, for the war between England and her colonies would afford the opportunity to reduce England to a second rate power. The two crowns being unable to act in an all out war must have recourse to a circumspect policy. Vergennes laid down four propositions: 1) care must be taken by France and Spain not to commit themselves, 2) inaction would not save France from being an object of suspicion in the American war,
3) the continuation of the American Colonial War would be of advantage to Spain and France, 4) the method to secure the best results would be to keep up the persuasion of the English ministry that France and Spain were pacific so as not to engage in a costly campaign; but, on the other hand, give courage to the Americans by countenancing them secretly and by giving vague hopes. The colonial American contest would thus grow fiercer and weaken Britain, no matter what the outcome.

Vergennes goes on to say that the American insurgents should be given secret assistance in military stores and money, but no open contract would be made with them until independence was achieved.39

Vergennes, aided by Beaumarchais, finally managed to win over the king and most of the council to a policy of secret assistance on May 2, 1776. Louis XVI ordered one million livres worth of arms and munitions sent to the colonies through Beaumarchais' Roderique Hortalez and Company. "Thus before any agent of the colonies had set foot on French soil, the French government had decided to pour oil on the flames of rebellion in America in order to embarrass Great Britain and to seek the moment for revenge."40

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39 Vergennes' paper is found in Wharton introduction to Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, p. 338.

40 Bemis, Diplomatic History, p. 21.
Vergennes had not won his struggle without a great deal of opposition. Louis XVI saw it as dishonorable conduct and possible disaster. Turgot shared the King's fears. In a state paper, Turgot vehemently pointed out that war with Britain must be avoided at all cost, for it would ruin his plans for renovation of France's economy and would drive a heavily in debt nation into bankruptcy (future events would prove how right he was). Turgot maintained that the colonies would eventually achieve independence, and, if Britain held them by force, she must naturally weaken her position in relation to France. Vergennes maintained that American independence would weaken England's commercial preeminence allowing France to make gains commercially and that an independent America would be so weak that it could never threaten French colonies in the West Indies.

The moneys given in 1776 aided greatly the cause of American independence.

Later French subsidies and loans brought France's cash investment in the United States by 1783 to more than eight million eighteenth century dollars...... Beaumarchais and his heirs preferred to think of loans rather than gifts and long claimed that congress failed to pay 3,600,000 livres due to him. Finally his heirs were paid 700,000 francs to settle the dispute.41

In March of 1776, Silas Deane, a merchant of Connecticut, was selected by the Committee for Foreign Affairs to try to buy munitions and various other war materials on credit and to see if France could assist the patriots. Following the Declaration of Independence, Congress determined to send an official dele-

41 Alden, The American Revolution, p. 182.
gation to the French court. The commission consisted of Silas Deane, Arthur Lee, and Benjamin Franklin. Prior to the selection of this commission an agreement was made on a model treaty for negotiating with foreign powers called the "Plan of 1776." The principles established were to be incorporated into all treaties of amity and commerce which were created with foreign lands.

The maritime principles of the Plan of 1776 were picked almost word for word out of eighteenth century European practice as reflected in the treaties of Utrecht and generally in the treaties of small navy powers: free ships, free goods, freedom of neutrals to trade in non-contraband between port and port of a belligerent, restricted and carefully defined lists of contraband not including foodstuffs or naval stores, and generally liberal and considerate treatment of neutral shipping. ⁴²

The Americans at first rejected any idea of attempting to seek alliance with France. It was only with great difficulty that Congress finally agreed to abandon traditional American animosities toward France, realizing that foreign aid was vital to winning independence. Vergennes' plans at the time (Mid-1776) did not include a Franco-American alliance because he was contemplating siding with Spain in action against Britain and Portugal at the time. The Congress, at this time, wished to create with France an extremely one-sided treaty in which France would recognize American Independence and offer military aid without America offering any guarantees that a reconciliation

would not be reached with England. Congress apparently counted upon French bitterness towards England in the hoped for agreement. "The commissioners were also authorized to give a pledge that the patriots would not make peace without giving France six months' notice." The commission was also assigned to obtain French military engineers and to buy or borrow eight warships of the line. The commission was given one trump card in that it was delegated to report that, if France delayed, the patriots might be induced to end hostilities with Britain. France and Spain were also offered territorial concessions, at the expense of Britain for entry into the war.

In the meanwhile, Vergennes had just about reached a tentative agreement between France and Spain to declare war on Britain. Spain demanded as reward Minorca and Portugal and Vergennes was willing to sanction an attack on Portugal in exchange for the aid of the Spanish army and fleet. In September of 1776, however, news of General Howe's successes in America reached Vergennes. With General Howe in possession of Long Island, the fear of a British invasion upon French and Spanish colonies in search of winter quarters disappeared. Vergennes saw this was a chance for France to continue the augmentation of her forces and resumed a policy of secret aid.

During the year 1777, Benjamin Franklin emerged into the front rank of diplomats. "He was installed in the then suburb

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43 Alden, The American Revolution, p. 185.
of Passy on the right bank of the Seine, finely lodged in the Chateau de Chaumont which was put at his disposal gratis by the owner, Donatien le Roy." It was during this period that Franklin fell into his role as a rustic philosopher, the "natural man" of Rousseau and gathered around him a worshiping entourage of French ladies - "notably Madame Helvétius and Madame Brillon." Franklin left much of the work in drawing up details for a commercial treaty with Deane and Lee while he gallantly and shrewdly played a game for higher stakes. Carefully avoiding court intrigues such as Choiseul's attempt to oust Vergennes, he used his wit, dropping a line here, a joke there, as more and more French ships, loaded with supplies, sailed for America and as more and more American privateers docked in French ports.

Vergennes, in the meantime, was having his difficulties soothing the irate British ambassador, Lord Stormont, who claimed that "all human things have bounds beyond which they cannot go." Franklin continued working at his diplomatic game by maintaining that he had little interest in formal military alliance and that such an alliance might bind America's interests. So effectively was the idea presented that many in Louis' court began to wonder if Franklin could be induced to accept an alliance if one were offered.

44 Lancaster, American Revolution, p. 260.
"On July 24, 1777, the Comte de Vergennes communicated to the Spanish Court a long memoir, bearing the approuvé of Louis XVI, in which he proposed an open alliance with the Americans."\(^{46}\) Now Vergennes was stating that "our assistance must become sufficiently effective to assure a total separation and forcer les Américains à la gratitude."\(^{47}\) (force the Americans to gratitude). He went on to say that to allow the Americans to be defeated would give England so much power that both France and Spain would pay the consequences in the future. Charles III had gained a new foreign minister in the Count Floridablanca, who was opposed to American independence, believing that the American nation could some day pose a threat to Spain's colonies, which would be greater than that posed by Britain. He proposed a Franco-Spanish mediation in the struggle between the British and patriots, hoping to leave both the mother country and the colony in an uneasy truce which would weaken both.

During the final part of the year 1777, France was moving ever closer to an open alliance with the American insurgents. This is true even though she lacked the full backing of Spain. Almost in the open did French ships bring supplies and arma-

\(^{46}\) Meng, *Comte de Vergennes*, p. 63.

\(^{47}\) Vergennes' letter in Meng, *Comte de Vergennes*, p. 63.
ments to America, still largely through the system created by Beaumarchais. French officers such as Lafayette volunteered for the American cause and sympathy for the patriots was evident almost everywhere in France. There was one drawback preventing a Franco-American alliance and this was the disheartening news of British military victories and the continuous American setbacks. With Howe's capture of Philadelphia, it looked as if the patriot cause was nearly lost. On November 24, however, heartening news reached Paris that Washington's army had performed well at Germantown and then came the most shattering news of all; this was the news of the great American victory at Saratoga and the surrender of Burgoyne on December 4, 1777.48

The news of this victory convinced even the most cautious among the French that the American cause was not to be swept aside easily and that the patriots could indeed win a victory over a major British force. The French understood this victory as a sign of American capability to carry the war to a successful conclusion.

On December 17, without even waiting to discover whether Spain would join France, the French Foreign Minister promised the United States formal recognition, a step certain to bring on his country a declaration of war from London. In return, he asked a pledge from the American commissioners that the United States as an ally would not make a separate peace, a pledge which

48 The dates given are the dates of the arrival of the news in Europe. The Battle of Saratoga was fought in October of 1777.
they gave.\textsuperscript{49}

On January 8, 1778, the French Court dispatched an invitation to Spain to join in negotiating a treaty of alliance with the United States. The answer from Spain was negative, "the necessity of protecting Spain's treasure fleet" was advanced as the primary reason for delaying action. Vergennes determined to push ahead in negotiations without Spain and open war between France and England stood close at hand.

\textsuperscript{49}Alden, \textit{The American Revolution}, p. 189.
On the evening of Friday, February 6, 1778, Benjamin Franklin discarded those sober cloths which most Parisians insisted were Quaker garb, and donned a magnificent, if slightly out-of-date, coat of figured blue Manchester velvet. His astonished colleagues Deane and Lee were stunned by the sudden burst of elegance.\footnote{Lancaster, The Revolution, p. 282.}

The occasion was the signing of the treaty which bound France to the United States in a firm alliance. Franklin maintained that he had worn this coat in London in 1774, to a special hearing of a Parliamentary committee, when Alexander Hamilton had attacked him violently for his part in the Court of the private Hutchinson-Oliver letters concerning activities in the colony. Franklin smilingly intimated that today he was giving the coat "a little revenge."

That evening in Vergennes' office, in the Hôtel de Neutrem, Franklin, Lee and Deane signed the two epochal parts with France, one of comparse and one of alliance.

The opportunity had at last come for France to renew war with Britain. The old British-French rivalry for North America had been the basis for French involvement in the American Revolution. The animosities existing between...
On the evening of Friday, February 6, 1778, Benjamin Franklin discarded those somber cloths which most Parisians insisted were Quaker garb, and donned a magnificent, if slightly out-of-date, coat of figured blue Manchester velvet. His astonished colleagues Deane and Lee were stunned by the sudden burst of elegance.50

The occasion was the signing of the treaty which bound France to the United States in a firm alliance. Franklin maintained that he had worn this coat in London in 1774, to a special hearing of a Parliamentary committee, when Alexander Wedderbun had attacked him violently for his part in the transmission to the Massachusetts General Court of the private Hutchinson-Oliver letters concerning activities in the colony. Franklin smilingly intimated that today he was giving the coat "a little revenge." That evening in Vergennes' office, in the Hotel de Lautrec, Franklin, Lee and Deane signed the two epochal pacts with France, one of commerce and one of alliance.

The opportunity had at last come for France to renew warfare with Britain. The old British-French rivalry for North America had been the basis for French involvement in the American revolution. The animosities existing between

50 Lancaster, The Revolution, p. 262.
the two nations had never really ceased and the Treaty of Paris of 1763, had only provided a breathing spell in the Anglo-French rivalry for world dominion. France had rebuilt her military forces and strengthened her bonds of alliance, particularly with Spain, awaiting the right opportunity to strike at British supremacy. In 1778, the opportunity had arrived at last. The deadly sincerity of France's determination to intervene in the American war and thus renew its anti-British policy can be shown by the fact that, before signing the treaties of the Franco-American alliance, France had been given a tempting opportunity to become involved in European territorial aggrandizement.

Upon the death of Maximilian, Elector of Bavaria, December 30, 1777, Joseph II of Austria promptly occupied and annexed the major portion of the electorate. Frederick the Great of Prussia immediately went to war to prevent it. If France would have been willing to support the Austrian aggression against Prussia she could have as a reward the Austrian Netherlands.51 Vergennes realized that this involvement with Austria would have precluded any military action against Britain. France worked to tranquilize the situation in Bavaria which led to a stalemate in the peace of Teschen. France was not

51Bemis, Diplomatic History, p. 29.
going to allow her opportunity against England to slip through her fingers.

The Treaty of Amity and Commerce between France and the United States contained within it the maritime principles established in the Plan of 1776 (previously discussed) and most-favored-nation trading principles—that is, both signing nations agreed that if any special trading privileges were granted to other nations in the future, these favors would immediately be granted to each other (Article 2). This Treaty of Amity and Commerce formally extended complete and official recognition of the United States by France, which almost automatically implied warfare with Great Britain. The treaty, furthermore, stated that it was lawful for either party to carry, wherever they pleased, ships, goods, and prizes taken from the enemy nor could these be seized when they entered the port of either party (Article 19). It was also declared illegal for either signatory to give shelter or refuge to those who have made prize of the subjects, people, or property of either signing party in ports. Article 24, outlawed any Privateers not belonging to the Christian king of France or the United States to fit their ships in the ports, exchange or sell goods in the nations of the signing parties. Article 25, stipulated that free ships shall also give a freedom to goods and "that everything shall be deemed to be free and
exempt, which shall be found on board Ships belonging to Subjects of either of the Confederates, although the whole lading or any Part thereof should appertain to the enemies of either, contraband goods being always excepted." The liberty of navigation was to extend to all kinds of merchandise but contraband (Arms, great guns, bombs, cannon balls, gun powder, pikes, swords, lances, spears, mortars, petards, grenades, muskets, musket balls, hecklers, helmets, breast plates, coats of mail and all kinds of arms proper for arming soldiers).

In the interests of the weaker mercantile nations, including the United States, the French Treaty of Commerce provided for the whittling down of contraband lists - that is, lists of war materials that neutral ships could not carry without risking seizure by belligerent cruisers.53

The Treaty of Amity and Commerce generously granted to American skippers valuable privileges. France abandoned the policy of secret aid which had been cheap but effective and started on a policy of overt assistance at a ruinous cost to herself.


53 Bailey, Diplomatic History, p. 34.
In a general sense the Treaty of Commerce was absolute and immediate in its effects; The Franco-American Treaty of Alliance was eventual or contingent on war taking place between France and Britain. The Treaty of Alliance would go into effect with a British declaration of war. Of the two treaties, the Treaty of Alliance is the more important and contains the more vital provisions.

Article I of the Treaty of Alliance between France and the United States declared that "if War should break out between France and Great Britain, during the continuance of the present War between the United States and England, his Majesty (king of France) and the said United States, shall make it a common cause." The direct purpose of the treaty was stated as the maintenance effectually of the sovereignty liberty, and independence of the United States (Article 2). The United States was permitted, if it so desired, to attempt to seize British lands in Northern parts of America or the Bermuda Islands and to make them dependent upon the United States (Article 5). France was given the right to dispose of other British American islands except the Bermudas. The French also renounced any claim they might have had to French colonial possessions in North America prior to 1763 (including Canada). A very important article was Article 8 which stated that neither

France nor the United States would conclude a truce or peace with Great Britain without first gaining the consent of the other "and they mutually engage not to lay down their arms, until the Independence of the United States shall have been formally or tacitly assured by the Treaty or Treaties that shall terminate the War...." The two nations also guaranteed the possessions of each other in America.

It must be noted that part of the reason for French haste in signing the treaties resulted from French fear that a reconciliation might be effected between America and Great Britain. Almost immediately, the Ministry in London obtained copies of both treaties through a spy, Dr. Edward Bancroft, and after official notification of the Treaty on Amity and Commerce, George III dismissed the French ambassador. The Carlisle Commission had been established by the British to seek a reconciliation with the colonies, based upon Parliamentary repeal of the most obnoxious legislation to the colonies and repeal of The Intolerable Acts. The French treaty still had to be ratified with Congress and both the French treaty and Carlisle Commission literally raced across the Atlantic to see which would be accepted first. The French treaties arrived first and were immediately ratified by Congress in Philadelphia on May 2, 1778. France and England entered into hostilities with no formal declaration of war on June 17, 1778, when their fleets met off Ushant. France had taken the irrevocable step to war with England.

55 Ibid., p. 27.
Chapter VII. Drawing Spain into the Conflict and The League of Armed Neutrality.
France's immediate diplomatic concerns after signing the treaties allying herself with the United States in 1778, were to draw Spain into the war, and to gather up continental European support against England. In doing this, France hoped to create a situation of diplomatic isolation for England and resume her position of preeminence in continental affairs. This would also greatly enhance England's vulnerability in the war and bring about a hoped for collapse in Britain's preeminence as a world power.

England immediately sought to make use of all possible measures in keeping Spain neutral. In April, 1778, Vergennes undertook efforts to create a friendly attitude between France and Spain and he used the occasion of an English suggestion that Spain act as intermediary in the dispute with France to do this. The French minister accepted the suggestion, although he believed it to be nothing more than an attempt by England to gain time. Good feeling resulted between France and Spain because of France's friendly attitude and the eagerness with which the French court accepted the advances of the Spanish king, Charles III. In May, the Spanish ambassador in London, Escarano, was insulted by Lord Weymouth, the English Foreign Secretary, who denied ever suggesting mediation in the war and
stated that France must disavow her recognition of the United States before any negotiations could proceed. This proved to be a great blow to any accord reached between Spain and England and threw Spain into the waiting arms of Vergennes.

The Spanish continued to procrastinate wavering from war, one day, to mediation the next, and it seemed as though Florida Blanca wished to drag out negotiations with France for an indefinite period. Finally, however, Vergennes' resourcefulness paid off and "on November 9, 1778, Montmorin, the French ambassador in Madrid noted that Count Florida Blanca, the Spanish Foreign Minister, believed it necessary to prepare for war with England in the spring." 56 Spain was willing to aid France but not the United States; on November 12 Montmorin wrote that it was apparent that Spain regarded the United States as her enemy, and would leave nothing undone to prevent America from drawing near her possessions. Vergennes immediately pointed out that the United States was too feeble to cause a threat to Spanish colonial possessions and that England, if victorious, would constitute the far greater threat. He said that the basis for any peace treaty would be the recognition of American independence but that France would accept a long truce with Britain. The Spanish minister stated the conditions under which Spain would enter the war: 1) France was to enlarge her fleet in the Caribbean and undertake the capture of Jamaica, 2) Spain

56 Meng, Comte de Vergennes, p. 72.
would capture Florida and Honduras from the British, 3) the British would be driven from Gibraltar. Florida Blanca still intimated that he distrusted the United States as much as England.

By December of 1778, Vergennes came to believe that the French fleet could not handle the larger British fleet without the aid of Spain and so the Pacte de Famille must be put into effect. After January of 1779, Spain refused to state conditions under which she might be induced to lend cooperation but demanded that such a list eminate from the court of France so that on February 12, 1779, Vergennes gave in to this humiliating condition, and dispatched the draft of a convention to Spain.

The convention stated that both nations (Spain and France) agree to insure the independence of the United States (Article 4). Article 5 outlined small advantages for France, and Article 7 listed the inducements which were offered to Spain.

1. The possession of the river and port of Mobile.
2. The restitution of Pensacola.
3. The expulsion of the British from the Bay of Honduras, with the prohibition of their never being allowed to form an establishment at that place.
4. The revocation of the privilege which was accorded them (the English) of cutting wood on the Bay of Compeche.
5. The restitution of Gibraltar.\(^{57}\)

Spain felt itself too bound to recognize the United States and also feared entering the war at too early of a date and so

\(^{57}\text{Ibid.}, p. 78.\)
continued to stall. Florida Blanca had sent a proposal for ending the war between France and England to the English ministry in November, 1778. On March 27, 1779, England rejected Spanish mediation in the dispute stating that they would never recognize American independence. In April, Spain sent an ultimatum demanding Spanish mediation which was fully rejected by England in May of 1779. On June 5, Vergennes received news of a Spanish break with England resulting from "insults offered the Spanish flag and territories by the English and the complete absence of any disposition of the latter to adjust these differences amicably." The rejection of Spanish offers of mediation was the primary cause for the break with England.

The final draft of the convention between France and Spain had been received by Vergennes in March and was only slightly different from Vergennes' original draft of February. Charles III insisted upon a loophole, whereby he would not have to recognize the United States as independent. Spain insisted upon the restitution of Gibraltar as the primary clause; they demanded all of Eastern Florida and the island of Minorca as well.

Thus the first great consequence of the French alliance was Vergennes' effort to draw Spain into the war on the side of France. By virtue of the Franco-Spanish alliance (April 12, 1779), known as the Convention of Aranjuez, Spain and France

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58 Ibid., p. 82.
agreed to fight until Gibraltar was recaptured for Spain. France, by drawing Spain into the war, had accomplished a major phase in its overall plan of cutting England off from allies and surrounding her with hostile nations. Spain maintained an overly cautious attitude for the remainder of the war and did not combine with the French in any great coordinated land or sea attacks. Vergennes' victory resulted in a restoration of the European balance of power after the American Revolutionary war ended. With the two Bourbon powers united, they were capable of wielding more power on the international scene than they would have been capable of alone. This tended to counterbalance England and raise the prestige of France and was a major step in restoring France's preeminence.

Upon the American war, the Spanish alliance did have some major consequences. Britain had to constantly fear a combined French and Spanish naval attack and thus was forced to keep a large naval reserve in its home waters which could have been used effectively against the revolutionaries in America.

The second major consequence of the Franco-American alliance was the tightening of the diplomatic net around Great Britain through the League of Armed Neutrality. Vergennes came to realize that if France was going to emerge victorious over England, she must preclude the intervention of any power friendly to England. Not only did Vergennes wish to maintain a neutrality of possible English allies, he also sought to create a naval league which would be hostile to Britain's autocratic rule of the seas.
It was the Armed Neutrality League of 1780 which crowned Vergennes' achievements in this regard. The document proclaiming armed neutrality was established by Catherine the Great of Russia on February 29, 1780. The proclamation established certain principles for the protection of neutral commerce in periods of war and the belligerent nations, France, Spain, and Great Britain were invited to join.

The principal European nations upon invitation later leagued themselves with the Armed Neutrality by formal adherences; the Netherlands, January 4, 1781; Prussia, May 19, 1782 (but Frederick the Great proclaimed the code on April 10, 1781); the Empire (Holy Roman), October 9, 1781; Portugal, July 4, 1782 (after peace negotiations had begun); the Two Sicilies, February 21, 1783 (after peace had been signed).\(^{59}\)

In the declaration of Catherine the Great concerning the rights of neutral nations several important ideas are stated. In Article I, it was pointed out that neutral ships have the right to navigate from one port to another as well as along the coasts of nations now at war.

The second article reiterates the idea that free ships make free goods excepting, of course, contraband goods. The enumeration of contraband did not include naval stores or ships' timbers. Article IV and V were as follows:

**Article IV.** That as to what concerns a port blocked up, we ought not, in truth, to consider as such any but those which are found so well shut up by a fixed and sufficient number of vessels belonging to the power which attacks it that one cannot attempt

\(^{59}\)Bemis, *Diplomatic History*, p. 39.
to enter into such port without evident danger.

Article V. That these principles above laid down ought to serve as a rule in all proceedings, whenever there is a question concerning legality of prizes.\(^6\)

With the League of Armed Neutrality, the opportunity had come for the weaker sea powers of Europe to assert their rights over England who had for centuries abused them. In the end this league assumed an unfriendly, even menacing, attitude which greatly weakened Britain's position. France, Spain, and the United States indicated their willingness to abide by the league and only England declined, fearing the loss of her control of the sea.

Although the League of Armed Neutrality was proclaimed by Catherine the Great, it was the Comte de Vergennes who was directly responsible for its development. Toward the end of November in 1776, Vergennes sent as minister to The Hague, one Duc de la Vauguyon who was instructed to impress upon the Dutch, the idea of refusal to submit to English domination and the desirability of strict neutrality in times of war. These statements contain within them the germ of the idea of the league. Vauguyon proved to be highly capable in winning over the Dutch to an eventual defiance of English overlordship when in 1780, Holland joined the League of Armed Neutrality.

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Vauguyon also succeeded, "on October 3, 1777, in influencing the merchants of Amsterdam to request the States General to grant armed escorts to their ships trading with America."61 which were being attacked by the British at that time. The States General did accede to the request. This destroyed any possibility of English and Dutch alliance and convinced Vergennes that a policy of binding together powers into a league of neutrality would be effective. In Sweden, Gustavus III owed his throne to France and received annual subsidies from that nation. At the time of the first naval engagements between France and England, he quickly declared his intention of maintaining a strict neutrality.

Denmark had been united to Russia and England in the so-called "Northern System" and Count Von Bernstorff, the Danish Foreign Minister, had always shown a marked preference for the English. In 1777, the Danish had declared their intention of neutrality when their ships were attacked by American privateers in the North Sea. Vergennes in 1778, granted the Danish ships French protection in their trade with France and a policy of neutrality was well on the way of being established.

Vergennes' primary problem existed in respect to Russia. "The French Foreign Minister had been personally responsible for defeating the ends of Russian diplomacy in Turkey and in Sweden, and the sting of those defeats still rankled."62

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61 Meng, Comte de Vergennes, p. 92.
62 Ibid., p. 94.
England and Russia had a long tradition of friendship reinforced by strong commercial bonds. Since the beginning of the American revolution, most of England’s imports of naval stores (timber) usually came from Russia. Vergennes quickly pointed out that if the American colonies were recaptured by England, Russia would lose this lucrative trade; he also stated that France had no claim on America’s post war commerce and this could be shared with neutral nations including Russia. In 1778, Vergennes worked to bring the Sultan of Turkey into negotiations and continued to supervise the discussions. These efforts had the desired results and on May 1, 1778, the Chevalier de Corberon, French chargé de affairs in St. Petersburg, was able to report that Catherine II realized the need to preserve her neutrality.

Thus in 1778, Vergennes had persuaded Holland, Sweden, Denmark, and Russia to maintain a policy of neutrality, but he still desired to form this neutrality into a strictly enforced system which would form a buttress to the aspiration of Great Britain.

Catherine the Great had announced her intention to remain neutral and, although her relations with France had improved, she was still pro-British in outlook as of the summer of 1778. In August of 1778, the raids of American privateers in the North Sea seriously hampered Russian shipping and the empress declared her intention of using force to protect her trade with England.
Her failure to mention an intention to guard her trade with France gave the French ambassador an opportunity to mention the idea of a league of neutrality to the empress. At this time, France was attempting to mediate the dispute between Austria and Prussia over Bavaria and in November of 1778, Catherine intimated to the French ambassador that she would like to play a role in maintaining the peace of Central Europe. This gave France another opportunity to bring up the idea of an armed league of neutrality. The English began to exert pressure in the opposite direction through their ambassador, Sir James Harris, who flattered the personal vanity of the empress and gave huge sums to her favorite, Potemkin, and transformed Vergennes' idea into a defensive league favorable to England. In February of 1779, Catherine declared a policy of neutrality in northern waters where England was the only nation carrying on extensive trade. French and American privateers were thus made the brunt of this declaration. Sweden and Denmark were invited to join Russia in this effort. In an effort to combat this, Vergennes determined to call upon his friendship with the King of Prussia. A friendship between France and Frederick the Great had been assured by the French settlement of the dispute over Bavaria. The Marquis de Pons, Ambassador to Berlin, reported that the Prussian king expressed the following, on April 15, 1779:
You may tell the king your master that it will be a pleasure for me to have this declaration retracted. I only ask a little time; I have a long argument to put forward.\textsuperscript{63}

The successful conclusions to the peace negotiations in Germany in which Russia and France were associated caused much better feeling to exist between the two courts. The Peace of Teschen was signed on May 13, 1779 ending fighting between Prussia and Austria and Corberon, the French ambassador in Russia, was able to report concerning the news of peace that "everything breathes enthusiasm and satisfaction,"\textsuperscript{64} between Russia and France. In this atmosphere, the arguments of the King of Prussia were decisive and Russia agreed to reverse her declarations concerning the northern seas.

From that point on, events seemed to favor Vergennes in his negotiations with Russia. Russia wished to mediate in the warfare between France and England but this was rejected by Britain in the second half of 1779. James Harris attempted to win the favor of Catherine, but Corberon proved his match in appealing to the vanity of the empress. In January of 1780, news of a seizure of a Dutch vessel, loaded with Russian wheat, by the Spanish in the Mediterranean arrived in St. Petersburg. The French prevailed upon the Russians to take a moderate attitude and eventually Spain reduced its

\textsuperscript{63}Letter of Frederick II of Prussia quoted in Meng, \textit{Comte de Vergennes}, p. 103.

\textsuperscript{64}Letter of Corberon quoted in Meng, \textit{Comte de Vergennes}, p. 106.
stringent regulations concerning neutral commerce in the Mediterranean. This act caused Catherine to think more seriously of creating a League of Armed Neutrality and finally the decision was made, nearly two years after it had been first suggested by Vergennes. The wording was directed against all belligerent powers but in actual operation worked to the detriment of England.

Thus with the proclamation of the League of Armed Neutrality in February 1780, France had completed its projected political isolation of Great Britain. This accomplishment was decisive to the outcome of the American revolution, perhaps guaranteeing a final British defeat after the Surrender of Cornwallis in 1781. The League of Armed Neutrality resulted from France's overall program of cutting Britain off from allies thus insuring a victory in the American war. Vergennes' negotiations forming the league, as his negotiations creating an alliance with the United States, show an ever progressing plan of action to restore France to her position of pre-eminence and to humble Britain. The League of Armed Neutrality may be deemed a consequence of the Franco-American alliance in that it was part of an overall program to insure a major French victory over Great Britain. The League proved to be one of the greatest threats to English security throughout the remainder of the Revolutionary War.
Chapter VIII. The Final Fruits of the French Alliance.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to delve deeply into the military results of the French Alliance; however, some highlights must be mentioned, in order to bring the French Alliance of 1780 into proper perspective.

The military aide of the Alliance bore fruit quickly in July of 1779, when a French fleet conveying transports appeared off the Delaware Capes and moved northward toward Sandy Hook, where the British were assembling men and supplies from New Jersey to maintain the French Admiral, d’Estaing, decided not to join into action with the British ships in the region fearing the unknown shallow waters. D’Estaing was also under orders to proceed as soon as possible to the French West Indies. Washington and the Admiral launched a joint land and sea attack on Newport, Rhode Island (British held) which resulted in failure because a reinforced British fleet was placed in the sound; and, in attempting to meet this fleet, d’Estaing was caught in a violent storm. After d’Estaing’s ships were refitted in Boston, he was forced to move to the West Indies. The first fruits of the French Alliance amounted to nothing; but, when the Americans failed to realize, was that France was fighting a world war in which America was only a small part.
It is not the purpose of this thesis to delve deeply into the military results of the French alliance; however, some highlights must be mentioned, in order to bring the French Alliance of 1780 into proper perspective.

The military side of the Alliance bore fruit quickly in July of 1778, when a French fleet convoying transports appeared off the Delaware Capes and moved northward toward Sandy Hook, where the British were embarking men and supplies from New Jersey to Manhattan. The French admiral, d'Estaing, decided not to join into action with the British ships in the region fearing the unknown shoal waters. D'Estaing was also under orders to proceed as soon as possible to the French West Indies. Washington and the Admiral mapped out a joint land and sea attack on Newport, Rhode Island (British held) which resulted in failure because a reinforced British fleet was placed in the sound; and, in attempting to meet this fleet, d'Estaing was caught in a violent storm. After d'Estaing's ships were refitted in Boston, he was forced to move to the West Indies. The first fruits of the French alliance amounted to nothing; but, what the Americans failed to realize, was that France was fighting a world war in which America was only a small part.
The fact that the war had become global by the French entrance into it, can be seen in the fact that Britain began to transfer units from Manhattan to British Florida and the West Indies. The emphasis in the war shifted to the southern states, where British troops could be moved back and forth between the West Indies and the Carolinas. This had not been done until France entered the war.

In the summer of 1779, the French captured the islands of St. Vincent and Grenada and threatened the British in the Caribbean. In September, d'Estaing sailed from Haiti to aid the American drive against British held Savannah, an enterprise which ended in defeat. The presence of the French fleet forced a British withdrawal from Newport and brought about a withdrawal of part of Clinton's (British commander) army to the West Indies; this aided the American army "by causing a very considerable expenditure of British men and money in the islands." 65

In Europe also, French intervention became very important. The necessity of defending Britain against French or Spanish naval attack and invasion caused a great expenditure of labor and money from productive employment in the pursuit of the American war. "With the beginning of hostilities between France and Great Britain, a safe basis for action was opened

to American privateers for the whole length of the Channel and along the greater part of the shores of the Bay of Biscay. French and American privateers harassed British shipping; and, in July of 1779, a combined Spanish and French fleet threatened the English coast but was forced to return to its home ports because of a plague on the Spanish ships. England had every right to fear the combined Spanish and French fleets.

The French navy alone was the equal of the English in numbers, but while well officered, it was still badly undermanned and inferior in sturdy-ness and speed. The addition of the forty Spanish ships of the line gave them numerical superiority.

Although the French were thwarted in the great naval effort at an invasion of England, in July of 1779, the threat of such an invasion continued to remain with the British. After that time, the French worked to isolate Britain by creating a League of Armed Neutrality against the "tyrant of the seas." The diplomatic net around England was further tightened by the entry of Holland into the war against England in 1781. Holland had long been a source of great annoyance to Britain in that it conveyed supplies to the Americans, and allowed American privateers and ships of Roderique Hortalez et Cie to refit in its ports, especially on the island of St. Eustatius in the

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66 Ibid., p. 301.
67 Gershoy, From Despotism to Revolution, p. 171
Caribbean.

In the winter of 1779-80, Lafayette returned to France, in an effort to petition Louis XIV and his ministers to send an army to America, if the Treaty of Alliance were going to mean more than mere writing.

The tremendous conflict that Britain now had on her hands was already straining her resources to the utmost. France, too, was rapidly descending into bankruptcy. The outcome of the war, indeed, was dependent upon whether Great Britain or the Bourbon powers could hold out the longer, and the probabilities all pointed to the former’s prior exhaustion. In determination of this issue, it mattered little whether Rochambeau’s army was in North America, the West Indies, or Ireland. Nevertheless the king yielded to Lafayette’s entreaties and a force of 7500 men... was gathered.

It was found to be impossible to send all the troops at once but enough ships were provisioned for 5500 and so in July of 1780, the General Comte Donatien de Rochambeau and the French regulars, assigned to fight in the American theater for the duration, not to be carried off to the West Indies by the order of some minister in Paris, landed in Newport, Rhode Island.

The Americans had seen the ranks of British redcoats, and the legions of blue coated Hessians, but it is doubtful that either of these could match the decorative splendor of the French troops who arrived with Rochambeau in 1780.

There were four infantry regiments – the Soissonnais, in white coats with rose colored facings and hats with white and rose colored plumes; the Bourbonnais, in white and black; the Saintonage, in white and green; and the Royal DeuxPonts, largest

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of the regiments, in blue coats with brilliant yellow facings and cuffs.\footnote{Lancaster, \textit{The Revolution}, p. 174.}

In addition to these there was also Lauzun's Legion dressed in light blue jackets trimmed in yellow. Rochambeau had been instructed to place himself and his troops under the command of Washington and so the well trained and experienced French commander who had engaged in so many important European campaignes placed himself as subordinate to a man who had never engaged in a European campaigne. The French troops were all experts, veterans of serious European fighting, and were fully equipped.

The French settled down in Rhode Island and there was a long wait before the army got into action. The idleness and impatience of the French, in being forced into months of inaction, naturally depressed Rochambeau to whom Washington only spoke in vague generalities and did not even invite to inspect the American troops, most likely believing that his tired and tattered army could not stand comparison with the French.

"By 1779, the commander of the British fleet in American waters was Sir George Brydges Rodney and the French naval commander in the West Indies was the Comte de Guichen."\footnote{Channing, \textit{History of the United States}, p. 324.}
The French fleet was larger but, nevertheless, Rodney was able to defeat de Guichen's attempts to recapture St. Lucia, although Rodney could not draw the French into decisive action. In December 1780, Sir Samuel Hood sailed from England with reinforcements of battleships for Rodney's fleet and a large convoy of merchantmen. In the same month, Comte De Grasse with a great armament, sailed from Brest. The news of Dutch entry into the war became known to Rodney and so he attacked and captured the Dutch island of St. Eustasuis leaving Hood to deal with De Grasse. In May of 1781, news reached Washington that in the summer De Grasse would bring the French fleet northward and three thousand soldiers with it. Washington felt that this would provide an opportunity to capture New York, but Rochambeau requested De Grasse to move to Chesapeake instead. Skillfully, De Grasse eluded the British fleet and secured a French army from the colony of Haiti, and sent Washington word of his proposed landing at Chesapeake. Rodney overlooking the possibility of De Grasse's sailing northward, delegated Hood to follow the enemy and he, himself, left for recuperation at Bath.

On August 14, 1781, news of De Grasse's movement northward from the West Indies, reached Washington and plans for a combined French and American march to join forces with LaFayette and Wayne in Virginia, where De Grasse was to land,
were undertaken. With two thousand Americans and five thousand French, Washington passed through New Jersey before Clinton could realize that it was Cornwallis' army in Virginia that the Americans were seeking and not his own.

Cornwallis remained immobile at Yorktown until September 7, when the troops carried by De Grasse joined those of Lafayette and covered the British positions on the land side. Cornwallis was confronted by a superior enemy force and he could have broken out at that time but he did not try. One week later, Washington's army arrived transported from Annapolis and Baltimore down Chesapeake Bay and this caused Cornwallis "to be firmly trapped against the sea by sixteen thousand French and American troops."\(^{71}\)

At New York, the British fleet was under Sir Thomas Graves and had seven ships of the line. Hood joined Graves on August 28, making a total of nineteen ships of the line, and they sailed for Chesapeake hoping to intercept De Grasse. On September 5, De Grasse and Graves fought an indecisive battle but Graves felt compelled to return toward New York. The bay was under French control. A fleet under Admiral Barras out of Newport with weapons and tons of salt beef for the American-French armies was able to arrive. The doom of Cornwallis was nearly sealed. De Grasse had seized for the American cause one important factor which it had lacked from the first -

\(^{71}\)Alden, *American Revolution*, p. 244.
control of the seas.

Cornwallis continued to hold out through September, but his position grew worse and Graves was gloomy about possibilities of driving the French fleet from the bay. It was while in process to relieve Cornwallis with a fleet two-thirds the size of that of De Grasse, that Graves learned of the surrender of Cornwallis, on October 19, 1781. The decisive battle of the war was over and few in England believed that victory would be obtained after this defeat. The surrender of Cornwallis put an end to major offensive actions of the British in the American Revolutionary War and the final fruits of the Franco-American alliance had been secured.
Chapter IX. French Economic Aid to America 1776-1783.

There can be little doubt that the French economic aid to the American nation during the Revolution was both large and of the greatest importance in affecting the outcome of the war. The Treaty of Amity and Commerce gave the United States the right of most favored nation in 1778. This had the effect of opening the French West Indies to American trading vessels. France also, in 1778, opened her ports of American trade, including the commerce of American commerce. Once the war ended, the French government quickly annulled these rights in an Ordinance of the King's council of August 30, 1784. It seems that once the war had ended, the usefulness of the American colonists was gone and with it their rights to commercial privileges. France felt herself bound to return to a policy of mercantilism which precluded most foreign commerce. Despite this fact, trade with France during the Revolution was of great importance as were the loans which France made to the United States during the period of the Revolution.

The first French loan to America came from the Farmare General of France, an organization which collected the taxes and enjoyed a tobacco monopoly, among other privileges. Franklin and Deane contracted this loan in March of 1777, which amounted to one million livres, in exchange for which were to be delivered five thousand hogsheads of tobacco.
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with another million livres to be paid when the tobacco arrived. The tobacco was never fully delivered so that the second loan never took place. The French government directly negotiated a loan in 1778, for eighteen million livres, to be advanced in twenty-one installments from 1778 until 1782. This loan was a tangible result of the Treaty of Alliance.

In 1781, France contracted a loan of ten million livres from Holland to the United States, the interest of which was guaranteed by the French government. In 1783, France loaned another six million livres to the American cause for independence. In a contract signed between Franklin and Vergennes in 1782, the French government remitted the arrears interest on the eighteen million livre loan amounting to nearly two million livres.

"These loans amounted in all to 35,000,000 livres or $6,352,500." 72

Beaumarchais and the firm of Roderique Hortalez and Company remained in existence from 1776 until 1783. During that period he distributed over six million livres worth of supplies to the colonies.

In addition to this, the gifts from the French King to the United States amounted to eight million livres for which repayment was never asked nor none ever offered. 73


73 The figures here given are derived from John H. Latane et al., Our Debt to France, p.p. 3-23.
It becomes clear, from these figures, that the French investment in the American War for Independence was considerable. It is doubtful that the United States could have sustained warfare with England without this aid. The French goal seemed to be to prevent the American cause from collapsing and, by doing this, to sustain a menace to the British Empire.
The defeat at Yorktown "led to the resignation of Lord North, the Tory Prime Minister, whose ministry was succeeded, in March, 1782, by that of the Whig Marquis of Rockingham." The British public had never been overly enthusiastic about the war; and, after the battle of Yorktown, began to demand an end to the fighting. In April, 1783, Richard Oswald, a retired trader from Scotland, was instructed to begin negotiations with Franklin. The first obstacle created in the negotiations were raised by the French and Spanish, not the English.

Aranda, the Spanish representative in Paris, first proposed a boundary situated well to the east of the Mississippi, running from a point on western Lake Erie to the junction of the Ohio and Great Kanawha rivers, and then to the northern border of East Florida. Jayneval, Vergennes' secretary, seemed to back the proposal, although he felt that the region north of the Ohio should be left to the British. It is clear that Spain still maintained her distrust of the United States and that France was willing to back Spain. French sentiments clearly desired an independent United States but a very weak one, which would remain dependent upon France. France was not so much interested in establishing the American democracy as it was in gaining a foothold on the North American

74Bamis, Diplomatic History, p. 561.
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74 Bemis, Diplomatic History, p. 56.
continent as represented by a weak United States.

The primary American negotiators at the Paris peace conference were Franklin, John Jay, and Adams. Jay, at the time of his arrival in Paris, was hostile to both France and Spain; and highly suspicious of their motives. Charles III of Spain had not recognized American independence in 1778 nor had he entered into an American alliance. Spanish politicians were afraid of future American expansionism and thought of the United States as threatening Louisiana and as having designs upon British-held Florida.

In 1780-81 Spanish troops occupied West Florida, seizing its ports and penetrating into its hinderland; and Spanish militia from St. Louis captured the British post of St. Joseph in southwestern Michigan, holding it for twenty-four hours, long enough for Madrid to assert a claim by right of conquest to the entire eastern bank of the Mississippi.75

In 1780, Florida Blanca was carrying on a dialogue with a British agent, Lord Cumberland for a general peace settlement. This settlement would have involved, not independence for the United States, but a general truce between

75 Alden, American Revolution, p. 251.
Britain and the United States, by which each party would maintain the areas which it occupied. This would have left New York, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah in the control of the British. In 1781, Jay offered Spain an alliance giving them Florida and American renunciation of the right to free navigation of the Mississippi. Soon Jay realized that this price for an alliance was too high and "before he left Spain in May, 1782, he also knew that the government of Charles III desired neither a strong America nor American friendship."\textsuperscript{76}

Long before this time, France had shown that it would be willing to back Spain in many of its claims. The first French minister to the United States, Conrad-Alexandre Gérard, was instructed to uphold the interests of Spain in the New World. Gérard was instructed to do what he could in securing for Spain, Florida, Jamaica and a share in the Newfoundland fisheries. Gérard also worked to gain a western United States boundary to the east of the Mississippi. The Franco-American Alliance, however, had guaranteed the territorial integrity of the United States. This shows the willingness on the part

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., p. 253.
of France to by-pass the interests of the United States in an effort to tighten her alliance with Spain. This alliance with Spain would help to place France in a position of preeminence in European affairs. In the winter of 1780-81, Vergennes' willingness to overlook the cause of American independence can be seen in the fact that he was considering a long term truce between Britain and America, as a possible peace solution. Vergennes wished that mediators such as Catherine the Great or Count Kaunitz of Austria would suggest the terms so that France could agree to them. France, at the time, was facing serious military losses and so America was to be sacrificed for necessity.

Oswald's commission to negotiate contained the wording that he was to negotiate, not with representatives of the United States but with commissioners named by the colonies. Vergennes complained that this insulted the dignity of the United States as an independent nation and separate power. The attitude of Vergennes was that once the United States was recognized as independent, it would have to play its own role in the negotiations. The object of the Treaty of Alliance
would then have been attained and, henceforth, the young nation would be on its own; leaving France free to deal with Spain and Holland to the betterment of its own interest.

Vergennes also worked to gain control over the American peace commission. In August of 1779, the Continental Congress followed France's suggestion in preparing for a peace conference which might be mediated by Spain. John Adams was selected as plenipotentiary for the conference. This conference broke down, before it could begin, because of Spain's entry into the war. Adams proceeded to irritate Vergennes by inviting the British to discuss anyway. "Adams also told Vergennes that the United States was as valuable to French policy as France was to the United States."77 Adams also demanded full recognition of American independence before entering into peace negotiations in Vienna which were suggested by Vergennes. Vergennes soon found that he could not control Adams and asked Congress for his dismissal. On June 15, 1781, Congress created the second peace commission of five plenipotentiaries: Adams, Franklin, Jay, Jefferson (who did not reach Europe in time to participate) and Henry Laurens (in the Tower of London but released in time to take a feeble part in the peace). They were to have the "liberty to secure the interests of the United States in such a manner as circum-

77Bemis, Diplomatic History, p. 49.
stances may direct, and as the state of the belligerent powers may require."

Except for the one indispensable point of independence, the new instructions placed the American commission fully under the advise and control of the French court. Never in history has one people more trustingly and innocently submitted its fate to the disposal of a foreign power. We may well shudder to think what might have happened if it had not been for Yorktown. Should the American Commissioners follow their instructions, Vergennes would be able to modulate the progress of the negotiations among the several belligerents and mediators until the moment came when French interests were fully satisfied, and the interests of France's incompatible allies taken care of only if possible. Perhaps it might now be possible to defer a peace of American independence until Gibraltar was secured for Spain.78

By 1782, the situation had become sufficiently complicated. French and Spanish forces were throwing everything they had into a desperate effort to capture Gibraltar. The effort had taken a long time and the British still seemed intractable. Spain remained obstinate, and Vergennes felt obligated to seek no peace until the prize had been delivered; unless he could gain for Spain the area between the Mississippi River and the Appalachians.

John Jay began to become suspicious of the French Minister and informed Franklin that he felt that negotiations should go ahead with Oswald, without the French. Jay's suspicions were further enhanced when an English agent showed him a

78Ibid., p. 50.
translated copy of an intercepted dispatch from Barbé-Marbois, the French chargé d'affaires in the United States to Vergennes which argued "that France should not support an American claim to participate in the inshore fisheries of British North America." The French desired to protect their share in the fisheries. Arnada continued in the Spanish demands for vast territories on the east bank of the Mississippi, and Vergennes proposed his compromise giving the area north of the Ohio to Britain.

These events were followed by Vergennes sending his confidential secretary to London to confirm some terms of peace, and this visit provided a confidential relationship between the British and French governments, which contributed to an eventual peace. Rayneval intimated that France would not defend America's claim to the North America fisheries. Rayneval also suggested that America could be put off the trail by keeping them ignorant of English, French and Spanish negotiations.

On September 11, 1782, Jay sent a special emissary to London proposing the idea of separate negotiations between Britain and the United States. Jay had become disturbed by news that Vergennes had secretly sent Rayneval to London and that many precautions had been undertaken to conceal this action. Jay, at this time, was fearful that Vergennes was

79 Ibid., p. 54.
going to try to make a deal with the British, limiting Americans lands to east of the Appalachians. Lord Shelburne, the British Prime Minister, saw this as an opportunity of creating a rift between France and the United States and so readily agreed.

Once the British and Americans were able to enter into separate negotiations, the settlement of peace terms moved rapidly ahead, and on November 30, 1782, Great Britain and America signed a preliminary treaty of peace. This act violated the French Alliance of 1778 which stated that "neither of the two parties shall conclude either Truce or Peace with Great Britain, without the formal consent of the other being first obtained." Jay did this because he believed Vergennes to be attempting to stall in an effort to deliver Gibraltar to Spain. Jay also knew that Vergennes had exerted pressures upon Congress, including bribery, in order to remake the American peace mission and gained the instructions that the commission was to make no move without French approval. In a strict sense, the Americans had not broken the French Alliance because they had signed a preliminary peace which would not take effect until France had reached a settlement with England.

Vergennes had been faced with the prospect of fighting indefinitely to gain Gibraltar for Spain and this, to his way
of thinking, was intolerable. America's agreement with Britain could only strengthen the British position and thus put pressure on Spain to be content with something less than Gibraltar. The American actions thus aided Vergennes out of a tight situation.

After Franklin had made his cleverest apologies to Vergennes for not consulting France in the making of the preliminary treaty, a final Anglo-American treaty was signed on September 3, 1783, with the complete permission of France. The independence of the United States had been achieved.
The aid which France gave to the United States as a result of the French Alliance was of immense importance to the outcome of the war. One can only speculate as to whether the United States would have won the Revolution if they had not received the aid of France. It cannot be doubted that, at the very least, the War of the American Revolution would have been of very much longer duration had not France entered the conflict.

It has been shown that France did not act her role out of any great regard for the sentiments or the establishment of democracy in America. France entered the conflict for the sole purpose of cutting English commercial dominance which she felt was bound to England's relationship with her North American Colonies. This would allow France to move into possession of commercial dominance. France also had a great desire to dominate the world political scene and replace England as the leading force in international politics. On this regard, France sought to militarily defeat England in North America and isolate England through a League of Armed Neutrality in Europe.

Whether or not France succeeded in her designs of regaining prestige is a matter not easily determined. In 1763, France had been thoroughly defeated and disgraced by the loss of Canada and India, and a complete defeat in a major world war. The French army and navy had been shattered in the conflict and
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France could hardly raise her head in international affairs. The efforts of Choiseul and Vergennes resulted in a rebuilt armed forces and a strengthened bond with allies notably Austria and Spain. Vergennes was especially successful in creating a strong alliance with Spain and in developing a league of allies, comprising many of the most important states in Europe, which practiced neutrality on the side of England's enemies. The French nation, which had been thoroughly defeated in 1763, was capable of carrying on a major and sustained war against England in 1778.

When the fighting had ended in 1781, England was forced to look back upon many humiliating reverses and defeats. At her lowest point, England had lost control of the Channel to France and Spain. Ireland had come close to revolt and the Americans and French had made a fool out of her army at Yorktown. Minorca and Gibraltar had also been placed under heavy siege by Spain.

In the peace negotiations, however, France gained no great victory. America had been lost to Great Britain; but France was unable to limit American territories to the Eastern Seaboard, and, as a consequence, was not able to use the United States as a pawn. France managed to gain for the Spanish, the area of East Florida and the island of Minorca, and gained for herself some islands in the West Indies and trading ports in India and Senegal, but was unable to deliver to Spain the
greatest prize of Gibraltar.

For these gains, France paid the great price of a huge debt which helped to lead to the French Revolution of 1789.

For the United States, the French Alliance had the great asset of aiding in gaining her independence. After 1783, however, the Alliance between the United States and France became more of a hindrance than an aid. France failed, after 1783, to honor commercial aspects of the treaty and the United States came to think of it as an entangling foreign alliance. After the French Revolution, and with the beginning of the long series of wars between France and Britain, America became seriously concerned about being drawn into these wars because of the French alliance of 1778. It was only as part of the Convention of 1800, ending the undeclared Naval War between France and the United States that this now bothersome alliance was finally dissolved.


