

"The situation of the army with respect to supplies, is beyond description alarming." [1] Written by George Washington in 1779 to the governor of Delaware, these lines exemplify the most redolent problem for the Americans in the Revolutionary War: a lack of supplies. Alliances with France and Spain alleviated these dire shortages, allowing the Continental Army a fighting chance against the Redcoats. A defensive strategy and guerilla tactics were instrumental in executing the victory. Finally, Americans exploited unrest in Parliament between Whigs and Tories, and Parliament decided the West Indian colonies were far more valuable. America was set free because of an economic decision; for their return on investment, the war was simply too costly for the British.

America could not have won the war on her own. France and Spain secretly aided America from the war's genesis. They each spent one million "livres tournaises" for over one hundred thousand muskets and bayonets, in addition to uniforms, cartridge boxes, and other accruements. Their actions were managed by a dummy corporation led by Pierre Beaumarchais. The French alliance became public after the Americans won the 1777 Battle of Saratoga. In February 1778 France signed the Treaty of Alliance to "maintain effectually the liberty, sovereignty and independence absolute and unlimited of the said United States." [2] (Article 2d of the Treaty). The Spanish alliance became clear after they declared war on England in June 1779. Spaniards led by Bernardo de Galvez y Madrid kept the British from finishing their blockade on American shores and kept open a supply line to the South. Other allies Mysore and the Dutch Republic joined in 1780.

American strategy was of utmost importance in winning the war. Initially landing on Staten Island, the Redcoats aimed to isolate New England by conquering New York and then joining an expeditionary force from Canada. For total victory in New England, the British

needed only one rout of Washington's infantile army. Continental morale would be shattered and the army would disband. Before the invasion, Nathanael Greene convinced an American war council that the war's outcome depended on keeping an army in the field. The council decided to extend the fighting with defensive warfare in hopes of exhausting the British. As George Washington spoke to Congress, "We should on all Occasions avoid a general Action, or put anything to the Risque, unless compelled by a necessity." [3] Washington employed this strategy effectively in the Brooklyn Heights defense, when he was outflanked by Redcoats on Long Island. He retreated through the heavy fog up Manhattan Island, pausing to fight at Harlem Heights and White Plains. Retreating across New Jersey and the Delaware River to protect the government at Philadelphia, Washington found safety when the Redcoats established winter quarters at Trenton and Princeton. This efficient strategy of maneuvering continued for Washington and was a major factor in the American victory.

American tactics were similarly crucial in securing victory. Overzealous patriots have tried to paint the image of clever colonial snipers and guerilla warriors preying on helpless Redcoats who lined up in open fields. This is false, as a modern historical consensus. It is rooted in fact, as argued by Anthony J. Joes, who proposes that guerillas were important players in the American victory. At Lexington and Concord, before the war truly began and the colonies united, the Redcoats routed minutemen at Lexington. Then, on their way to Concord, the British were ambushed by these guerillas, sustaining about 50% casualties. Later, Southern guerillas led by Francis Marion preyed on General Cornwallis's supply lines. These tactics were crucial to the American victory, but eventually replaced by traditional 18th-century tactics, highlighted by ranks, volleys, and bayonet charges.

America could not win an outright war against Great Britain. Its only chance was to take advantage of the large distance between Britain and the actual war. This allowed the Americans a victory by morale. Taken to its full extension with all the countries' troops in play, the War of Independence surely would have spelled disaster for the Americans. But, since all they had to do was strike poignantly enough at the Redcoats to convince Parliament and the British public that it was not economically feasible to continue the war effort, victory was possible. This was enabled by a *crucial* factor in the American victory: the political infighting between British Whigs and Tories. Americans drove a wedge between Whigs, opposing the monarchy and war effort, and the so-called Tories, closely allied with George III. Prime Minister Lord North was called a Tory, but he considered himself a Whig. The Tories had dissolved after 1760 into many divergent political factions, and Whigs took control of Parliament. Whigs divided into such sects as Grenvillites, Bedfordites, Rockinghamites, and Chathamites. Bedfordites, Grenvillites, and remaining old Pelhamites supported Lord North's government, known to *opposing* Whigs as a Tory regime. Most politicians called themselves Whigs and their enemies Tories to curry favor with the people, since Whigs were more populist. During the war, "Radical Whigs" supported the Americans.

Britain made a calculated decision to withdraw from the war. America had allies in France, Spain, and the Dutch Republic. The threats came especially close to home with the Armada of 1779, a massive French and Spanish force that threatened but never assailed Great Britain. After 1778, the British shifted defense resources to the West Indies, since they were more economically valuable to the Empire than the Thirteen Colonies were. Stretched thin like butter over too much bread, the British were forced to allow Catholics to serve in the military. This act met caused the reactionary *Protestant Association* to form and lead the Gordon Riots in

June 1780. With American allies encroaching from without and recalcitrant factions revolting from within, Lord North was clearly losing control of his government. After the decisive American victory at Yorktown, Lord North was seen by Sir Nathaniel W. Wraxall “under emotions of the deepest agitation and distress,” shouting, “Oh God! It is all over!” [4]

Works Cited

1. Bullock, Steven C. *The American Revolution: A History In Documents*. “A December 1779 letter from George Washington to the governor of Delaware.” Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003. 63. Print.
2. Bullock, Steven C. *The American Revolution: A History In Documents*. “The Treaty of Alliance, Article 2d.” Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003. 66. Print.
3. Bullock, Steven C. *The American Revolution: A History In Documents*. “A speech from George Washington to Congress.” Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003. 64. Print.
4. Bullock, Steven C. *The American Revolution: A History In Documents*. “The Memoirs of Sir Nathaniel W. Wraxall.” Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003. 68. Print.