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THESIS

The Relationship Between
National Policy and Strategy in War

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THIS IS.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRENCH POLICY AND STRATEGY IN
THE WAR OF THE COALITION 1777-1783, AND
ITS LESSONS TO US.

GENERAL DISCUSSION OF POLICY AND STRATEGY.

World history is a compendium of policy, strategy, tactics and results, covering not only nations but groups within nations, and individual within groups. In some cases, we find the policy of a nation so fixed that, for generations, the only variation is that introduced by the individuals or groups in their different conceptions of the fixed policy. In other cases, we find no such firmly established policy, but rather a series of policies, one following the other, but all aimed at accomplishment of the same general results. In some cases, there is observed a frequent change of basic policies, sometimes by changed conditions but more often by changes in the individuals in control of the affairs of the nation. One surprising thing, discovered by a careful reading of history with the idea of seeking to track down and isolate for detailed examination policy, wherever encountered, is not so much the historian's inability in reviewing past events, to find a policy, but the absence from the records of history of evidence, conclusive to any degree that the nation recognized its own policy to the extent of taking measures obviously necessary to ensure its accomplishments.

Accepting that this in part was due to financial, internal, political or other reasons, one

still is impressed with the idea that, then as now, national policy could be likened to a trail through the woods: the path must be traversed several times before the trail is clearly visible.

National strategy is the method or plan of a nation to achieve the aims of its policy, but history shows us that, even though a nation may have a fixed and well established policy, its strategy changes. More variables have been introduced. We still have the influence of groups and individuals, and the several channels through which the strategy can be applied, such as political, economic, or military means.

Naval strategy is dependent upon the national strategy, in turn dependent upon the national policy. Our variables have now so increased in numbers that it is easy to understand how, in many past wars, few definite strategic plans were followed through to a conclusion. In the few cases we do find, the successes have been due, it seems, rather to the singleness of purpose and the tenacity of the commanders-in-chief than to the higher authorities.

THE WAR OF THE COALITION: Background.

The Seven Years War concluded, in so far as France was concerned, by the Treaty of Paris, signed on February 10th 1762, had been very disastrous to France. She had lost Canada, Nova Scotia, the Islands of the Saint Lawrence, all the territory east of the Mississippi, except the city of New Orleans, most of the West Indian Islands; she had been forced to give Minorca back to England, and, because of failure to

fulfil her promises to Spain, had ceded to that country the entire area West of the Mississippi known then as Louisiana. Her original possessions in India were restored to her, but she was required to surrender the right of fortifying them or of keeping troops in them. Her overseas trade had been ruined, and the nation was on the verge of bankruptcy. She had, in fact, been reduced to a second-rate power. Her ally, Spain, had fared hardly less badly, and the so-called Family Compact with that country no longer offered much support.

The statesmen of France did not have to cast around to determine the real reason for the disastrous outcome of the Seven Years War. It had been accomplished through the sea power of England, rendered less difficult through the inefficiency of the French and Spanish fleets. Further, the previous policy of the French Government towards the colonial possessions had reduced the powers of resistance of those possessions to any attack, thereby requiring on the part of England exercise of control of the seas, in the different areas, for a much shorter period of time than would have been the case had the French Government been more liberal in sending troops and essential supplies.

As France and Spain lost through the Seven Years War, so England gained. She had consolidated her position in North America and in India, acquired additional island possessions to afford bases for her Fleet, vastly increased the strength and efficiency of that Fleet, added to her overseas trade, and had, at least temporarily, reduced

her traditional enemy to a state of comparative military impotence. The war had been costly, but the results amply justified the cost.

The ignominious Treaty of Paris left France humiliated and thirsting for revenge. The disasters of the war had aroused a national enthusiasm for a real Navy. The Duc de Choiseul, Minister for Foreign Affairs, had fostered this enthusiasm, but it came too late to save the situation. However, Choiseul maintained his faith in the idea of a powerful navy, and, after the war, continued to exercise successfully his influence in that direction, to the end that the building of ships was continued on such a considerable scale that " in 1779, the French fleet was almost equal in size to the British Navy " (1) At the end of the Seven Years War, France had forty ships of the line. In 1770, she had sixty-four ships of the line and fifty frigates, ample reserve ammunition, and ship timber ready for the quick building of additional ships.

Serious attempts were made to improve the efficiency of the Navy, and a certain amount was accomplished, but efforts in this direction were rendered extremely difficult on account of caste situations then existing among the officers. Those of noble birth felt themselves in general beyond the discipline of superiors not of their caste, and many of noble birth were given rank and authority far beyond their real and comparative abilities.

Choiseul, though realizing the weakness of Spain and the problematical value of her assistance

(1) H.E.BOURNE: The Revolutionary Period in Europe, p.67.

in case of war, also realized that France had nothing to lose through the alliance, and encouraged Spain to strengthen her position. All those measures did not pass unobserved by England, and it is probable that, had Pitt been in control, England would have taken active measures to stop them, but the English Government was too weak to take a militant attitude.

It would be unfair to say that real efforts were not made to improve the financial position of the French Government during this period between wars, but since all such measures included reducing the extravagances of the Court, they, in most cases, lived short lives.

On May 10 1774, Louis XVI ascended the throne. That he was in general accord with the policies of Choiseul, there is no doubt. A French historian attributes to him the authorship of the following order, which was issued to his ministers:

" To watch all indications of approaching danger; to observe by cruisers the approaches to our islands and the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico; to keep track of what was passing on the banks of Newfoundland, and to follow the tendencies of English commerce; to observe in England the state of the troops and armaments, the public credit and the ministry; to meddle adroitly in the affairs of the British colonies, to give the insurgents colonists the means of obtaining supplies of war, while maintaining the strictest neutrality; to develop actively, but noiselessly, the navy; to repair our ships of war; to fill our storehouses and to keep on hand the means for rapidly equipping a fleet at Brest and at Toulon, while Spain should be fitting one

at Ferrol; finally, at the first serious fear of rupture to assemble numerous troops upon the shores of Brittany and Normandy, and get everything ready for an invasion of England, so as to force her to concentrate her forces, and thus restrict her means of resistance at the extremities of the empire. " (2)

Vergennes, who had succeeded Choiseul as Minister for Foreign Affairs, had very definite ideas as to the policy which should be pursued by France in her relations with other countries of Europe. He resented being dragged at the apron strings of Austria, and, wishing to avoid or at least to postpone an open rupture, hoped to maintain the balance of power and to curb the ambitions of England and Austria by alliances with the weaker powers. He refused the support of France to Joseph II, Emperor of Austria, in his plan for the annexion of Bavaria. He saw trouble brewing between England and her American colonies, and although appreciating the immediate advantages to France of a revolt of the colonies, yet he did not overlook the potential danger to the French Government of a successful revolt, as is shown in the following quotation from a letter he wrote to Durand, French Minister in London: " Far from seeking to profit by the embarrassment in which England finds herself on account of affairs in America, we should rather desire to extricate her; the spirit of revolt, in whatever spot it breaks out is always of dangerous precedent; it is with moral as with physical diseases, both may become contagious. This consideration should induce us to take

(2) MAHAN: The Influence of Sea power upon History, 1660-1783, Page 337, quoting Lapeyrouse-Bonfils, Volume III, page 5.

care that the spirit of independence, which is causing so terrible an explosion in North America, have no power to communicate itself to points interesting to us in this hemisphere." (3) It appears that he gradually came around to the views of Choiseul, his predecessor, who considered that "to foment trouble between England and her colonies was a very efficacious and a natural way of gratifying his feelings." (4) At any rate, at the outbreak of the war, Vergennes is found ready and anxious to furnish help, in a practical even if cautious form.

The French policy now seems to have been: in alliance with Spain, and if possible with other weaker nations, and when favorable opportunity offers itself, to wage war against England, in order to avenge the defeat of the Seven Years War, and to restore the lost trade and the prestige of France.

THE WAR.

The Colonies began armed resistance to England in April 1775. Almost immediately, steps were taken by the Continental Congress to obtain supplies and funds from abroad, and an inquiry was made of the French Government by roundabout ways as to what were its intentions regarding the American Colonies. The ministry was divided on the subject of American affairs: Turgot, Maurepas and Malesherbes were inclined towards a policy of neutrality, but Vergennes, influenced by Rayneval and Beaumarchais, decided upon a policy of practical help, and early in 1776, began

(3) GUIZOT: Outlines of the History of France, Page 541.

(4) " " " " " " Page 540.

to make remittances of large sums to Beaumarchais in Spain, from where, by indirect means, they were to be made available to the Colonies. Colonial representatives were sent to France, late in the Spring, and remained there in the form of one person or another, until the conclusion of the peace.

The Hereditary sentiments of Louis XVI and the attitude of some of his ministers, coupled with the strong pro-English feelings of the Queen Marie-Antoinette, retarded the efforts of the Colonists to obtain real and open support from the French Government. It became obvious to Congress that no French alliance was to be expected unless accompanied by a complete severance from England, and, on 4 July 1776, Congress voted the Declaration of Independence. During the same month, Vergennes wrote a memorial on American affairs, setting forth what he considered should be the policy of the French Government, which in effect was as follows:

- (a) continuation of secret aid,
- (b) prevention of the Americans from making an early peace,
- (c) lulling the English into the belief that France and Spain had no intention of entering the war,
- (d) strengthening as rapidly as possible the French and Spanish forces, especially the Navies.

In spite of the pacific views of ^{a part of the} Turgot, ^{Ministry} Maurepas and Malesherbes, the recommendations of M. de Vergennes prevailed.

The national strategy behind those recommendations was sound: the covert aid given to America caused an ever increasing drain upon the resources of England in her attempts to crush resistance,

secured at least a prolongation of that resistance and afforded France and Spain an opportunity to make extensive preparations for entering the war.

It is true that France had no definite assurance that Spain would consider herself bound in this case by the Family Compact, but de Vergennes did not hold back because of the absence of such an assurance. French feelings became more and more warlike, and the defeat and surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga decided Vergennes to take the fateful steps of signing, on 6 February 1778, a treaty of alliance with America. Spain, shortly afterwards, signed a similar treaty. Active war began, France and England, however did not commence actual hostilities until June: "When d'Estaing arrived in America, hostilities had commenced between France and England, without declaration of war, by the natural pressure of circumstances and the state of feeling in the two countries. England fired the first shot on 17 June 1778." (5)

It becomes now necessary to make a general survey of the situation, in order to be able to give intelligent consideration to the strategy of the French during the war.

It was the sea power of England which had defeated France in the Seven Years War, and it was the sea power of England which was making the course of America so very difficult. It was sea power which both France and Spain were in position to furnish. Naval warfare could be expected wherever the French and English interests clashed, as well as in American waters and

(5) GUIZOT: Outlines of French History, page 543.

in the English Channel. This was borne out in fact, and the principal fighting areas were:

- (1) English Channel, (2) West Indies, (3) India,
- (4) North America, (5) Mediterranean.

The North American and West Indian operations were so closely connected that one may regard America as one fighting area, giving the three principal theatres of naval war as: America, Europe and India.

No attempt will be made to describe in detail all the actions in the different areas, as no useful purpose would be accomplished thereby, but it will be necessary to follow them through in a general way, to determine the French strategy, its relations to the National policy, and its effects.

France continued to increase its Navy, and began arrangements which indicated the intention of invading England, following the old plan of Louis XVI; " in the Summer of 1779, when Spain had joined in the conflict, a descent upon the coast of England was actually attempted, but failed for lack of resolute and skillful leadership." (6) But the main and more important plan consisted in striking at England in the colonies.

The first engagement of any consequence was the Battle of Ushant, 27 July 1778, between Admiral Keppel and Admiral d'Orvilliers, each with thirty ships of the line. The result was wholly indecisive. D'Orvilliers, avoiding a serious engagement until he considered he had a favorable situation, saw the situation arrive, only to be defeated in his purpose

(6) H.E. BOURNE: Revolutionary Period in Europe: Page 68.

by the failure of the commander of his rear division to carry out the order; the first, but alas only the beginning of a long series of such cases on the part of French subordinate commanders.

On 15 April 1778, Admiral Comte d'Estaing sailed for the American continent, with twelve ships of the line and five frigates, with the Delaware Capes as his destination. Benjamin Franklin, in Paris, had urged the Ministers of Louis XVI: "Anticipate your enemies, act towards them as they did to you in 1755, let your ships put to sea before any declaration of war, it will be time to speak when a French Squadron bars the passage of Admiral Howe, who has ventured to ascend the Delaware..." (7) Admiral D'Estaing took some three months to make the passage. The English learned of his departure and intentions, and succeeded in getting word to Lord Howe to evacuate Philadelphia to avoid being trapped. Howe got clear of the Capes with his fleet and transports ten days before d'Estaing's appearance, proceeded to New York, disembarked the troops and prepared to defend the entrance to that port. D'Estaing arrived off New York and on 22 July, started up towards the entrance of the port, then gave up the attempt and stood off to the Southward, passing up a splendid chance of defeating Howe and forcing the English out of New York: d'Estaing's fleet was of almost twice the strength of Howe's. The capture of New York would have been of tremendous importance to the American cause.

D'Estaing then proceeded to Narragansett

(7) GUIZOT: History of France, Page 543.

Bay, where on 8 August, he ran past the batteries and anchored inside, prepared to support the attack of the American Army upon the English defensive forces. Howe followed d'Estaing, and took up a position outside with a reinforced Fleet, equal in strength to about two-thirds of d'Estaing's Fleet. That night, when the wind came out of the North, d'Estaing, who apparently feared being trapped in the Bay, got under way and stood out to sea. Howe immediately made sail to keep to windward. Both Fleets maneuvered for the next twenty-four hours. During the night of the 11th, a violent gale arose and dispersed both Fleets. Accidental contacts brought about individual engagements, but that was all. The English withdrew to New York, d'Estaing reorganized off Newport, and then sailed for Boston. Howe, after repairing his ships at New York, returned to Newport, and finding d'Estaing had gone to Boston followed him there, but found him too strongly established to be attacked.

D'Estaing sailed from Boston for the Martinique on 4 November, and on the same day, an English force of five ships and a convoy of five thousand troops left New York for Barbadoes. D'Estaing reached Martinique one day before the convoy reached Barbadoes. The transports, under escort, sailed two days later for St Lucia, and arrived there the next day. Troops were landed, and seized a port, and the British ships were about to move to it when d'Estaing appeared with a Fleet more than double the strength of the English Fleet. D'Estaing contented himself with a long range bombardment, then proceeded further along to a bay where he landed troops which attacked the English

position. The attack failed, and d'Estaing retired. The English captured the whole island.

Things were then quiet in the West Indies for six months. The English Fleet was reinforced, but so was d'Estaing's, and he retained his decided superiority in strength. On 30 June, he sailed to attack Grenada, landed troops on 2 July, and captured it on 4 July. Admiral Byron, now in command of the British Fleet, heard of d'Estaing's capture of Grenada and headed for it with a large troop convoy and twenty-one ships of the line. D'Estaing had twenty-five. The French got under way when the British Fleet was sighted, and the so-called Battle of Grenada took place. It will not be discussed in detail; d'Estaing followed defensive tactics. Early in the engagement, several English ships were badly crippled, and d'Estaing had a great superiority in strength, the English Fleet was hampered by a convoy, but d'Estaing did not force the engagement to a decision, and permitted the English to withdraw.

The next matter of interest in d'Estaing's operations was his appearance on the coast of Georgia. He had been ordered to return to France with his Fleet, but heard that the Southern colonies were hard pressed and that the French were being accused of deserting the Colonists in their adversities. He disobeyed his orders and went up to the Georgia coast. He took the English unawares, but delayed too long, and when he finally tried to force Savannah, he was repulsed, and sailed for France.

Why was d'Estaing sent over, and what did he accomplish? Obviously, he was sent to give a

balance of sea power to the Allied cause on the theatre of war, and ease the pressure caused by the British control of the sea in that area. He accomplished almost nothing. He had at least three opportunities to defeat the English, at New York, at St Lucia and at Grenada, yet he never forced an action, and consequently never crippled the English, they continued, almost unobstructed, their use of sea communication. If there was any sound strategy in d'Estaing's campaign, it had not been detected. The excuse is offered that he was an army officer appointed to naval command; rather than any excuse, this is a reflection upon the detailed national policy which permitted such an appointment.

D'Estaing was succeeded by the Comte de Guichen, who assumed chief command in the West Indian seas March 22 1780, and whose force, augmented by a few vessels of d'Estaing's Fleet amounted to twenty-two ships. He too seemed to lack the will to fight decisive engagements. Upon one occasion, in March 1780, he came upon an English Fleet of sixteen ships, under Admiral Parker, at anchor at St Lucia; he did not attack, although victory should have been almost a certainty, if relative strength meant anything. The British Fleet was very shortly after reinforced by the arrival of Admiral Rodney, who assumed command.

The two Fleets, now almost evenly matched, met off Dominica on 17 April. It was an interesting engagement, although indecisive. They met twice again, but no real battle was fought. De Guichen sailed for France in August. His West Indian operations contribute little to this study.

On 12 July 1780, America received real aid

from France in the form of five thousand troops, escorted by seven ships-of-the-line under Admiral de Ternay. At this time, La Fayette urged the French Government to increase the Fleet in North American waters, but France was in no hurry to bring the American war to a conclusion, and on the other hand was guarding quite zealously its own interests in the West Indies. The tide had turned, however, and French sea power was to bring about the final collapse of the English efforts to keep America. On 17 March 1781, Admiral Comte de Grasse sailed from Brest with Twenty-six ships-of-the-line and a large convoy. Suffren sailed with him and at the Azores, they parted ways, the latter taking five ships to the East Indies, and de Grasse continuing the trip, and arriving off Martinique on 28 April. He ran into an English Fleet of eighteen ships, and he, having been joined by four ships which had been blockaded in Fort Royal, had twenty-five, but he would not engage decisively. The following day, he tried to overtake Hood, but could not, as Hood's Fleet had superior speed. Many of de Grasse's ships were not coppered, although coppering was a practice which had been followed by the English for many years. Apparently, this was one of France's many economies which, in the end, cost her dearly.

After minor operations in the Lesser Antilles, de Grasse proceeded to Cap Francais, Haiti, where he arrived on 26 July, and found a French frigate with dispatches from Washington and Rochambeau, acquainting him with the situation in America, and making certain recommendations. The situation was that there remained only two centers of English power, at

New York and in the Chesapeake, and communication between them was wholly dependent upon the sea. Control of Chesapeake Bay was essential. Destouches had come down from Newport with eight ships to obtain it. He was met outside the Capes by Arbuthnot, also with eight ships. An engagement followed, on 16 March 1781, in which Destouches, by superior tactics, got much the better of the fight, but stood in out to sea and let Arbuthnot enter and gain control for the English.

Washington and Rochambeau decided that the military situation demanded the assistance of de Grasse's Fleet, either at New York or at the Chesapeake, and arranged such a distribution of troops as to operate against either area. Rochambeau informed de Grasse privately that he preferred the Chesapeake, and de Grasse approved. Obtaining thirty-five hundred troops from Haiti, and a considerable sum of money from the Governor of Havana, he set sail for the Chesapeake with every available ship, and, on 30 August, anchored in Lynnhaven Bay with twenty-eight ships-of-the-line. The French Squadron at Newport had sailed three days before to join him. This Squadron consisted of eight ships-of-the-line, four frigates, with a convoy of eighteen transports, all under command of Admiral de Barras. Washington and Rochambeau, in the meantime, started from the New York area to the Chesapeake with their troops.

Rodney heard of de Grasse's movement North, and sent Hood with fourteen ships to chase him. Hood arrived before de Grasse, and failing to find him in the Chesapeake, sailed on to New York where he met Admiral Graves with five ships. Graves immediately

took command, and on 31 August, sailed for the Chesapeake, hoping to intercept de Barras and his convoy. He found de Grasse in Lynnhaven Bay, and stood in to attack. De Grasse stood out, and an action ensued in which many of the English ships were damaged. De Grasse decoyed Graves out further to sea, and de Barras slipped in. Graves, faced with overwhelming odds, returned to New York.

By now, Cornwallis was hemmed in, with no chance of succor, and after withstanding siege for a month, surrendered.

The outcome bore out Washington's convictions, expressed in a memorandum dated 15 July 1780: " In any operation, and under all circumstance, a decisive naval superiority is to be considered as a fundamental principle, and the basis upon which every hope of success must ultimately depend. " (8)

The North American campaign may be considered as closed with the surrender of Cornwallis, but events of great importance were yet to occur in the West Indies.

After the capture of Yorktown, de Grasse returned South, arriving at Martinique on 26 November 1781, the day after de Bouillé had recaptured for the Dutch, who had entered the War in 1780, the island of St Eustatius. The two Admirals joined forces and proceeded against St Kitts. Troops were landed, the small garrison retired to Brimstone Hill, and a siege was begun. The French Fleet anchored in the roadstead on the Southern side of the islands. Hood, with twenty-two ships, arrived off the anchorage on 24 January. The French Fleet consisted of twenty-nine ships, generally

(8) WASHINGTON: Memorandum for concerting a plan of operations with the French Army.

superior in strength, ship for ship. Hood intended to make a surprise attack at daylight, but was delayed during the night, and did not arrive until about midday. De Grasse was warned of his approach, got under way and stood down to southward, and a fleet engagement occurred off Nevis the next day. Although some of Hood's ships were roughly handled, none were lost, and by clever tactics, he succeeded in taking up de Grasse's former anchorage in the roadstead, thus blocking de Grasse off from the support of his troops on shore. De Grasse attacked the next day, but was driven off.

Brimstone Hill surrendered on 12 February. On the 13th, De Grasse, who had remained off the roadstead, took his fleet to Nevis, and anchored there. Hood slipped out unnoticed with all his ships, de Grasse losing his opportunity for a decisive victory, for Hood and Rodney joined up twelve days later, giving the English Fleet a slight superiority in numbers.

The Franco-Spanish plan was the capture of Jamaica, and de Grasse and the Spanish Fleet were to rendez-vous at Cap Francais. Rodney knew of, or at least suspected the plan, and was determined to prevent it, as it meant the juncture of the fleets. Rodney intercepted de Grasse, and the fleets engaged on 9 April. Fortune offered de Grasse a splendid opportunity to overwhelm a part of the English fleet, but he did not avail himself of it, and withdrew. The English pursued, and on 12 April, the decisive battle of the Saints was fought. Rodney broke the French lines, desorganized their fleet and captured five ships, including the flagship. Rodney failed to pursue, and lost the opportunity of practically

annihilating the disorganized French Fleet. On the whole, de Grasse's West Indian campaign appears as a series of wasted opportunities. Had he possessed tenacity of purpose, the map of that area might present to day an entirely different appearance.

The campaign of Suffren in East Indian waters, while intensely interesting, and disclosing that there was at least one French officer of high position who believed that offense is the best defense, does not require the detailed study given to the American-West Indian campaigns. Just as it brings before us a great character, a great leader, with a bold fighting spirit, so also it exposes the weakness of the French strategy and the lamentable inefficiency of the naval organization. With a few adequate bases, practically no supplies and a group of captains who were inefficient and disloyal, Suffren, for a period of two years, more than held his own in East Indian waters. Had he received adequate support, it is probable that the French would have been able so to consolidate their position in India that they could never have been turned out. The truth of the matter is that the French statesmen of that day lacked sufficient vision to see that colonies, perhaps then a liability, would ever be otherwise, and were unwilling to risk ships, men, money on the scale required to give reasonable assurance of victory.

The War in Europe was almost entirely a naval war. Plans were forced upon the French by the Spanish terms of entering the war. That country required of France as a condition upon entering the war: invasion of England or Ireland, efforts to recover Minorca, Pensacola and Mobile, a definite promise that

no peace would be made until Gibraltar was restored to Spain. No invasion of England could be attempted without the defeat of the English Channel Fleet, and although the English were in constant fear, they were never seriously threatened with invasion, for despite elaborate plans for an Allied maritime invasion of the Channel, it came to nought.

The Franco-Spanish operations in the Mediterranean resulted in the capture of Minorca, and the failure, despite vast efforts and heavy losses to capture Gibraltar. This failure was due to the fact that the English through their Navy were able to relieve the situation each time, when it became really critical. The importance of this should not be overlooked, as it had great weight in the peace negotiations.

ANALYSIS.

This rather long narrative has been related in order to show the diversity of the French effort, and the failure of the French in all but one case to carry military effort through to a point that was decisive. What was the French strategy?..Let us now first re-examine French policy.

The Seven Years War was a great humiliation, and although in the peace treaty of 1763 the respective sovereigns of England and France had solemnly agreed that " there shall be a Christian, universal and perpetual peace, as well by sea as by land, and a sincere and constant friendship, " France, from the moment the treaty was signed, thirsted for and prepared for revenge. How blunt is the following phrase from the French communication to Spain, defining as the

purpose of the then proposed war: " To avenge their respective injuries, and to put an end to that tyrannical Empire which England has usurped and claims to maintain upon the ocean." Expressed bluntly, the policy was revenge, however it might be accomplished. Once this is appreciated, the many apparently purposeless and desultory campaigns begin to have some meaning. To express it in other terms, the direct aim of the French was to cripple England. Indirectly, France would be strengthened if that aim could be achieved. There does not appear to have been at any time any definite plan for French territorial aggrandizement on a large scale. On the other hand, there were at least two plans to tear territory from England, one to assist the Colonies to achieve their independence, the other to restore to Spain the territory England had wrested from her. The French Government had no altruistic motives whatsoever in fighting on the side of the American colonists. Washington sensed this perfectly: " No bond but interest attaches these men to America (referring to the French volunteers) and as for France, she only lets us get our munitions from her because of the benefit her commerce derived from it." (9) The Royal Family and several Ministers felt that support of such a revolutionary movement was fraught with potential political danger, and subsequent events proved they were right. Nor had the Government any desire to see a strong nation born on the American continent. Any doubt as to this is quickly dissipated by a study of the peace negotiations, throughout which are discerned clearly the persistent

(9) Quoted by GUIZOT: History of France, Page 542.

efforts of the French Government to limit American aspirations, and American borders.

Having reduced the French policy to that one word: revenge, it now becomes easier to determine, from a study of her actions, her strategy. Prompt victory for the American Colonists was far from her desire. It would have released England from the constant and ever increasing drain of her resources in her efforts to subdue them, and would have released strong English forces to interfere with the minor French operations in the West Indies and other parts of the world. Realizing this attitude, one can surmise that perhaps, d'Estaing and Guichen were instructed not to be too zealous; the departure from France of Rochambeau with his army probably indicates the point at which France decided that further failure to furnish new material assistance would result in the defeat of the Colonists, and therefore defeat France's purpose. The timely appearance of De Grasse settled the question of what the ultimate outcome would be, but it is noteworthy that although Washington implored de Grasse to aid in the campaign in the Southern States, he declined and returned to the West Indies, giving a vague promise of help for the following season. " The abasement of England by the establishment of a balance of power in America among Great Britain, Spain and the United States would have been sufficiently consonant with French interests." (10) " Vergennes, although expressing himself as willing for the United States to negotiate separately, wished to postpone the conclusion of such negotiations until the objects of France and Spain had been assured.(11)"

(10) VINSOR: Narrative and Critical History of America.

(11) ID. Id.

The provisional articles of peace were signed on 30 November 1782. They were to constitute the Treaty of Peace between Great Britain and the United States, but it was declared that such a treaty should not be concluded until terms of peace should be agreed upon between Great Britain and France.

Vergennes, learning of the conclusion of the negotiations, wrote to Franklin: " You have concluded your preliminary articles without any communication between us, although the instructions from Congress prescribe that nothing shall be done without the participation of the King." Franklin replied: " Nothing has been agreed in the preliminaries contrary to the interests of France, and no peace is to take place between us and England till you have concluded yours. Your observation is apparently just, however, that in not consulting you before they were signed, we have been guilty of neglecting a point of bienséance. But as this was not from want of respect for the King, whom we all love and honor, we hope it will be excused..... The English, I just now learn, flatter themselves they have already divided us. I hope this little misunderstanding will therefore be kept a secret, and that they will find themselves totally mistaken."

The results of the negotiations between the American representatives in Paris and the British Government had been the entire overthrow of the policy of Vergennes of confirming the power of Spain, and weakening that of America.

The French strategy in their other campaigns is not quite so apparent. Their efforts in the East and West Indies, Mediterranean and the English Channel

diverted the English forces and thereby prevented a concentration of the British naval efforts in the North American waters, but had those campaigns been planned more carefully, and this particularly in the East Indies, had the commanders been given proper means, great victories might have been gained, much territory acquired, and France might, without really great effort, have been in a position to insist upon terms of peace such as would have left no doubt among historians as to who had won the war.

It is probable that, in their strategy, the French did not overlook the probability that, if the war could be prolonged sufficiently, England, the dominant power on the sea, would exasperate neutrals to a point where they might join in against her. Holland did come in as a result of the so-called armed neutrality, but it cannot be said that the entry of Holland was anything but a liability to France, as the Dutch Fleet could not join the Allies, and it fell to France to take up the defense of Dutch shipping and colonies.

Throughout the naval engagements of the war, there are the ever present apparent efforts of the various French commanders to conserve their ships. This rather defensive attitude had been followed by the French Navy throughout the Seven Years War. A defensive is frequently justified, as when inferior in strength, or while waiting for an opportunity to take the offensive, but seldom were they inferior in any area, and with the exception of Suffren, they practically never took the offensive. It is possible that rather than blame the French commanders for timidity or lack of confidence in the ability of their ships to defeat

even an inferior British force, one should consider the possibility that this was a strategical policy to conserve the strength of the French Navy. If so, it was strategically unsound, as well as in several other ways. It might be explained as a policy framed to cover a situation where it was known that the English Navy had a tremendous moral supremacy, and to avoid the loss of prestige of a decisive defeat.

Corbett says: "The object of naval warfare must always be, directly or indirectly, to secure the command of the sea, or to prevent the enemy from securing it." Certainly, France made no real attempt to "secure the command of the sea". The enemy may not have entirely maintained it, but he, at least, used it with few exceptions, when, where and how best suited his purposes.

Lessons to us.

The basic desire of self-preservation is common to all nations and all peoples. First, one should avoid if possible being placed in jeopardy, without good and sufficient reasons. Secondly, one is to endeavor to recover from such a position with the least possible loss; thirdly, one should have a definite basic plan of recovery before one places oneself knowingly and deliberately in jeopardy.

It may be said that, during the eighteenth century, the position of France varied as inversely relative to that of England. The two nations were direct competitors in the great fields of territorial aggrandizement and trade. As a result of a long period of unsound finance, capped by the disastrous Seven Years War, France found herself very weak, and England

correspondingly strong. France was in jeopardy, for, unless she extricated herself from that position, she could not hope long to survive. This was recognized by her statesmen, plans were made and steps were taken. The two outstanding weaknesses were financial and naval, and remedial measures were soon under way. Considering the plan - to strike at England at the first favorable opportunity - it is obvious that France erred on the weak side in the measures taken to build up financial and naval strength. The entire financial system was hopelessly faulty, and could not be reconstructed in so short a time; in fact, that reconstruction has not to this day been yet completed. The important parts of a Navy were - and are - ships, personnel and bases. Ships were built, but many of the necessary drastic measures needed to improve the personnel in discipline and efficiency were not taken. Like the financial system, the naval system could not be changed so quickly. It would seem that the lessons of the Seven Years War would have of themselves caused prompt measures to establish adequate naval bases in the Colonial possessions, but apparently, very little was done. Politically, the strategy supported the policy. The assistance of Spain was assured, although not guaranteed, and France waited for her favorable opportunity, and found it when England was involved in the serious struggle with her Colonies.

In summation, French Grand Strategy gave only partial support to French policy. Naval strategy has already been discussed in general terms, but may be summarized by saying that the strategy, where discernible, can be construed to support the policy, if assumptions

are made as to corollaries of that policy.

Several lessons may be taken as applicable to the United States:

First: war for revenge is not worth while unless the products and by-products of victory more than compensate for the losses. In this case, the results were not decisive, and the direct costs were far greater than the direct gains. The indirect gain of a certain restoration of prestige cannot be evaluated. The indirect loss was inculcation of republican ideas, which eventually played a large part in the bringing about of the French Revolution.

Second: war, as an instrument of national policy, should never be embarked upon unless it is supported by the national strategy. In what respects French strategy failed to support its policy has been outlined above. While we may not have a policy of war against Japan, our official actions have been such as to lead that country to believe that such is our policy, and it may be forced upon us. We should either abandon a policy which appears warlike, and may provoke war, or, if we adhere to that policy, we should adjust our national strategy to support it. The French at least made an attempt.

Third: naval strategy must support the national policy. To paraphrase a distinguished writer: we should have either a policy commensurate with our Navy, or a Navy commensurate with our policy.

Fourth: friendships between nations are as desirable as friendships between individuals. Neither can safely tell when in times of stress they may need the other badly. Neither France nor England

had any real friend during the subject war. Spain was offered a price which seemed worth while, but rendered only half-hearted assistance. Prussia furnished troops to England - at a price, but at the same time was quietly furnishing money to the colonists. Our traditional policy of isolation was probably wise when we were an isolated country, with no interests beyond our continental boundaries. Such is not now the case. Our interests extend throughout the world. In some areas, they conflict with the interests of other nations, in some cases they parallel them. We would be wise indeed to seek the open friendship of those whose interests parallel ours, either through trade agreements, financial bonds or other peace time methods, in order that it may become apparent to the peoples of those nations that their interests are interlocked with ours, and that there develops a national attitude of mutual support which would, through national psychology, develop into active support in time of war.

Fifth: in a war based upon a policy of limited objectives, those objectives should be clearly defined, and the strategy should be towards their attainment, with the least possible diversion of effort.

Sixth: superiority of tactics is of no value unless immediate advantage is taken of the situation created by such a superiority. Tactical positions seldom reach a static condition.

Seventh: ships do not, of themselves, make a Fleet. They must be adequately manned with trained personnel, and above all there must exist among that personnel, from the highest to the lowest

and from the lowest to the highest a feeling of confidence in the loyalty and in the ability of all to do their part. If this is lacking, there is no Fleet.

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