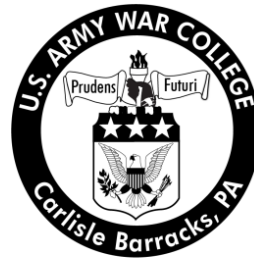


Instruments of National Power: How America Earned Independence

by

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United States Army War College
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Elements of national power exist today as they did in the eighteenth century. While the term DIME or the concept of national powers had not been conceptualized yet, they existed nonetheless. The ways and means used today to achieve desired ends come from the exercise of the elements of national powers and are different from the ways and means available during the American Revolution.

Diplomacy

Diplomacy at the international level is a form of soft power, defined as the way nations persuade other nations to do what they want them to do in support of their national interests. This definition applies to both twenty-first and eighteenth century diplomacy; however, the ways and means are quite different. Today, diplomacy and foreign policy fall under the purview of the President of the United States, the Secretary of State, ambassadors, the National Security Council (NSC) and congressional committees on foreign affairs, to name a few. The development of foreign policy is an intricate process derived in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous international environment. It requires a thorough understanding of the environment, extensive interagency cooperation, and a clear vision of what America's role in the world should be. Eighteenth century diplomacy was much different. The diplomatic organizations and processes that exist today did not exist then. There was no "America," and thus no one had yet considered what America's role in the world should be. Diplomatic actions were completed through representatives often located thousands of miles away from home. They would have to wait weeks if not months to exchange information or news, which is vastly different from today's environment of instantaneous communications.

Britain's use of its diplomatic national power was poor throughout the American Revolution. British diplomacy with the American colonies was wanting due to a sense of arrogance, most likely brought on as a result of being the closest thing to resembling a global hegemon in the late 1700's. The British Empire, with colonies located all over the world, was used to getting its way and was prejudiced against anyone who thought different. This attitude can best be described in the words of Thucydides, who has the Athenians telling the Melians that "the strong do as they can and the weak suffer what

they must."¹ Further bolstering Britain's haughty diplomatic tone was its victory over its long-time French rivals during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763).

With these factors in mind it is not difficult to understand why the British government treated the American colonies as "...a child to the British motherland needing discipline..."² Because of this prejudicial view toward the American Colonies there were very few, if any, diplomatic actions by the British to try to find a way to resolve American disputes peacefully, despite the American attempts to do so. The British diplomatic policy can best be summed up as a "do what you're told or suffer the consequences" policy. Such a policy, for obvious reasons, did not sit well with the representatives of the American colonies and would ultimately lead to war. It is also striking to note that this cavalier policy did not change throughout the course of the war. It was only towards the end of the war, after General Charles Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown, when it became obvious that the "do what you're told" policy was not going to work. Britain's failure to effectively leverage its diplomatic national power was a key reason why Britain lost the war.

American diplomatic efforts offer a stark contrast to the British diplomatic efforts throughout the course of the war. American leadership, the Continental Congress, recognized early that they could not beat the British on their own and would require outside help. Not surprisingly, Congress turned to the French. The French were anxious to exact revenge against the British after having been humiliated during the Seven Years' War and perhaps had designs of taking over Britain's position as global hegemon. The French foreign minister, Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes, put in place a foreign policy based on his belief that Britain's rising power had to be kept in

check.³ Similar to British support for the war, French support fluctuated depending on the military success of General George Washington and his Continental army. After Cornwallis soundly defeated Major General Horatio Gates at the Battle of Camden (1780), Vergennes “suggested that his American allies would have to make peace with Great Britain on the basis of *uti possidetis*”, Latin for “as you possess”.⁴ This was the concept that territories currently held by the British would remain so as part of the peace negotiations. Vergennes was also motivated for peace due to the exorbitant cost of the war to the French economy and the fact that it was taking much longer than anticipated. Historian James Stokesbury asks, “Was it worth courting national bankruptcy just to tweak the lion's nose?”⁵

The idea of *uti possidetis* was a non-starter for the Continental Congress, however. In 1780, British had control of New York and the Carolinas. Ceding those territories to make peace would have split the colonies and left the door open for future British military actions. This was unacceptable to Congress, who would only accept complete independence of all thirteen colonies and the removal of British forces. In order to keep France in the fight, Congress had to rely on its diplomatic powers to persuade the French to continue support for the cause for independence. The skillful efforts of American diplomats such as Benjamin Franklin and John Laurens resulted in an alliance with France that would endure just long enough to beat the British. Even that was a miracle, given that France was a monarchy and that the idea of a civil uprising against the ruling government was contrary to its absolutist system of government. The French looked past this irony, however, for their involvement in the war was more about defeating Great Britain and less about supporting the American ideal of independence.

French support of money, arms, and most importantly, the French navy, were key factors towards America's victory. Without French support, garnered through the adept use of diplomatic national power, the American cause of independence would have most likely failed.

Information

Information as an element of national power refers to the way a nation uses information to shape the global environment on a long-term basis in support of national interests. Information, often associated with intelligence, is a means used by nations to understand the complex nature of international and domestic relations. The ancient Chinese theorist Sun Tzu espoused the importance of knowing and controlling information. In *The Art Of War*, Master Tzu states, "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril."⁶ The use of information power during the eighteenth century was much different from today. With the advent of the World Wide Web, the twenty-four hour news cycle, global interconnectivity, and institutional information organizations like the Central Intelligence Agency, the twenty-first century world is a much smaller place than it was during the American Revolution. Eighteenth century information was often as timely as the fastest horse or ship. It was frequently inaccurate and outdated—a shortcoming that military and political leaders on both sides of the war would constantly have to overcome.

The British information element of national power suffered due to long distances between London and the American colonies, poor policies regarding information operations, and inadequate British intelligence on American troop movements.

To say that information exchange between London and the American colonies in the late eighteenth century was time consuming is an understatement. With lines of communication both three thousand miles long and seaborne, it took weeks if not months (depending on the weather) to exchange information. In 1781, the British Secretary of State, Lord George Germain, failed to receive word of the defeat at Yorktown until almost a month after Cornwallis' surrender.⁷ The problem of distance that the British had to contend with was not a problem at all for the Americans. British Generals were often working with orders that were outdated. Any changes to strategy that London desired took time, while Congress could move much more rapidly.

British strategy and policy regarding information operations or the psychological aspects of war proved to be disastrous time and time again. In 1778 the war effort had come to a stalemate with General Henry Clinton holed up in New York while General Washington contemplated how to get him out. London devised a new strategy known as the Southern Strategy, which would consist of military operations in the South (Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina). The strategy would rely on the supposedly high level of support from Loyalists (colonists who support the British, also known as Tories) in the South. Britain's confidence in Loyalist support was not completely unfounded. Reports received early in the war from state governors such as Josiah Martin of North Carolina significantly overestimated Loyalist support, which tainted London's view for the duration of the war.⁸ There also was a sense that the Revolution was fueled from small pockets of radicals whom the Loyalists were hesitant to confront on their own. As soon as British regulars arrived, however, the Loyalists would come out in droves to fight for the crown. Another possible explanation has to do with the size of the British

army. After France entered the war, London was required to send forces to protect other interests such as the West Indies. This meant less troops for the southern campaign. The idea of simply increasing the size of the army was untenable since it would require additional tax burdens to support a war that was becoming increasingly unpopular. In the end, even if London secretly questioned the veracity of Loyalist support, the alternatives were not so feasible. As such, British leaders made the assumption that once they began their campaign in the South, Loyalist support would be there. This assumption, based on a poor understanding of the environment due to a lack of credible information, would soon prove to be entirely wrong.

The Southern Campaign began in 1778, with a British landing at Savannah, Georgia. The port, one of America's largest, fell immediately, almost without a fight. It was soon followed by Clinton's siege victory over General Benjamin Lincoln at Charleston in 1780 where "over 5,000 Americans were removed from the defense of the South..." and would be the largest American surrender during the war.⁹ While the victories at Savannah and Charleston helped drum up some Loyalist support, it was not on the large scale that was anticipated.

Viewed after the fact, what is striking is how little effect these victories had on world opinion. The British army, as a premier professional force, was expected to win. They were supposed to beat the amateur American army. As such, they gained little advantage regarding information operations from any of its victories. On the other hand, they experienced significant informational disadvantages after Pyrrhic victories or the occasional defeat. The American victory at Kings Mountain in October of 1780 may have done more to discourage Loyalist support than any other event of the era. Upon

reflection after the war, Clinton concluded that Kings Mountain was “the decisive moment in the war...” and “thereafter, no realistic hope existed of raising substantial numbers of Loyalists.”¹⁰

Throughout the Southern Campaign, Cornwallis and the British failed to develop a cohesive strategy to present information in a positive light. In fact, based on their actions, it almost seems as if they were deliberately trying to go in the opposite direction. Barbaric actions taken by some British officers did little to help Loyalist recruitment. One of the most notable British officers in this regard was Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton. Soon after the victory at Charleston, Tarleton engaged a Continental Army force in the vicinity of Lancaster, South Carolina. The ensuing battle fought on May 29th, 1780, would be later known as the Battle of Waxhaws or the Waxhaws Massacre based on the cruel and vicious actions of Tarleton’s men after the Americans had surrendered and requested “quarter”. What would be later known as “Tarleton’s quarter”, American soldiers were cut down mercilessly with their arms up begging for mercy. Tarleton’s actions earned him the nickname “Bloody Banastre” and in a report to Cornwallis after the battle, Tarleton stated “I have cut 170 Off’rs and Men to pieces.”¹¹

The massacre at Waxhaws is not the only example of British actions that resulted in alienation of prospective British supporters. The cruel actions of British Major James Wemyss while in pursuit of partisan bandits in the Carolina backcountry earned him the title, according to historian John Buchanan, of “the second most hated man in the Carolinas.”¹² While in pursuit of the rebel partisan leader Francis Marion, Wemyss and his men “plundered and burned the homes...hanged several parole violators;

torched the property...razed loom houses, mills, and blacksmith shops...destroyed a Presbyterian church which he called a sedition shop.”¹³ After studying the brutalities seen time and again in the Carolina backcountry, historian Walter Edgar concluded that had there existed some form of international court “Cornwallis and his subordinates... would have been hauled before [it]...as war criminals.”¹⁴

Such actions by Tarleton and Wemyss did little to increase loyalist support, but it was very effective on increasing rebel recruitment for both the militia and the continental army. Cornwallis’ failure to develop a cohesive information strategy resulted in his subordinates conducting operations that ran contrary to one of the main tenets of the Southern Strategy—enlistment of Loyalist support. The British failed to leverage their informational element of power by not understanding the psychological impact of their operations.

British intelligence efforts during the war consistently came up short and were never on a par with the Americans. This should not be surprising given that the British were an occupying force, an inherent disadvantage. For example, a farmer’s wife in the Carolina backcountry was more likely to inform rebel leaders of British movements than she was to inform British leaders of rebel movements. The British were essentially fighting an insurgency in a foreign land and were at a disadvantage throughout the entire war when it came to credible intelligence. The British intelligence effort suffered from two shortfalls—they either had “no intelligence” or they had “bad intelligence.”

One such example of “no intelligence” occurred after the Battle of Cowpens. On January 17th, 1781, Brigadier General Daniel Morgan’s forces met the forces of “Bloody Banastre” in an area just north of Cowpens, South Carolina. In one of the few decisive

American victories in the South, Morgan forces defeated the forces of the overconfident Tarleton. Morgan would not rest on his laurels long. A superb leader and tactician, Morgan understood that the British would return and with superior numbers. It was time for him to move out and rejoin with Major General Nathanael Greene's forces to the northeast. Morgan was right in anticipating a quick response to his victory at Cowpens. Upon learning of Tarleton's defeat, Cornwallis, who was planning on pursuing Greene's army, changed his plans to pursue Morgan instead. To not do so "...he [Cornwallis] feared...would open the door to infinite sapping strikes all through the South Carolina backcountry by partisans who were aided and abetted by Continentals."¹⁵ The problem for Cornwallis was that he lacked intelligence informing him which direction Morgan would move his forces. On January 16th, a day before the Battle of Cowpens, Cornwallis did receive some "intelligence indicating that Morgan was pulling back to the northwest."¹⁶ After Cowpens, though, he could not be sure which way Morgan would move. Historian John Ferling states, "...Cornwallis could only guess the direction that Morgan would move, and he guessed wrong."¹⁷ Cornwallis, perhaps sticking with his initial intelligence estimate, decided to move his forces to the northwest. Without adequate intelligence on the movement of Morgan's forces, Cornwallis and his superior force missed an excellent opportunity to engage Morgan on their terms. Cornwallis marched his troops for two days in the opposite direction before he realized his error. By this time "...Morgan was twenty miles ahead of him, a nearly insurmountable lead."¹⁸

Similar to Alcibiades' assumption that he would receive local support to bolster Athenian land forces in the campaign against Sicily during the Peloponnesian War, the British assumed they would receive Loyalist support for their campaign in the South. In

the end, however, the British army never received the amount of Loyalist support that the Southern Strategy relied upon, because of their poor handling of information. The British failed in both the psychological and intelligence-gathering aspects needed for an effective information operations campaign. As a result, their use of information as an element of national power was strikingly inferior to the Americans.

America's information element of national power was more successful than the British due to Washington's adept use of continental spy networks and an effective narrative of revolution bolstered by the works of Thomas Paine and others

It can be argued that few other generals in history put more importance on their intelligence networks than George Washington. As his own chief intelligence officer, Washington established extensive spy networks throughout the colonies that often afforded him the benefit of being one step ahead of the British. These spy networks were necessary to counter Britain's huge military and economic advantages. Washington had an advantage that all occupied states have over invading armies—ancillary intelligence support from non-combatants. This was especially true during the Southern Campaign. British movements rarely went unnoticed or unreported to Washington in the North or Greene in the South. "Their intelligence was superb. From friendly farmers, captured enemy soldiers...the partisans often knew when and where to expect a British supply convoy."¹⁹

Good intelligence even allowed future president and author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, to escape capture. In June 1781 Cornwallis ordered Tarleton and his men to march on Charlottesville and capture as many political prisoners as possible, including Jefferson. Tarleton's mission would have been a

success if not for the actions of one man, John Jouett. A captain in the Virginia militia, Jouett spotted Tarleton and his men entering a tavern. Without hesitating a minute, Jouett quickly rode to Charlottesville to alert Jefferson and other state representatives of the incoming raid. In “one of the most dramatic and narrowest escapes of the war”, Jefferson quickly evacuated himself and his family to safety.²⁰

Intelligence stories such as this are abundant in the annals of the American Revolution, but none of them is as strategically significant as Washington’s manipulation of intelligence prior to the march on Yorktown in 1781. By superb execution of misinformation and deception, Washington fooled Clinton into believing that American and French forces were making preparations to attack Clinton in New York and not Cornwallis in Yorktown. Part of the success of this deception was due to the movement of American-French coalition forces in a manner that made it appear as if they were setting up to attack New York. Another part of the success was a misinformation operation carried out by Washington personally in which “...he himself...had supplied the enemy with exactly the information he wanted to them to have about his now-abandoned plan.”²¹ The efficacy of Washington’s misinformation campaign was evident from multiple reports provided to Clinton from British spies. One report said “...an attack upon New York & Long Island is designed as soon as the French troops arrive, in conjunction with the Continental Troops...”²² Other British spy reports stated “If there is any Attempt [sic] Made you may depend on it will be made on the Island that will be first place of the Attack [sic] and “report strongly prevails in the Country of Raising Militia and laying Seige to New York.”²³ Such reports convinced Clinton that an attack on New York was imminent. By the time Clinton realized the coalition's true objective, Yorktown, it

was too late for him to send aid or assistance to Cornwallis or the approximately 9,000 British and Hessian troops fighting there.²⁴

Political activist and author Thomas Paine was the “voice” of the American Revolution. Certainly, there were other strong personalities such as John Adams or Thomas Jefferson, but none captured the imagination of citizens across the colonies as did Paine. Through his inspiring works such as *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis*, Paine was able to put in writing what many Americans had been feeling, and he did so in language that the commoner could understand and appreciate. John Adams once said "without the pen of the author of *Common Sense*, the sword of Washington would have been raised in vain."²⁵ Successful information operations require a narrative, a message that its intended audience can understand and embrace. It also requires delivery of the narrative, which was done through thousands of pamphlets distributed throughout the colonies. Washington himself would often have Paine’s pamphlets read aloud to the troops prior to going into battle. The most famous of Paine’s writings, one that still resonates today, states:

These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like Hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated.²⁶

The stirring and inspiring words of Paine contributed as much to the success of the war as did any military victories. In a letter to General Greene (for whom Paine once served as a military aide) founding father Benjamin Rush stated, “I believe his [Paine’s] *Crisis* did as much mischief to the enemy, & as much Service to the friends of liberty as it has

been in the power of any one man to render this country with any other weapons Short of the Sword."²⁷ The psychological impact of Paine's writing alongside Washington's adept use of intelligence were key factors in winning the information war and demonstrated the superiority of America's information element of power over the British.

Military

The military element of national power represents the military might of a nation. Referred to as a "hard power" due to its kinetic nature, the military component of DIME might appear to be a measure of last resort. This is not always the case, however, as the credible threat of hard power alone in combination with other elements of DIME (sometimes known as "smart power") can often allow a nation to achieve its interests. Like diplomatic power, military power is different today than in the eighteenth century. Today, the United States military, comprised of land, air, and sea forces is unmatched globally. Few would even consider going toe-to-toe with today's US military. Nothing could be more different than the Continental Army that took on one of the mightiest military in the world, the British Army. American military forces during the Revolution were a hodge-podge of continental army "regulars", state militia, and whoever else felt like fighting that day. Not only were the Americans outmatched on land, they were outmatched on sea. While a small Continental Navy did exist, it was no match for the power of the dominant British Navy.

The British military as an element of national power had every advantage yet still failed to achieve the decisive victory required to beat the Americans. The lack of loyalist support, the uncharacteristic actions of Cornwallis, and the poor relationship between Clinton and Cornwallis all contributed to the military failure of the Southern Strategy.

One example of Britain's poor use of its military element of power can be attributed to bad assumptions and atypical actions of a British General officer in the execution of his duties. As discussed previously, the British Southern Strategy largely relied on significant support from Loyalists in the region. Cornwallis knew this, yet did very little to take the necessary steps to garner Loyalist support. In fact, "Cornwallis never made a sustained effort to recruit, train, and adequately equip Loyalist militia..."²⁸ Without adequate Loyalist support the military strategy to capture and control the South would be extremely difficult due to the mere size of the geography. Cornwallis simply "did not have enough men to occupy one territory while he conquered more."²⁹ A lackluster effort in garnering Loyalist support was one of many military missteps by Cornwallis during the Southern campaign that ultimately led to disaster for the British. Cornwallis' pursuit of Greene across the Carolina backcountry would set the stage for additional missteps. One such blunder would occur after the Battle of Cowpens. Having been humiliated in defeat by Morgan and his men, Cornwallis was determined to catch and destroy the now recombined forces of Morgan and Greene. Considered an uncommon action at the time for a British General officer, Cornwallis ordered the burning of his own wagons, as well as anything that would impede his speed in order to quicken the advance of his army. Cornwallis said, "I find it impossible to take on waggons [sic]. I have therefore determined to burn all my waggons [sic] except those loaded with rum, salt, spare ammunition and hospital stores."³⁰ In eighteenth century warfare "it is unimaginable that any other British commander in this war would have taken such a step..."³¹ Such actions demonstrated that Cornwallis was obsessed with catching Greene to a degree of taking actions that played into Greene's strategy of

partisan tactics. Despite Cornwallis' actions, Cornwallis admitted that "Morgan's movements have been too rapid for me...my situation is most critical. I see infinite danger in proceeding but certain ruin in retreating. I am therefore determined to go on..."³² Cornwallis' unusual actions can, perhaps, be attributed to his desire for a decisive victory in order to bolster Loyalist support.

While the British won most of its tactical engagements in the South they failed to garner the decisive victory they so desperately desired. In fact, British tactical victories strategically weakened the British Army due to the high cost of casualties and a thinning of the army required to control its military gains. One of the bloodiest fights in the campaign, the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, is a good example. Cornwallis received word that Greene and his force of approximately 4500 men were camped out in the vicinity of Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina. Despite being outnumbered nearly two-to-one, Cornwallis moved his forces to engage Greene on March 15, 1781. Cornwallis would be victorious, but as would happen many times during the war, the Americans managed to avoid the decisive blow by retreating at just the right moment. Cornwallis' defeat of Greene at Guilford is a classic example of a Pyrrhic victory. Charles Fox, British Whig Party leader and critic of the war, stated, "Another such victory would ruin the British Army!"³³

It is uncertain as to why Cornwallis went to such desperate lengths to engage Greene. Instead of chasing Greene all over the Carolina backcountry, Cornwallis, like Clinton in New York, could have established a strategic defensive to consolidate and maintain his gains in Georgia and South Carolina. Cornwallis' decision to pursue Greene with an unusual eagerness for the time, however, was the opposite of a

strategic defensive and resulted in actions that strategically debilitated his army. One possible explanation for his uncharacteristic actions may be found in his relationship with Clinton.

Simply put, Cornwallis and Clinton did not get along. Clinton "...harbored an especially deep resentment toward Cornwallis" and Cornwallis, after learning that he would be subordinate to Clinton, allegedly said, "I cannot bear to serve under him."³⁴ Whatever the cause of discontent between the two, their cantankerous relationship was one reason the Southern strategy failed. Despite being Clinton's subordinate, Cornwallis felt superior to Clinton and made several strategic decisions without consulting or even informing his commander until after the fact. Cornwallis' biggest strategic blunder was his decision to move his army from the South into Virginia. Cornwallis made this decision without consulting Clinton and "was fully aware that...he was abandoning his mission of pacifying the Carolinas, in violation of General Clinton's orders."³⁵ Even more surprising was that Cornwallis understood "that he was ceding control of the interiors of North and South Carolina, as well as Georgia, to the rebels against the wishes and orders of the British Commander-in-Chief, General Clinton."³⁶ Cornwallis' decision to keep pushing north evidently came from his desire to remain on the offensive, perhaps motivated by a desire for military glory—a trait that all successful military officers desperately sought during 18th century warfare.

Upon learning that the American-French coalition was planning an assault on New York (part of Washington's deception), Clinton ordered Cornwallis to switch to a defensive strategy and send as many troops as possible for reinforcement. Cornwallis was irritated but complied and set up his defensive in the city of Yorktown. He did not,

however, send any troops, “claiming he needed all the troops he had to remain in Virginia...”³⁷

The American-French coalition was never planning an attack on New York. The misinformation disseminated via Washington’s spy networks fooled Clinton into thinking their objective was New York, when in fact it was Yorktown. With French and American armies at this front door and the French Navy at his back, “Cornwallis knew instantly that he was in trouble” yet failed to take any action.³⁸ Later, defending his actions, Cornwallis explained, “...he had lacked the discretionary authority to act...”³⁹ This was an outrageous statement, considering that “a lack of discretionary authority to act” did not stop him from his decision to abandon the Southern strategy. As the noose around Yorktown tightened, Cornwallis sent pleas to Clinton for reinforcements, yet none came. With “...nearly 17000 troops in New York...” Clinton sat idle in a “...frame of mind where everything was someone else’s fault, and it served them bloody right, too.”⁴⁰ On October 19th, 1781, Cornwallis surrendered to Washington and wrote to Clinton, “I have the mortification to inform your Excellency that I have been forced to give up the posts of York and Gloucester and to surrender the troops under my command...”⁴¹ Cornwallis’ surrender ended the Battle of Yorktown and effectively ended the war.

The tenuous relationship between the two leading British generals created an environment where poor strategic decisions were made. This coupled with an overestimated assumption of loyalist support and the non-strategic actions of Cornwallis resulted in underutilization of Britain’s military element of power.

The American military element of national power was practically non-existent at the beginning of the war, but improved as the war went on. The entrance of France into

the war was certainly a factor, especially the French Navy. The American military element of power remained inferior to the British in every way, yet still managed to beat the British through unconventional strategies and innovative thinking.

Washington realized early on in the war that his center of gravity was the Continental Army. As long as the army was intact, then so was the cause for independence. The British army was one of the most formidable armies in the world. How could Washington expect to keep his center of gravity intact with a group of undertrained, undersupplied men? His answer came from one of his most trusted generals, Nathaniel Greene. Greene said “Tis our business to study to avoid any considerable misfortune, and to take post where the Enemy will be obliged to fight us and not we them.”⁴² Thus began the underpinnings of what would ultimately become the American military approach to the war—the Fabian strategy.

Named after the Roman general Fabius Maximus, the Fabian strategy is the idea of fighting only when it is advantageous to do so and thus avoiding the decisive defeat at all costs. Washington and his generals would effectively employ this strategy throughout the war, thus helping to level the playing field with the stronger British. Some of the most successful victories under this strategy, also known as partisan warfare or “*petite guerre* (“Little War”)”, include the battles at Trenton, Cowpens, and Yorktown.⁴³ Successful retreats include the battles of Guilford Courthouse or Ninety-Six. When American forces failed to follow this strategy, the results were disastrous. One such example of this occurred during the Siege of Charleston in 1780 where Clinton defeated Major General Benjamin Lincoln and captured over 5,000 men. Lincoln, with ample warning that the British were coming in overwhelming force, curiously decided to stay in

Charleston. In one of the worst defeats of the entire war, Lincoln inexplicably abandoned the Fabian strategy that had been in effect for almost four years.

The Fabian strategy—a revolutionary concept for the Americans in a revolutionary war—was the right strategy, at the right time, for the right force. The Fabian strategy could not win the war by itself, however. Something else would be needed for the American military to gain an advantage over the British military. That advantage would come in the form of innovative and imaginative thinking by Major General Nathanael Greene and Brigadier General Daniel Morgan.

As Cornwallis began his campaign to pacify the Carolinas, Washington appointed Greene to command the Southern Army. Greene, a strong proponent of the Fabian strategy, was ordered to disrupt Cornwallis through the use of partisan warfare and prevent him from gaining a foothold in the South. To this end, one of Greene's first moves was to split his army into two forces. While 18th century warfare considered such an act to be risky, it was "...also the first evidence of imaginative thinking from headquarters in the Southern department..."⁴⁴ Additionally, Greene felt that dividing his force "compels my adversary to divide his, and holds him in doubt as to his own line of conduct."⁴⁵ In other words, he would place his adversary in a position he was not accustomed to, which would be an advantage for Greene and fit in to the Fabian strategy.

The gamble paid off. Greene kept one half of the Southern army and appointed Morgan to command the other half. As their forces split, Cornwallis likewise had to split his army to chase them. Cornwallis would make for Greene's army, while Tarleton would pursue Morgan. In keeping with the Fabian strategy, Greene's orders to Morgan

stated, "It is not my wish you should come to action unless you have a manifest superiority and a moral certainty of succeeding. Put nothing to hazard, a retreat may be disagreeable but not disgraceful."⁴⁶

Greene was not the only general thinking creatively in the South. Morgan was also developing new fighting tactics that resulted in a great victory for the rebels. The Battle of Cowpens was one of only two decisive victories for the Americans during the entire Southern campaign (Yorktown being the other). The American decisive victory resulted from Morgan's skillful combination of militia and regular troops and his adherence to the Fabian strategy. In correspondence to Greene, Morgan stated, "my situation at Cowpens enabled me to improve any advantage that I might gain and to provide better for my security should I be unfortunate."⁴⁷ In other words, Morgan felt he had a military advantage at Cowpens and a means for strategic retreat, in needed. His plan "...called for a defense in depth with three lines of resistance."⁴⁸ The first line was made up of sharpshooters, the second militia, and the third combined militia and regulars. The performance of militia forces in combat had been inconsistent. Some would stay and fight while others would run at the first sighting of red coats. In order to prevent this, Morgan ordered his militiamen to fire at least three volleys before withdrawing behind the third line located along a low ridgeline. In other words, he gave his green militia a limited task, with the comfort of knowing that, after three shots, they had done their duty and could retreat. It would also give Morgan a concerted effort of fire from his second line, hopefully decimating Tarleton's forces that much further before the British engaged the trained, rested troops of the third line. Morgan's plan was enormously successful. The battle "...lasted little more than an hour, ending in a

humiliating British defeat with Tarleton barely escaping capture.”⁴⁹ In correspondence with Greene, Morgan stated, “The Troops I had the Honor to command have been so fortunate as to obtain a complete Victory over a Detachment from the British Army commanded by L^t Colonel Tarlton.”⁵⁰ Morgan’s innovative plan was so effective that Greene would apply the same tactics during the Battle of Guilford Courthouse two months later.

American embrace of the Fabian strategy and innovative thinking proved to be a game changer during the war in the South. By adopting an unconventional strategy and implementing creative thinking, the Americans utilized their military element of power much more effectively than did the seemingly more powerful British.

Economy

The economic instrument of national power deals not only with a nation's economic resiliency, but also how it tries to use its economic influence on other nations. The concept of economic statecraft certainly existed in the eighteenth century, but as with the other elements of national power, is quite different today than it was then. While there has been much discussion on the current downturn in the economy, it pales in comparison to the American economy of the late 1700's. America's economic power was practically non-existent and required the avid support of other countries such as France to keep the Revolution alive.

The British economic element of national power far surpassed the economic power of the colonies. As such, they could leverage their economic advantage through economic sanctions. As the conflict dragged on, however, the strain of the war, exasperated by the entrance of France and Spain, proved too much for Britain's economic power to handle and was a contributing factor to its defeat.

It can be argued that economics was the reason the American Revolution started in the first place. Still suffering from the exorbitant cost of the Seven Years' War, Britain levied taxes against the colonies to pay for that war. The decision to impose taxes on the colonies without colonial say in the matter is what ultimately drove the colonists to break from Britain. In 1780, as part of Cornwallis' strategy to control the South, the British put economic sanctions in place. They tried to leverage their economic power to gain the support of Loyalists while making rebels or neutral parties suffer economically. The "...British would use their economic leverage to further break the resistance, purchasing supplies only from Loyalists while confiscating the property of the openly disaffected."⁵¹ These sanctions, however, did little good in recruiting the number of Loyalists needed for the Southern strategy and probably resulted in more recruits for the rebel cause. Additionally, the British failed to realize the poor economic state of the colonies at the time. Any economic sanctions imposed by the British would have little effect because the colonists were so bad off in the first place. Historian Russell Weigley states, "The Americans were so poverty-stricken militarily that they could not be made much poorer."⁵²

As the war dragged on, much longer than anyone in London anticipated, the pressures on Britain's economy began to show. While Britain's economy was stronger than the America's, it had to worry about other threats to its interests besides the American Revolution. With the entrance of France in the war in 1778, Spain in 1779, and the Dutch in 1780, Britain had to devote resources to areas besides North America. With the French, Spanish, and Dutch navies now a threat, Britain had to defend its interests "at home, in the Mediterranean, in Africa, in India, as well as in the West

Indies...⁵³ By the fall of 1780 “Great Britain’s resources were stretched thin” and “there was also a growing concern within the government about the financial cost of the effort. The national debt had almost doubled since the beginning of the war.”⁵⁴

Being the only country in a war without allies is not an enviable position. Britain reached out to other states within the European continent, but none were listening. In fact, “none of the European states was willing to pull Britain’s chestnuts out of the fire for her this time around.”⁵⁵ Without allies, Britain could turn to no one else for help. The compounding economic problem, along with the devastating loss at Yorktown in 1781, undoubtedly contributed to Britain’s decision to pull out of the war.

While Britain’s ability to leverage its economic power waned towards the end of the war, America’s economic power waned the entire war. It is a stretch to even suggest that the colonies had an economy let alone a vibrant one capable of being classified as an element of national power. With both countries' economies hanging by a thread, it became a race of which one could outlast the other. Fortunately for the Americans, they had allies, while the British did not.

As the war went into its fifth year in 1779, the economic landscape was bleak. The drain on the economy to support the war effort was dramatic where “iron went for muskets instead of plows, and muskets went to kill Englishman instead of game, and the colonial economy went nearer and nearer to collapse.”⁵⁶ American soldiers fought bravely and the Fabian strategy was keeping them from a decisive loss but the “...severe shortages of men, arms, clothing, food, and other supplies...” were beginning to take their toll.⁵⁷ Congress had no money to pay the troops and could not find a “remedy for the new nation's tumble-down economy.”⁵⁸ Lack of pay for the troops led to

mutinies in some cases, which added to the already immense burdens Washington had to endure. With the economy rapidly declining and little prospect for a decisive engagement, Washington recognized that time was running out. As the year 1780 came to a close, he brooded “we have no Magazines, not money...and in a little time we shall have no Men.”⁵⁹ Echoing Washington’s concerns, Greene, in a letter to then President of the Continental Congress, Samuel Huntington stated, “The small force that I have remaining with me are so naked & destitute of every thing, that the greater part is rendered unfit for any kind of duty.”⁶⁰ The American’s would require more help from their allies, the French, if they hoped to weather the economic storm.

Without the military and economic support from the French, it is doubtful the Americans would have been victorious. Much attention goes to the French navy hemming in Cornwallis at Yorktown; but economic support from France was just as vital. As 1781 began, the American economy was in dire straits and Congress turned to France for assistance. Getting French support was becoming more difficult since “during the first three years of the alliance, France had little to show for its outlays of funds, arms and manpower.”⁶¹ With some persuading, France consented to provide “...six million livres...to be placed as Washington’s disposal...”⁶² However, the French bank was beginning to dry up. If the war did not end soon, the British might win the economic race. Fortunately for the Americans, though, the war did end soon, and the economic resiliency of the colonies outlasted the British--just barely.

Conclusion

A nation does not necessarily have to be the best in each element of the DIME to achieve its national goals and interests. It does, however, have to be adept in managing each element of national power synergistically in order to achieve its desired results. In

the case of the American Revolution, it is clear that the American's more effectively managed their elements of national power than did the British.

From the British perspective, management of the DIME failed on all accounts. Diplomatically the British failed due to their prejudiced view of the colonies as demonstrated via their "do what your told" policy. The British information campaign failed due to cruel acts such as Tarleton at Waxhaws and a lack of credible intelligence within the colonies. Militarily, the British failed due to overestimation of Loyalist support, lack of a strategic vision in the South, and a poor relationship between the leading British generals, Clinton and Cornwallis. Economically, the British failed due to poorly thought-out economic sanctions, an assumption that the war would end quickly, and a lack of allies for additional support. Failure to manage its elements of national power adequately resulted in Britain's defeat by the American underdogs.

In contrast to the British, the American's management of the DIME was successful. Diplomatically, the American's realized the importance of getting the French involved and to keep them involved through the savvy diplomacy of Benjamin Franklin and John Laurens. The American use of information was a success based on Washington's skillful use of spy networks, support from the local populace, and the inspirational writings of Thomas Paine. Militarily, the American's succeeded based on its use of the Fabian strategy and innovative thinking of its generals such as Greene and Morgan. Economically, despite being in a terrible state throughout the entire war, the American's were able to hold on just long enough, with support from the French, to outlast the British. The adroit combinations of all elements of national power resulted in a surprising victory over the British and the birth of a new nation.

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