

SSUSH4: ANALYZE THE IDEOLOGICAL, MILITARY, SOCIAL, AND DIPLOMATIC ASPECTS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



ELEMENT B: Explain the reason for and significance of the French Alliance and other foreign assistance including the diplomacy of Benjamin Franklin and John Adams.

The Foreign European Alliance



- ❑ Americans faced the more prepared, better financed, and better equipped British military in the American Revolution.
- ❑ In order for the Americans to supplement their war effort, diplomats worked in Europe to secure help from other countries.
 - Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, who had been key figures in the development of the Patriot cause in the colonies spent the majority of the American Revolution in Europe working to negotiate assistance from France, Spain, and the Netherlands.
- ❑ The French ultimately provided critical military and financial assistance, while the Spain and the Netherlands provided primarily financial assistance to the American cause.

Reasons of the French Alliance

- ❑ A comparison of the resources held by the British and by the colonies at the time of the Declaration of Independence provides a solid explanation for why Benjamin Franklin and John Adams worked to secure the French alliance and foreign assistance during the Revolutionary War.



- The population of the thirteen colonies totaled about 2.5 million (of which 500,000 were slaves) and Great Britain's population was about 8 million at the time of the American Revolution.
- In addition to this smaller pool from which to draw soldiers, not all colonists supported the Patriot cause.
 - The Loyalists made up about 1/3 of the colonial population.
- Another critical disadvantage that the American forces faced was that the British military was made up of professional soldiers who were trained and supplied far better than the newly created Continental Army.
- Financially, the Continental Congress struggled to secure resources and equip the Continental Army to carry out the war because the newly created government lacked money to pay for the mounting costs.
 - Under the provisions of the Articles of Confederation, the Continental Congress did not have the power to tax.
 - Requests for voluntary payments from the states to the Continental Congress was their only method to generate revenue.
 - The funds needed to finance the war were never fully provided by the states. Given all of these tremendous obstacles, it was critical for the Continental Congress to secure alliances and financial assistance from other countries.



Significance of the French Alliance



- ❑ France emerged as the greatest ally for the Americans during the Revolutionary War.
- ❑ Great Britain had become the dominant world power after successfully concluding the French and Indian War in 1763.
 - Britain's traditional enemies (France, Spain, and the Netherlands) looked for a way to regain the advantage in world trade.
- ❑ As Britain's American colonies began rebelling, French government officials representing their king, Louis XVI, began negotiating with the Americans.
 - Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were instrumental in negotiating the Franco-American Treaty in 1778.
 - The alliance essentially turned the tide of the war against Great Britain.
 - French naval attacks in the Caribbean and against British holdings in India forced the Royal Navy to weaken its blockade along the eastern seaboard of the United States.
 - The French also supplied large quantities of muskets, cannons, shot and powder to Washington's forces.
 - Spain and the Netherlands were also Britain's rivals and contributed substantial financial assistance to the American cause.



Significance of Foreign Alliances



- ❑ It was after the colonists won the Battle of Saratoga, New York in 1777 that France was willing to openly support the Americans by entering the Revolutionary War opposed to their rival Great Britain.
 - The naval support that ultimately came from the French was critical in winning the British surrender at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781.
- ❑ Benjamin Franklin had been working in France to secure the alliance since the winter of 1776.
 - He spent much of his time interacting with the upper classes and educated elements of society in order to gain access to the French leadership.
 - Franklin became very popular in France and was known for his folksy appearance such as wearing a fur cap instead of a fashionable wig common among the upper classes.
- ❑ John Adams was also an American ambassador working in Europe to secure much needed support for the revolutionary cause.
 - Adams spent some time in France with Benjamin Franklin at about the time that the formal alliance had been achieved.
 - It was in the Netherlands that Adams had his greatest diplomatic impact.
 - In April of 1782, when the Treaty of Paris was being negotiated, Adams secured the formal recognition of the United States and a substantial financial loan from the Dutch.



Significance of Foreign Alliances

- ❑ While in Europe, Franklin and Adams were representatives of the United States (along with John Jay and Henry Laurens) in negotiating the Treaty of Paris 1783 that settled the Revolutionary War.
 - The diplomatic successes of both Benjamin Franklin and John Adams helped to secure the French military alliance and critical financial assistance from various European sources.
 - The United States, given the significant limitations they faced in fighting against the more powerful and prepared British force, relied heavily on the support provided to them from Britain's own European rivals.

