

How far was
american victory in
the war of
independence due to
poor military lead...



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How far was American victory in the war of Independence due to poor military leadership (24) To the extent to which cause had the most significant effect on the outcome of the War of Independence is a perceptual view which has become very debatable topic, whereby historians have failed to conclude a main reason. However no doubt that in trigger cause and start of British downfall was because of foreign intervention. Although, the long-term problem of British strategic decisions + communication combined with weak general ship in the short-term played a vital role in the surrendering of initiative which lost the war.

Historian Jeremy Black has concluded that the military leadership shown by Britain was poor especially by Cornwallis which lost Britain the war.

Cornwallis by failing to crush American resistance in the South Carolinas had surrendered the initiative to the enemy and portrayed his leadership as feeble. His poor decision making in not going to put down the violence in the South, but let it escalate and move to Virginia played a vital role in Britain's downfall. Cornwallis in June 1781 had said that the Carolinas were safe, but had discounted violence in the interior regions. This radical violence then alienated and eliminated a Loyalist force of 1000 at King's mountain, therefore American war morale rose significantly. Cornwallis pushing on to Virginia was a mistake. Virginia was severely disrupted and the states ability to wage war was minimised, but whilst many counties surrendered as a result, this intensified Virginians hatred for Britain.

Having failed to destroy Lafayette's army decisively Cornwallis was portrayed as weak and lost the initiative. The final problem with Cornwallis's decision to move onto Yorktown was strategically poor. Yorktown was a

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rocky peninsula ??? a poor defensive position??? whereby there were only two escape routes whilst the town was poorly fortified and susceptible to bombardment. Cornwallis had relied on Clinton keeping control of sea power.

If the British lost sea power Cornwallis would fall like a rock. However, historian Paul Langford disagrees and feels that it was foreign intervention which saw the removal of British sea power which was the crucial moment for Britain losing the war. ??? sea power was the decisive factor in the American War???. The trigger cause to downfall of sea power outside Yorktown was to prove decisive. The French by luck were able to take advantage of Clinton??'s misfortunate situation as he returned to port in damaged vessels after a storm which could have re-supplied Cornwallis and kept him in the game. French general De Grasse to sail from the West Indies unimpeded into Chesapeake Bay and gain ultimate control of the bay, blockading it, therefore Cornwallis was trapped, surrounded within the peninsula. In addition the introduction of foreign intervention saw Britain no longer fighting a war in America but all over the world. Britain now had to redeploy troops to defend the colonial empire, stretching from India to Africa.

As a result the number of resources, troops and attention Britain could pay to war in America was minimal, as the army was becoming over-stretched in trying to defend all its colonial interests. Ultimately, even though foreign intervention played the crucial role in the short-term, France wasn??'t overly useful to America for large amounts of the war. The French actually provided little sufficient help in American the first few years. France didn??'

??'t donate many troops or weapons. Although a 5000 strong French army
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was in North America under Rochambeau which landed in Newport in July 1780, it remained inactive in garrisons for over a year, before used in action. France too was acting in its best interests in revenge; it had little interest in actually helping the Americans but inflicting an embarrassing defeat upon Britain. Finally British governmental mistakes can be held responsible as a contributory long-term cause for the loss of the war in America.

Middlekauff for example felt that the certain taxation policies such as the Stamp Act 1765 caused the colonists to become resentful of their despotic ministerial tyrants and therefore the hostile population hindered the war effort, making it increasingly difficult for Britain to wage war effectively more than 15 miles from the coast as communications would become cut. The poor decision making of George III in declaring the colonists rebels after the Olive Branch treaty sealed Britain's fate as colonial opinions to detach from the mother country were set in stone. This gave the Americans a motivational drive to win.

Arguably the employment of 30, 000 Hessians was unwise. As well as alienating American support, some historians claimed they weren't committed to the cause, over the war period over 5000 Hessians deserted. Although Britain in the long-term would have struggled to wage war without the help who in 1778 were 33% of military personnel. Britain was trying to fight a war that was 4800km away and therefore information was lost in a time lag of 2-3 months, where often the situation had changed beyond recognition. As a result the delegation from Germain to his generals at the time Howe and Burgoyne was in the hope they would act responsibly and put their ego's aside.

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For example the mis-communication of Germain's part to inform Howe of Burgoyne's plans to cut off New England led to the defeat of Burgoyne at the Battle of Saratoga. Thereafter this led to the introduction of a confident French force who would eventually turn the war in its favour. Britain in addition stopped focusing on the war and therefore lost the initiative. If North who in turn was an uninspiring leader had sent more troops instead of declaring after the Battle of Saratoga the war as un-win-able British forces may have won a decisive and fatal battle. In conclusion ultimately the war was lost by the British rather than won typically by the Americans. The British although winning most battles, because of the incompetence of their generals never managed to decisively crush the American army on which they had several opportunities to do, but instead surrendered the initiative.

The transfer of sea power in 1781 to the French for the short-period proved decisive as Cornwallis surrendered Yorktown, tipping the scales via a fluke in America's favour. Therefore the foreign intervention led to the ultimate defeat of the British. [pic]