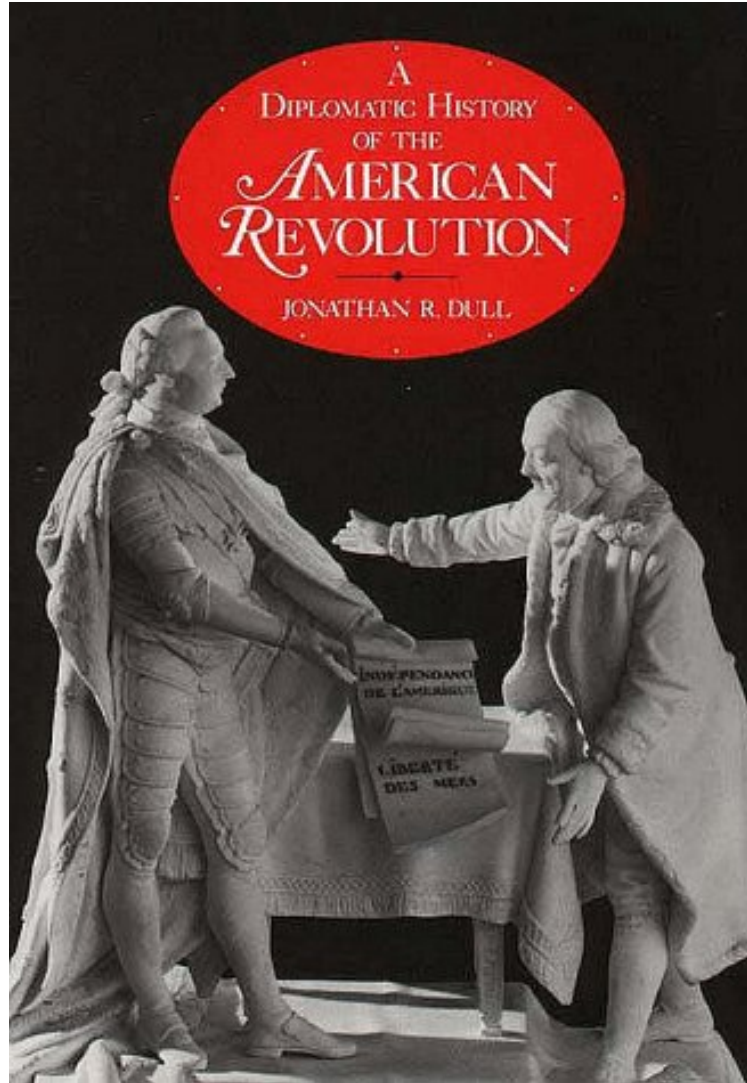


(Download free ebook) A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution

# A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution

*Jonathan R. Dull*

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**Jonathan R. Dull : A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wonderfully detailed explanation of the American diplomacy that won the warBy gloine36In his occupation as an editor for Benjamin Franklin's papers, Jonathan Dull developed a keen understanding of the role of diplomacy in the American Revolution. He put that knowledge to paper in this book, A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution. As we know, the War of American Independence was anything but a foregone conclusion. On paper the Americans faced overwhelming odds, but had some advantages which still were not enough for them to be able to sustain a rebellion. Knowing that the colonies would never produce enough gunpowder

or arms, the delegates to the Second Continental Congress began to look for these in Europe. Since France and Britain had been mortal enemies for centuries, they turned to France and initiated the first diplomatic endeavors of the United States. Dull makes a strong case in this book as to why the French aided the Americans. That reason has absolutely nothing to do with the ideas expressed by the Americans. If anything, those ideas were rejected by the King of France, Louis XVI as being alien to his subjects. Yet, he did consent to supplying the Americans as well as financing them. Those were due to the enmity the French had towards Britain at that time due to the terms in the Treaty of Paris, 1763, which had ended the Seven Years War. France wanted to regain its position as the dominant power in the European balance of power and used the American's rebellion in that attempt. It was this factor that resulted in the American victory. One of the things that make this book difficult to read is that it is a diplomatic history and as a result has a lot of names in it. Having written articles on diplomatic history, I understand this and have not found a way around it without leaving out the important details. Diplomatic histories involve people on a large scale because that simply reflects the reality of the past. It also reflects what diplomats do and that is to interact with a lot of people on behalf of their country. Modern diplomacy is overseen by government officials at home due to the real time availability of communications today. At the time of the American Revolution diplomats were working with considerable time delays which made diplomacy a much slower paced activity compared to today. In the case of the Americans, it involved transatlantic distances which required a minimum of six weeks to cross one way. Obviously, the American diplomats in France were required to make decisions on their own and were empowered to do so which meant those men needed to be able to think on their own. Benjamin Franklin was the main American diplomat in that time. Dull illustrates the incredible uphill battle Franklin faced in Europe and how he engineered the American success of diplomacy. Franklin's greatest advantage was in knowing the French really hated the British for the terms of the Seven Year's War which he used with great skill. He also used the few American victories to gain monies for the fledgling country as well as additional supplies which it absolutely had to have to stay in the fight. Basically, once France entered the conflict in the Franco-American Alliance, Franklin was able to parley that to his advantage as well which he did constantly. Dull's book is short, but packed with information. His footnotes are extensive and reflect the international landscape of the period which weighed so heavily upon the situation. This truly was a major international war that affected Europe in ways few Americans understood. In fact, few Americans understand it today which is why this is a very good book to present students of this time with. Its major drawback is that it focuses singularly upon the diplomatic history of the Revolution which will possibly alienate readers who search for military history of the period. However, no battle the Americans won would have achieved the American victory without the American diplomacy. Even more importantly, it was American diplomacy that won the vast results in the Treaty of Paris, 1782. While this book could definitely be expanded upon and incorporated into a larger history of the Revolution, it achieves its goal as it stands.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Did Britain "win" the Revolutionary War? By Richard L. Roseberry

In his work *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*, Jonathan R. Dull attempts to present the reader with what he terms a new synthesis of Revolutionary diplomacy. He proposes to do this by debunking traditionally accepted perceptions "such as the 'idealism' of American diplomats or the significance of the Battle of Saratoga."1 Dull intends to develop this new synthesis by "paying attention to all the participants in the War for American Independence (the United States, Great Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands) and even to that of some of the onlookers, such as Russia."2 Given the extent of his task, Dull succeeds in identifying numerous factors and contributors, both foreign and domestic, which shaped American diplomacy from its very beginnings. He also manages to achieve his objective "to avoid the all-too-human tendency to believe ourselves the central point about which the world revolves."3 Dull is certainly credible; he wrote several other books, including *Franklin the Diplomat: The French Mission*, and *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy, 1774-1787*, and was associate editor for *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, which he references frequently. Early in this work, he describes the "Committee of Secret Correspondence" appointed by the Continental Congress to "correspond with 'our friends' in Britain and elsewhere," and identifies Arthur Lee, Silas Deane, and Benjamin Franklin as the first official American diplomats.4 He goes on to portray the estrangement of the colonies from Mother England as the precursor to the Revolution. In describing the global politics of Europe during the pre-Revolutionary era, he makes it clear that the British were unusual with regard to their colonial possessions in North America. They "viewed their colonies in North America as an integral part of an interconnected empire."5 Because of this paternalistic view, the British sent a large army to North America, which caused the French to abandon Canada, leaving them a large army in place with no mission and transforming America into an object of diplomacy. With this backdrop in place, he continues to expound on his thesis that a myriad of factors, many not commonly recognized, influenced the development of diplomacy during the Revolution. He delves into the European "Balance of Power"6 theory that attempts to explain how states conduct their foreign affairs, and how even countries without "great power" status have international influence, though not on so grand a scale as the major players. He traces diplomatic origins of the Revolution to the failure of British diplomacy after the Seven Year's War and to French foreign policy during the reign of Louis XV. He gauges the British reaction to the Revolution and traces the development of an independent American diplomacy. He explains the French offer of secret aid to the Americans early in the conflict, and the Revolution's less than

overwhelming impact in Europe. In his discourse on the development of the Franco-American Alliance, he describes the first American diplomatic mission, reveals how those diplomats were undermined by secret orders, and how they failed in their attempts to add to the fledgling country's alliances in Europe. After he summarizes the outbreak of British-American hostilities, he studies the coalitions that develop or that were in place opposing Great Britain. He examines the Franco-Spanish Alliance and the reluctance of the Spanish crown to support the American rebels. As the military situation continued to deteriorate in 1781, revolts broke out in the Continental Army, and the American currency system collapsed, he describes how the American consensus disintegrated, and the American war effort reached a low point. He explains how Britain was also unsuccessful in finding allies and why Lord North resigned in 1782. He further examines how Russian diplomacy and the "League of Armed Neutrality" influenced the European balance of power diplomacy. In the final section, Dull details the efforts by the new head of His Majesty's government, the marquis of Rockingham, to begin peace negotiations. The secretary of state for foreign affairs, Charles James Fox, favored quick resolution of the matter, including immediate recognition of independence, to turn Britain's head toward more pressing storm clouds on the European horizon. A liberal peace settlement was proposed in order to foster future good will and commercial ties with the Americans. The British were anxious for peace. As Dull states, "Shelburne's' generous treatment of America may also have been partly conditioned by the expectation that America would continue to be economically dependent on Great Britain, in which case the granting of generous boundaries to her would do Britain no economic harm."<sup>7</sup>Dull begins to draw to a close by explaining the effect the settlement would have on the balance of power in Europe, and how the preliminary peace agreement with Britain was signed by the Americans, French, Spaniards, and on behalf of the Dutch. He contends that the American peace treaty with the British was a de facto betrayal of the Franco-American Alliance. He also goes into the war's effects on the peripheral players such as Russia, Turkey, Prussia, and Austria and the other Hapsburg dominions. In his summary, he ironically concludes that the European state that benefited most from the Revolutionary war was Britain; the results were just the opposite for the French - their apparent victory was actually a defeat.<sup>8</sup> Britain was rejuvenated, her economy was revived, and her navy was rebuilt as a result of the war. American trade continued to be predominantly with Britain, Britain's power and economic vitality improved, and Britain had no further reason to cooperate with France in the continental balance of power strategy. The resulting threat of French bankruptcy forced Louis XVI to convene the French parliament for the first time in 175 years. Dull contends that the American Revolution spelled the beginning of the end for the French monarchy, planting the seeds for her own revolution. Notes 1. Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985), xi. 2. *Ibid.*, xi. 3. *Ibid.*, 4. 4. *Ibid.*, 3, 10. 5. *Ibid.*, 6. 6. *Ibid.*, 13. 7. *Ibid.*, 145. 8. *Ibid.*, 161. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A Decent Summary By A Customer While Dull's book provides a reasonable summary of the diplomatic events surrounding the American Revolution, it fails to provide an analytic framework for the events it describes. I was often left asking the question, "so what?" while reading this book. A more thorough explanation of how diplomatic events interacted with domestic politics and ideologies in the American colonies would have made this book much more valuable. *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* is essentially a college textbook on late 18th century diplomacy and its relation to the American war for independence. Despite its failing as an analytic work, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* nevertheless provides a reasonably well-written description of diplomatic events and serves as a stark reminder that the American Revolution was conducted on the periphery of a European world.

This introduction to the diplomacy of the American Revolution presents a fresh, realistic, and balanced portrait of revolutionary diplomats and diplomacy.

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