

CASE

You're the French King Louis XVI. It's early 1778, right after the American victory at Saratoga. Opp/choice: sign a formal treaty of alliance with the Americans, declare war on Britain, and intervene in the war? Or, maintain the status quo of low-level smuggling? (Intervention is now or never. "Intervene later" is not an option.)

INTERVENE

Observation: French help means a lot to the Americans. They desperately need a strong navy to tie down the British navy, or else they can't win. With us, victory is almost assured.

1. Geostrategic benefits

a. Perfect opportunity to strike Britain, which must be done sooner or later. Spain and the Netherlands will pile on.

b. Strengthen France (by acquiring colonies, expanding our empire)

c. Weaken Britain, our cold war-style enemy

(i) in short term, by destroying materiel

(ii) in medium term, by removing colonies

(iii) in long term, by splitting up Britain from its colonies. 40% of population now supports France instead of Britain – they'll be grateful to us

2. Economic benefits

a. Permanently end British naval blockade that's strangling French shipping

b. Colonies

(i) give resources

(ii) provide a market for French goods, strengthening French industry.

(iii) fits nicely with our policies of mercantilism

c. Trade with America will be opened up, huge market, help French industry and hurt our competitor Britain's industry

DON'T INTERVENE

1. Unclear benefits

a. Americans will probably lose

(i) At Saratoga they got lucky, they've been getting their asses handed to them, 100% loss record in coastal areas

(ii) Can't win: British control the seas

b. French military can't help the Americans win

(i) British navy is greater than ours, they'll continue to dominate NYC and elsewhere

c. Even if the Americans somehow do win, they'll probably still favor the British over us due to cultural ties

2. Clear costs

a. Money! This will cost a lot. Huge debt payments already.

(i) Risk of default, which would be terrible, our credit would be ruined

b. Will require us to raise taxes, hurting the economy

c. Will crowd out other spending priorities

(i) Infrastructure improvements, badly needed. Roads, canals, etc. Biggest reason why Britain is ahead of us in industrializing.

(ii) Military spending – our long-term strategic goal should be to take over continental Europe with our badass army, which is the best way to defeat Britain

(iii) On your lavish palaces. You're a vain French king, you need your bling.

3. Your personal safety... safety to the French regime

- It's unstable, some "advisors" foresee a possible revolution in only a few years

- Will be made more unstable by having to raise food taxes, increasing both resentment and the risk of famine

- Will also be made more unstable by signing a formal treaty of alliance with a radical democratic group or revolutionaries, legitimizing them

- Your personal safety is at risk, and you're a weak-kneed coward. You're a cowardly French monarch, read your Plutarch.