A spaniard in the Capitol: Bernardo de Gálvez and Spain's support for U.S. Independence

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1. Recognition of Spain's importance in the US War of Independence

"Some say that we would not have been an independent country without you"

Words spoken by Joe Biden, President of the United States, during an official visit to Spain on June 28, 2022

Whereas Bernardo de Gálvez played an integral role in the Revolutionary War and helped secure the independence of the United States: Now, therefore, be it:

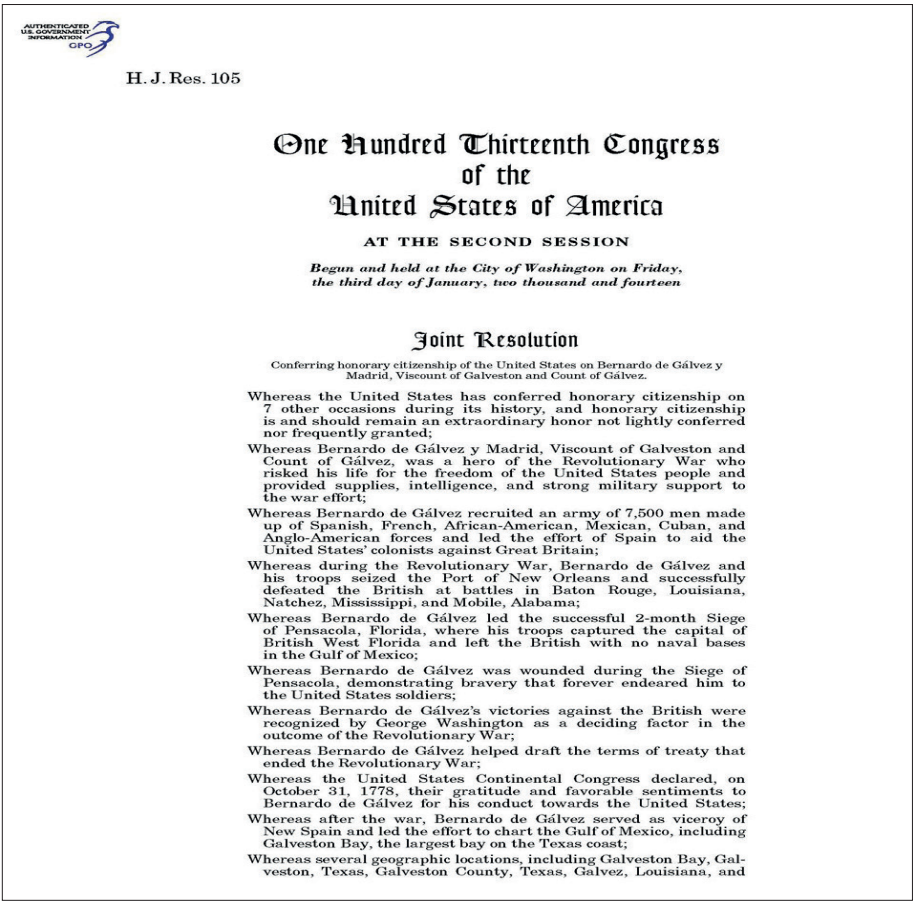
Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That Bernardode Gálvez y Madrid, Viscount of Galveston and Count of Gálvez, is proclaimed posthumously to be an honorary citizen of the United States.

Joint Resolution
Conferring honorary citizenship of the United States on Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid, Viscount of Galveston and Count of Gálvez.
Washington, January 3, 2014

I would like to begin this speech by pointing out a fact that I consider to be of great interest: in the history of the United States, eight people have received the distinction of honorary citizenship. Among them are people of great importance such as Winston Churchill, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Raoul Wallemberg[1]. Among the eighth of them, nominated at the proposal of the U.S. Congress and proclaimed by President Obama in 2014, there was the Spanish soldier and statesman, Bernardo de Gálvez. This recognition settled a debt that had remained outstanding since the proclamation of independence of the United States of America. Two other military figures, considered heroes of the American Revolution, had received the same distinction: the Marquis of Lafayette (in 2002) and the Polish Kazimierz Pułaski (in 2009). I believe that the name Lafayette is well known, both

1 Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Holocaust.

for his participation in the American War of Independence and for his leading role in the French Revolution. In France, he is widely recognized, and his name can be found on monuments, shopping malls...



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One Hundred Thirteenth Congress
of the
United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

Begun and held at the City of Washington on Friday, the third day of January, two thousand and fourteen

Joint Resolution

Conferring honorary citizenship of the United States on Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid, Viscount of Galveston and Count of Gálvez.

Whereas the United States has conferred honorary citizenship on 7 other occasions during its history, and honorary citizenship is and should remain an extraordinary honor not lightly conferred nor frequently granted;

Whereas Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid, Viscount of Galveston and Count of Gálvez, was a hero of the Revolutionary War who risked his life for the freedom of the United States people and provided supplies, intelligence, and strong military support to the war effort;

Whereas Bernardo de Gálvez recruited an army of 7,500 men made up of Spanish, French, African-American, Mexican, Cuban, and Anglo-American forces and led the effort of Spain to aid the United States' colonists against Great Britain;

Whereas during the Revolutionary War, Bernardo de Gálvez and his troops seized the Port of New Orleans and successfully defeated the British at battles in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Natchez, Mississippi, and Mobile, Alabama;

Whereas Bernardo de Gálvez led the successful 2-month Siege of Pensacola, Florida, where his troops captured the capital of British West Florida and left the British with no naval bases in the Gulf of Mexico;

Whereas Bernardo de Gálvez was wounded during the Siege of Pensacola, demonstrating bravery that forever endeared him to the United States soldiers;

Whereas Bernardo de Gálvez's victories against the British were recognized by George Washington as a deciding factor in the outcome of the Revolutionary War;

Whereas Bernardo de Gálvez helped draft the terms of treaty that ended the Revolutionary War;

Whereas the United States Continental Congress declared, on October 31, 1778, their gratitude and favorable sentiments to Bernardo de Gálvez for his conduct towards the United States;

Whereas after the war, Bernardo de Gálvez served as viceroy of New Spain and led the effort to chart the Gulf of Mexico, including Galveston Bay, the largest bay on the Texas coast;

Whereas several geographic locations, including Galveston Bay, Galveston, Texas, Galveston County, Texas, Galvez, Louisiana, and

And what is the recognition of Bernardo de Gálvez in Spain, his native land, and in the United States? Unfortunately, in a country like Spain, which prefers tragedy to epic tales, Gálvez has gone almost unnoticed by the general public and in history books. Fortunately, the initiative carried out for years by various institutions has succeeded in giving this figure the recognition he deserves, both in Spain and in the United States. The association has promoted the placement of a portrait of the military man in the United States Senate. This action was achieved in 2014,

but it was in response to an agreement by the US Congress dated May 9, 1783. At that time, Secretary of State John Jay wrote to Oliver Pollock conveying the approval of the U.S. Congress for Bernardo de Gálvez's portrait to be displayed in 'the President's House, in consideration of the early and deep friendship that such a distinguished gentleman showed to these United States'. This recognized his heroic role in decisive battles for independence, such as Mobile and Pensacola.

Another significant fact is the announcement by the U.S. Navy that one of its next-generation frigates will be named *USS Gálvez*. In his remarks announcing this decision, the Secretary of the Navy highlighted the Spanish statesman, noting that 'Gálvez was not just a supporter from afar: his actions directly influenced the course of the war and helped secure American independence.'

Without a doubt, all of these facts represent the interest that the figure of this native of Málaga has sparked in recent years, both in Spain and in the United States

And now, as the 250th anniversary of the United States' declaration of independence and the beginning of its struggle against England approaches, it seems a particularly fitting moment to highlight the many other men who helped support the cause of the Thirteen Colonies. Because Gálvez, then governor of Louisiana, did not act alone or on his own initiative. His actions reflected the intentions of the Spanish monarchy. In other words, they were part of what became a state-driven enterprise under the reign of Charles III.

Inauguration of Bernardo de Gálvez´s portrait in the Capitol.

This moment in history calls for recognizing the names of other Spaniards who played a decisive role in the birth of the United States. One of them, Luis de Unzaga, is even credited with creating the name of the new country. This is inferred from a letter from Washington to Colonel Joseph Reed dated November 30, 1776, just a few months after the Declaration of Independence.

> I have just received a most flattering letter from Don Louis Venzaga [Luis de Unzaga y Amézaga], Governor of New Orleans –He gives me the title of General of the United States of America, which is a tolerable step towards declaring himself our ally in positive terms– the substance is that He is sensible of the vast advantages which must result from the separation to his Master and Nation[2] .

Throughout this presentation, some of Spain's most significant actions in the war will be highlighted, but it is worth mentioning now a few figures who were at least as important as the native of Málaga, Bernardo de Gálvez.

Carlos III, rey de España. Andrés de la Calleja, ca. 1770. Museo Naval

2 'George Washington to Colonel Joseph Reed, November 30, 1776', Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-07-02-0171. [Original source: The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 7, October 21, 1776–January 5, 1777, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, pp. 237–239.]

First, there is Charles III, who, although he did not formally declare war on England until June 21, 1779, long before that declaration he was already authorizing actions in support of the American rebels, always under the guise of neutrality.

A key role in diplomacy and the delicate negotiations with France and England was played by the Count of Aranda, who was then Spain's ambassador to the French court. His negotiation skills, management of spies, and ambiguous ways of expressing Spain's position in the war allowed him to "concede without yielding" on multiple occasions. From the very beginning of the war, it was Aranda who met with the American Congress's commissioners traveling to Europe to secure aid for the cause of independence.

There are numerous letters and documents that confirm Aranda's relationship with Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee before Spain formally entered the war. However, prior to 1779, he made it a condition for securing "unofficial" aid from Spain that all negotiations take place in Paris. This was done to avoid friction with England in case King George discovered that the Spanish court was meeting with representatives of the Thirteen Colonies –a move that would have amounted to Spain's premature recognition of the rebel nation.

Floridablanca, Secretary of State, also played a role as Ambassador Aranda's interlocutor, relaying news from Paris to the king. And this news was very important. It was a matter of finding out the decisions taken –or to be taken– by Louis XVI, as well as the steps taken by the American rebels and the actions being carried out by the British court to quell the colonists' rebellion.

In the correspondence between the king and these two politicians, we discover the keys to Spain's actions in the multiple scenarios of this war. And the political decisions at the highest level –more or less clear until the declaration of war– were the driving force behind other men from various fields getting involved in supporting the colonists: first in a covert manner, then in a more visible way from 1779 onwards. Military personnel, diplomats, spies, merchants... all contributed to facilitating the actions of the inhabitants of the Thirteen Colonies.

We want to highlight the actions of two military figures, in this case from the Royal Spanish Navy: Luis de Córdova y Córdova and José Solano y Bote. The latter was granted the title Marquis of Socorro precisely for his support of Gálvez's troops in the capture of Pensacola and the defense of Spanish territories in the Gulf of Mexico. In fact, the joint Spanish-French fleet, through its diversionary maneuvers and the splitting of the Royal Navy, was absolutely essential to the final outcome of the conflict.

One aspect without which victory would have been unthinkable was the financial one. Material aid was continuously sent to the colonists from the Spanish territories in the Americas –especially Cuba and Louisiana– as well as from the Iberian Peninsula. Whether in the form of loans or donations, ships arrived in the North loaded with funds, fabrics, uniforms, weapons, and all kinds of supplies that could support the American cause. Two key figures in this effort were Diego Gardoqui and Juan de Miralles. Both would receive recognition from the United States for their actions during the war. Gardoqui became Spain's first ambassador to the United States, and Miralles became a close friend of Washington, who, upon Miralles' death, requested that he be given a state funeral.

Finally, the fundamental weapon that cannot be lacking in a war is espionage. Aranda knew how to weave an important network of spies in England, France itself, and the territories that both kingdoms retained in America. And it is at this point that we must highlight a key figure, Francisco de Saavedra. He was a military man, politician, spy, and –very importantly– a great friend of Bernardo de Gálvez, with whom he shared a vision of what Spain should do in the conflict and how to carry it out.

After this well-deserved recognition of the people who played leading roles throughout the War of Independence, and aware that we have left out many others, let us now examine the reasons for Spain's entry into the war, the strategy that was implemented, and the consequences resulting from the signing of the peace treaties.

2. Was this war in the interests of the Spanish crown?

Before beginning with Spain's official involvement and support for the rebels starting in June 1779, it is necessary to establish a context that helps us understand the motivations behind a decision that at the time generated much uncertainty.

A new geopolitical reality

Let us recall that the 18th century began with the War of Spanish Succession. Louis XIV was determined at all costs that his grandson, Philip of Anjou, succeed Charles II, who had died without heirs. This would provide both countries with an alliance based on the Bourbon family ties on either side of the Pyrenees. Opposing

the Bourbon candidate was Archduke Charles of Habsburg, who claimed his legitimacy based on dynastic rights. The conflict had multiple theaters and various contenders, and it took on an international character when England entered the war in support of the Austrian candidate.

It is well known how the war ended: Philip V ultimately ascended to the Spanish throne, but Spain paid a price –Gibraltar and Menorca had to be ceded to the British, who had occupied these territories during the conflict. The need to reverse this situation was a constant in Spanish policy throughout the 18th century.

As the French king had anticipated, once Philip V was firmly established on the throne, the alliance between France and Spain gradually solidified through the signing of the Family Compacts. From the perspective of international relations, the Franco-Spanish alliance would have as its permanent adversary another alliance: the Anglo-Portuguese one. Spanish policy throughout the 18th century would operate within this framework.

Let us remember that this was the era of the great empires. The four countries mentioned above had territories in America, Africa, and Asia. Only a sound strategy and the maintenance of armies and navies could ensure the preservation of these interests. Very briefly, let us consider the two conflicts that preceded the War of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies, which help explain Spain's stance in this conflict.

First, the War of the Austrian Succession (1739-1748), better known in Spain as the *Guerra de la Oreja de Jenkins,* which arose from an incident between a Spanish and an English ship in Florida. In reality, the incident itself was of little importance. The English were frustrated by the obstacles Spain imposed on trade with its American territories, and Captain Jenkins' affair provided a pretext to initiate a confrontation that was already anticipated between Spain and England. The conflict escalated as other countries joined for various reasons, including the War of the Austrian Succession. Ultimately, the war ended with little change in territorial distribution but weakened the economic and military strength of countries that had not yet fully recovered from the War of Spanish Succession.

More significant and damaging to the coffers and armies of all parties involved was the outbreak of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), considered by some as the 'first world war' in history due to its multiple theaters and the large number of participants.

European Empires in the Seven Years' War

What began as a confrontation between France and England eventually drew in Spain, which had signed the Second Family Compact. Once again, the theaters of conflict were diverse, resulting in a dispersion of forces. The outcome for Spain was disastrous. France lost its territories in North America (present-day Canada) to England, which took control. Additionally, England seized Spanish Florida, a strategic location due to its position on the Gulf of Mexico. Finally, France, in gratitude for Spain's support, ceded Louisiana to Charles III –a gift that was long considered 'poisoned.' After all, these territories west of Florida, though valuable due to their location along the Mississippi, were sparsely populated lands inhabited by Native Americans and organized only by French settler families. The hostility with which these settlers had to accept the change of sovereignty did not help matters– they were no longer subjects of the King of France but became subjects of the Spanish crown.

It should be noted that the three countries, already economically weakened by previous conflicts, found themselves in a dire situation in terms of resources to face the final third of the century. In the case of Great Britain, the decision was

made to raise taxes on its colonies, which led to growing discontent among the inhabitants of the Thirteen Colonies and ultimately resulted in the break with the metropolis and the outbreak of the War of Independence. The protests were further fueled by revolutionary texts such as those by Thomas Paine and by writings from some French Enlightenment thinkers.

"Although discontent was growing, not all colonists agreed with a break from Britain: many preferred to negotiate with the London Parliament before engaging in a war that was expected to be harsh and offered little chance of victory, unless they could count on the support of foreign powers. This made the War of Independence also a kind of civil conflict: rebels versus loyalists. The separatist movement gradually gained strength and was channeled through the Continental Congresses in Philadelphia, which brought together representatives from each colony and were held in 1774, 1775, and 1776. At the last of these congresses, the decision to break away prevailed, declaring independence from England. In any case, some clashes had already occurred between loyalist troops and rebel groups.

Thus, the Continental Army was born, under the command of George Washington. His troops were highly determined but poorly trained. He faced the challenge of transforming the popular militias into a real army. This difficulty was compounded by the lack of a navy. The training of the troops was achieved thanks to the work of the Prussian general von Steuben, who, through the King of France, joined the Continental Army, putting his expertise at the service of the rebels and instructing them in the art of warfare.

The rebels, aware of their weakness, requested help from France and Spain in June 1776. Why did the two countries take so long to become officially involved in the war, with France entering in 1778 and Spain in 1779?

The two monarchies of the House of Bourbon considered what would be the most convenient position for their interests. The reality, beyond a more or less idealistic view, is that supporting rebels against the monarchy was not to the liking of the two absolutist kings. In fact, many other factors came into play that would influence the decisions made by the monarchs. Let us recall the successive defeats against England in previous decades, and the desire to seize an opportunity to humiliate their rival.

It is necessary to take into account the global reality, beyond the rebellion of the British colonists, in order to understand the involvement of France and Spain in the conflict. In fact, their final decision to declare war on England was due to geopolitical reasons that went beyond the colonists' desire for independence.

The idea circulating in the Spanish and French courts was to take advantage of England being embroiled in the American conflict, in order to weaken the British by forcing them to spread their resources across multiple fronts. In Spain's case, there remained the sore points of Gibraltar, Menorca, and Florida –territories lost over the course of the century. Additionally, it was clear that as long as the British held Jamaica, the Spanish territories in the region would not be secure. Thus, another objective of Spain was to expel the British from the island to ensure full sovereignty over the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico.

Despite these interests, there were other factors weighing on the mind of King Charles III and his advisors. Besides the potential inconsistency of supporting an anti-monarchical movement, there was the danger that such a movement could be replicated in Spain's American territories.

In international politics, deception and secret agreements have always been constant. We know that, despite the official pacts, both France and Spain explored the possibility of forging secret bilateral alliances with King George III of England. France presented itself to England as a potential mediator in the conflict, without informing Spain (although nothing escaped Aranda, thanks to the network of spies he was building in Paris). At the same time, Spain considered the option of supporting England against the rebels in exchange for regaining Gibraltar, and negotiations were initiated on these terms, all of which ultimately failed. As we can see, the game of strategy in international relations has long been played on a very unstable board.

Regarding the uncertain future of the entire American continent: what objectives would the independent northern territories pursue once they were established as a nation? The population of the Thirteen Colonies was small at first, but it kept growing, which would inevitably lead them to expand westward. And would they not also look south, toward the Viceroyalty of New Spain? Supporting the colonists thus became a double-edged sword. Some politicians of the time tried to convince themselves that the United States, in exchange for Spain's support, would stay out of Spain's interests on the continent –a mistaken and dangerous assumption.

As Manuel Olmedo has already pointed out, Spain had to be very cautious. If it confronted the British openly, it could lose a great deal, given the strength of the English navy and the vast extent of its own territories. For this reason, it was absolutely necessary to secure French support for Spanish interests.

After Charles III's negotiations to seal a secret pact with England –which would have allowed him to recover Gibraltar– failed, the only course that seemed inevitable was war. However, as mentioned, Spain did not officially enter the conflict

until the formal declaration of war against England on June 21, 1779. All diplomatic resources had been exhausted since the rebels rose up in July 1776. Spanish-British talks had deteriorated to the point of open hostility. On April 3, 1779, Floridablanca sent an ultimatum to London demanding that it accept Spain's mediation in the conflict with the colonists. With no response forthcoming, a secret treaty was signed on April 12, 1779, in Aranjuez with the French ambassador, under which, if Great Britain refused Spanish mediation, His Catholic Majesty would join forces with the Most Christian King and declare war on London. The ministers of both powers would determine the appropriate moment for Spain to enter the war, so as not to disrupt ongoing operations (let us recall that France had declared support for the Thirteen Colonies in February 1778)[3]. The joint strategy included planning an invasion of England. Finally, the treaty also reiterated certain articles of the Family Compact that were to be scrupulously observed.

This was the apparent reality of Spain's stance: neutrality until the summer of 1779. However, the Crown had already been secretly supporting the colonists for years, without a formal declaration of war against the British. Let us examine how this 'clandestine' support took place.

3. Unofficial support for the independence movement

In the General Archive of the Indies, there is a document dated May 22, 1776, in which the Virginia Convention expressly requested Spanish collaboration in the cause of independence. The letter, written from Williamsburg, was addressed to the Spanish government through the then governor of Louisiana, Luis de Unzaga. Similar letters were sent to the French government. As noted, both France and Spain were interested in supporting the American revolution because it represented a clear opportunity to weaken England. At the same time, however, prudence led them to adopt an initial stance of supposed neutrality, trying to avoid a conflict with an uncertain outcome.

The reality was that both nations became involved by providing money, military supplies, medicines, and more. In addition, Spain supported the colonists from its American territories by offering refuge to their ships, which led to repeated protests from the British.

3 This support was only decided upon when the continental victory at Saratoga (October 1777) made it possible to believe that the Thirteen Colonies could achieve their independence.

At first, the English were confident of their victory over the rebels and believed that 1777 would be decisive in quelling the uprising. However, things did not unfold that way. After the victory at Saratoga, which thwarted a strategic British maneuver, Great Britain realized that crushing the rebellion would not be as quick or as certain as some had thought. But the worst was yet to come, occurring when France first, and then Spain, decided to intervene in the conflict.

Since the Virginia Convention requested support from the French and Spanish crowns, a plan was put in place to indirectly favor the interests of the colonists. We can highlight the actions of men such as Juan de Miralles, Diego Gardoqui, and Francisco de Saavedra in these early stages. Of course, although these were private actions, they had the backing and support of the crown at all times.

When the first revolutionary movements began, Governor Unzaga received secret instructions from King Charles III urging him to maintain an appearance of neutrality, while favoring the rebel colonists as much as possible. The governor understood, as did the king, that if the English won this war, the next targets would be Cuba (Havana had already suffered a previous British occupation), Mexico, and Central America. The control of the Gulf of Mexico was at stake, serving as a gateway to the rest of Spanish America.

Unzaga followed the instructions of his king, implementing various initiatives while always trying to maintain the appearance of neutrality. One example of this support is that the port of New Orleans frequently served as a refuge for rebel ships pursued by the Royal Navy, maintaining a delicate balance in the face of British protests.

In 1776, the main merchant of New Orleans was Oliver Pollock, born in Ireland and exiled to America during the religious and political persecutions carried out by England. He would become one of the key figures in the American cause. After beginning his commercial activity in Philadelphia and Havana, he eventually settled in New Orleans, which became the center of his operations. Pollock enjoyed the protection of the governors of Louisiana, turning his profession into one of the main channels for Spain's aid to the colonists. He maintained his trading network from New Orleans to St. Louis, using the Mississippi River as a route. Control of the river was one of the most contentious issues both in the war against England and later in Spain's relations with the United States, as it ensured a natural outlet from the interior of the continent to the Gulf of Mexico.

In the same vein, Governor Unzaga created a sham company in March 1775, *Roderique Hortalez & Co.*, ostensibly representing the interests of Basque financiers,

notably Diego Gardoqui. The company established offices in Bilbao and Cádiz with the aim of providing military supplies and financial aid to the colonies, which would be routed through New Orleans. This was entirely a private venture, but it was carried out at all times with the approval of the Crown. Gardoqui's role was so significant that, at George Washington's inauguration as the first president of the United States on April 20, 1789, the president had the Spanish diplomat stand by his side during the official parade. Moreover, Gardoqui would go on to become the first ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain to the United States of America.

Anonymous portrait of Diego Gardoqui.

Meanwhile, the Spanish government was also taking steps to support the rebels unofficially. On June 17, 1776, the Marquis of Grimaldi, then Secretary of State, sent the Count of Aranda 25,000 pesos to be delivered to the rebels in Philadelphia so that they could purchase military supplies, which were in short supply.

The year 1777 brought internal changes in Spanish politics. In the Americas, Bernardo de Gálvez succeeded Luis de Unzaga as governor of Louisiana. Meanwhile, on the Iberian Peninsula, Floridablanca replaced the Marqués de Grimaldi as Minister of State, which helped facilitate good communication with the Count of Aranda.

Minister Floridablanca understood that a way to weaken England without provoking a direct war was to confront its ally Portugal, which would reduce support for the British army. For years, Portugal and Spain had been in dispute over territories along the Río de la Plata. Taking advantage of the fact that England had its forces focused on the colonial revolution and could not support Portugal, an army was sent from Buenos Aires to occupy Colonia del Sacramento, in present-day Uruguay, bringing it back under Spanish control. Floridablanca's strategy worked: not only did Spain regain a territory previously ceded to the Portuguese crown in earlier agreements, but it also ensured that Portuguese troops could not assist the British.

Bernardo de Gálvez, from New Orleans, and in line with his predecessor Unzaga, gave priority to northern issues, establishing a spy network in the territory of the Thirteen Colonies. He also continued to protect merchant ships and privateers belonging to the revolutionaries that anchored in the port of New Orleans. At the same time, large sums of money continued to flow from Spain as credit to Washington's army. Oliver Pollock was once again responsible for these deliveries.

In 1777, representatives of the Continental Congress traveled to Paris. There, they discussed with Ambassador Aranda the possible official involvement of Spain in the war in support of the rebels. The Count of Aranda, guided by the prudence that prevailed in Spain at the time and intent on delaying a conflict with the British, stalled them. Then, one of the commissioners, Arthur Lee, decided to go to Spain against Aranda's advice, who, although not in favor, provided him with a letter of introduction for the Secretary of State. News of Lee's arrival in Spain was received with apprehension at the court. Grimaldi was sent by the new Secretary of State, Floridablanca, to meet with Lee in Burgos. During that meeting, which was kept secret from the British, Diego Gardoqui acted as interpreter. Despite Lee's insistence on traveling to Madrid to meet with Floridablanca or the king, he was compelled to return to Paris, where he continued negotiations with the Count of Aranda. Still, before leaving Spain, Lee received good news: the king pledged to provide the North American cause with aid amounting to 12,500 pesos.

Meanwhile, Gardoqui continued organizing shipments for the rebels with the help of the public treasury. After receiving 70,000 pesos, he sent six ships with holds full of military supplies. This shipment was decisive, in Franklin's words, for achieving victory at Saratoga on October 17, 1777. Obviously, all this aid from the Spanish Crown remained clandestine as far as England was concerned, although George III had a fairly clear understanding of Spain and France's true intentions.

Finally, let us devote a few lines to another key figure in Spain's support of the War of Independence: Juan de Miralles Trayllon. He was chosen by the Captain General of Cuba, Diego Navarro, to act as a spy and gather intelligence in the English colonies, using his commercial enterprises as cover. The Secretaries of State (Floridablanca) and of the Indies (José de Gálvez) tasked him with contacting the Continental Congress and, in particular, speaking with General George Washington, this time with the explicit goal of assessing the possibilities of Spain entering the war on behalf of the colonists and the potential consequences of such support.

Miralles' social skills soon brought him into contact with the highest circles of the independence movement –so much so that he became one of George Washington's close friends. To facilitate this connection, and to deliver the letter of introduction signed by Navarro in Cuba, Miralles organized a dinner in Philadelphia attended by Washington and other prominent members of Pennsylvania society. Among the guests was Von Steuben, the brilliant Prussian strategist who trained the Continental Army. Miralles presented himself to Washington as the unofficial royal commissioner to the Continental Congress. His role was to channel the aid that Spain was providing to the rebels. However, not content with acting merely as an intermediary, he also made significant personal contributions to the cause of independence.

The affection between Miralles and the American general grew to such an extent that the Spaniard fully supported Washington's cause, and the general's appreciation was evident in the numerous meetings and invitations extended to him. A few years later, Miralles died while staying at Washington's private residence in 1780. The future president of the United States organized a state funeral for his friend, recognizing the invaluable support he had provided throughout the war.

4. The declaration of war on England

Let us return to the ultimatum that Floridablanca sent to the British in April 1779. By that time, it had become clear that England would not accept any mediation from Spain, especially if the price was the surrender of Gibraltar. In this context, on April 12, the secret Treaty of Aranjuez was signed, once again formalizing the Spanish-French alliance against Great Britain. This secret agreement between the two Bourbon monarchies contained a series of clauses which, as we shall see later, were not always honored.

Article 1 of the treaty was worded as follows:

> His Catholic Majesty declares that if, in response to the latest explanations and means of pacification proposed to the court of London by special courier dispatched on April 3 of this year, the latter does not accept them in terms that will bring about immediate pacification, he will enter into war with the king and crown of England and will make common cause with His Most Christian Majesty, publishing the declaration, and commencing hostilities at the time and in the manner already agreed upon by the said sovereigns, so that the operations may not be thwarted and may be effective.

This text was the preliminary step toward the declaration of war against Great Britain, signed on June 21, 1779. It is interesting to note that the document made no explicit recognition of the independence of the United States. The initial objective was to fight against the English, who had been attacking Spanish interests for months, as reflected in a Royal Order dated July 8 addressed to the Spanish authorities in the Indies:

> The Court of London, after having wasted time with studied promises and delays, has refused (sic) to accept the fair terms proposed, thereby revealing the ambitious spirit that dominates it. Its true object has been to lull Spain to sleep in the shadow of negotiations, to keep the maritime forces of the august House of Bourbon disunited, and to allow time for its plan to mature to repair the losses it has suffered in its establishments by usurping some of my American domains.
>
> (...) Lately, they have even gone so far as to usurp my sovereignty in the province of Darien, with the Governor of Jamaica authorizing a rebellious Indian with a Captain General's commission in those parts and seizing the Spanish possessions in the Bay of Honduras...

This text was the preliminary step toward the declaration of war against Great Britain, signed on June 21, 1779. It is interesting to note that there was no explicit recognition of the independence of the United States in this document. The initial aim was to fight against the English, who had been attacking Spain's interests for months, as reflected in a Royal Order dated July 8 addressed to the Spanish authorities in the Indies:

> Despite my natural inclination to preserve the invaluable gift of peace, I have found myself in the difficult and sensitive position of having to order the withdrawal of my ambassador from the Court of London and to sever all communication, trade, and commerce between my subjects and those of the British King by my Royal Decree of June 21st[4].

4 Royal Decree of His Majesty, stating the just reasons for his Royal Resolution of June 21 of this year, authorizing his American vassals to retaliate and take revenge by sea and land against the subjects of the King of Great Britain. July 8, 1779.

From that moment on, no longer needing to feign false neutrality, Spain directed all its military efforts –including the financial support we have already mentioned– toward attacking England's interests, focusing on four key theaters to achieve its real objectives: Menorca, Gibraltar, the Caribbean, and the English Channel. These objectives could only be accomplished with French support.

War at sea

Great Britain remained the greatest maritime power, but if Spain and France combined their naval forces, their capacity would surpass that of the British. On February 7, 1779, the Official List of Warships was sent to Paris so that the ally could become aware of Spain's forces, specifying their deployment. Spain had 54 ships of the line, 26 frigates, and a considerable number of troops ready for the war that was beginning, as communicated to the French government by the Count of Aranda.

The problem for the British was no longer limited to America. The war was set to expand across multiple theaters. First, the English Channel, where the threat of a Franco-Spanish invasion was growing ever closer. In the Atlantic, the aim was to cut supply routes by intercepting or capturing British convoys—one of the essential actions in the war. From the French perspective, Great Britain had to defend its possessions in India and the Bay of Bengal. Finally, Spain's main objective: the recovery of Menorca and Gibraltar. The theaters of the Seven Years' War were repeating, but this time the tables had turned.

This already provides us with a fundamental piece of information: the war was mainly maritime. As Rodríguez Garat has pointed out,

> 'another factor that shaped the final outcome was the maritime nature of the war, which should not be overshadowed by the fame of the battles of Saratoga, Yorktown, or Pensacola, even though these engagements decided the conflict in North America. In reality, the sea was the center of gravity of the belligerents' military effort. Thus, while in the major land actions mentioned above the armies in combat rarely exceeded 10,000 men per side, the crews of the enormous combined fleet that entered the English Channel in 1779 numbered close to 50,000 men'.[5]

The Franco-Spanish fleet, whose target was England, reached the English Channel in August 1779 under the command of the French Admiral D'Orvilliers. At the head of the Spanish fleet was Luis de Córdova, nicknamed 'the Old Man' because

5 Rodríguez Garat, J (2022), p. 106.

he was already 73 years old when this campaign took place. The objective was to transport French troops to the island as a bargaining tool. However, a lack of coordination between the French and Spanish officers, along with indecision at critical moments, led to the failure of this operation. Despite not achieving the goal of landing troops in England, the action was considered beneficial to the interests of Spain and France because of the defensive measures it forced England to organize. In fact, Charles III awarded Córdova the Grand Cross of his Order. The presence of this formidable fleet caused panic in London, forced British ships to seek shelter in their ports, and compelled the English to maintain a fleet at home to prevent any possible attack, diverting ships from America and other British territories at risk –all this without actually engaging in combat.

On two more occasions, during the summers of 1781 and 1782, the fleet returned to the Channel, this time under the command of Luis de Córdova. The goal was no longer to invade, but to harass and disrupt maritime communications, keeping the Royal Navy in a constant state of defense. This control of the sea by the combined fleet facilitated decisive operations in other theaters of the war. In fact, to a large extent, the decisive battle of Yorktown (1781) on American soil was made possible by the British defeat at Chesapeake Bay due to a lack of naval strength. The same can be said of the capture of Menorca, where British forces had no naval support to defend the island.

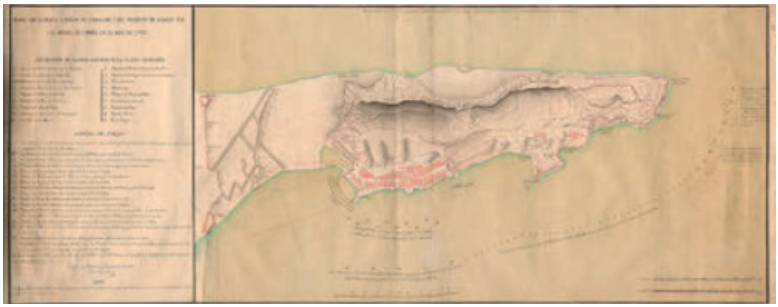
Luis de Córdova's Squadron (Naval Museum of Madrid)

Indeed, Great Britain waged a more defensive war, avoiding the initiative and trying to protect its many vulnerable points. In contrast, the Franco-Spanish fleet took the initiative on multiple fronts: attempting to invade England, laying siege to Gibraltar, occupying Menorca, and, finally, playing an essential role in supplying North America and transporting troops.

As has been customary throughout the history of naval warfare, the practice of privateering by all combatants was highly significant. In the 18th century, four regulations on privateering were issued by the Spanish Crown. The last of these, published shortly after the declaration of war, appeared on July 1, 1779. The aim was to encourage privateering activity, both by the Royal Navy and by private shipowners, as a way to weaken the enemy and gain economic benefits during the war.

As we have already noted, the combined naval forces operated in other theaters as well. One of these was the Americas, where José Solano y Bote's fleet was decisive in supporting Gálvez's operations. His fleet arrived in the Caribbean in June 1780, commanding the warships that escorted a convoy of more than one hundred vessels carrying all kinds of supplies necessary to reinforce the Spanish garrisons. This fleet faced multiple setbacks, including an outbreak of plague and the region's hurricanes. Although they did not achieve one of their objectives –Jamaica– they were crucial in supporting Gálvez's operations in Pensacola, both as a means of transporting troops and as a blockade to prevent British ships from aiding their compatriots. Solano y Bote was awarded the title of Marquis of Socorro in recognition of this action.

It becomes clear, therefore, that despite Spanish successes, the British Royal Navy, in its defensive position, failed to cut off Spanish traffic between America and Spain. Although the land forces were the main actors in the operations at Pensacola and Menorca, the victories were ultimately ensured by naval control of the maritime routes.



Plano de la plaza i peñón de Gibraltar i del proiecto de ataque por las armas de España en el año 1782. Lino Sancho Otovia. Museo Naval de Madrid

The siege of Gibraltar, a top priority for the Crown, began in June 1779 with a land blockade commanded by General Martín Álvarez de Sotomayor with 13,000 men, and a naval blockade organized by Squadron Chief Antonio Barceló, another largely unknown figure in the history of Spain's navy. Córdova's fleet was also involved in this theater. The goal was to force the surrender of the inhabitants of the Rock by preventing them from receiving aid and supplies.

However, maintaining a naval blockade for an extended period was always challenging. Small ships could evade the Spanish fleet's surveillance, and it was not always possible to keep ships stationed due to bad weather or because they were needed elsewhere in the conflict.

During the nearly four years of war, three British convoys managed to reach the colony at times when the garrison was on the verge of surrender due to a lack of basic supplies. In this way, Gibraltar remained in British hands despite Spain's attempts to delay the signing of the peace treaties until the Rock could be returned to Spanish sovereignty. Unlike what happened in Pensacola, the dream of seeing the Spanish flag flying here could not be realized.

Bernardo de Gálvez and the Battle of Pensacola

Let us conclude the account of the war with the action that gives this discourse its name, and which has received the greatest recognition from Americans as decisive support for their independence. Let us not forget that another consequence of these battles led by Gálvez was the recovery of Florida for Spain, thereby avenging the outcomes of the Seven Years' War.

The final victory was achieved on May 8, 1781. It required extensive preparations and several successful military operations to accomplish what was considered a decisive feat for the cause of independence. The setting: the city of Pensacola in the Gulf of Mexico.

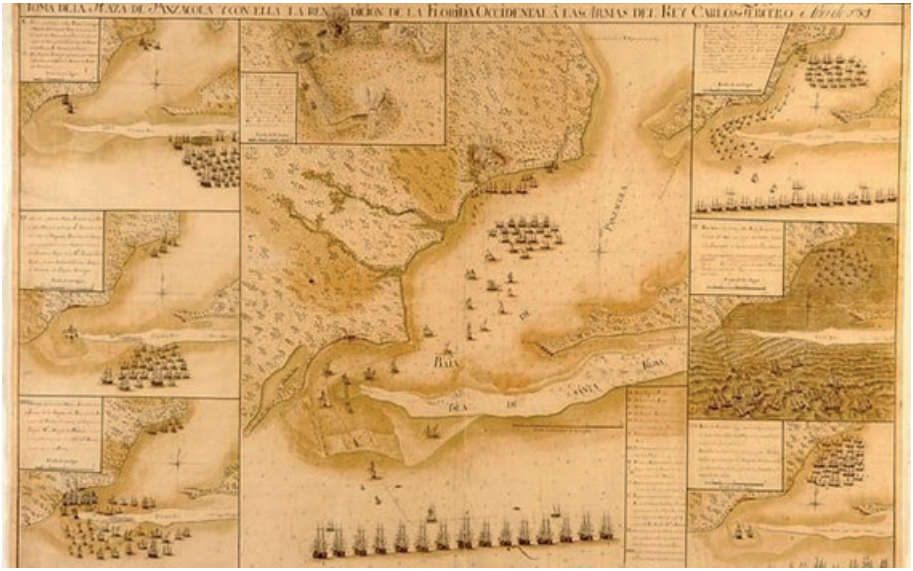
Bernardo de Gálvez, the Malagueño who succeeded Luis de Unzaga as governor of Louisiana in early 1777, came from a family of great significance in the history of the Americas. His uncle, José de Gálvez, after serving as the official inspector of New Spain, was appointed Minister of the Indies. José's brother and Bernardo's father, Matías de Gálvez, served as Viceroy of New Spain and played a prominent role in the defense of the Caribbean and Central America.

Bernardo, like several of the protagonists of this war, was trained at the military school of Ávila. After participating in various operations in the Mediterranean,

he was assigned to New Orleans. Continuing Unzaga's work, he provided all the assistance he could to the American rebels –first indirectly, and after the declaration of war, placing his full military capacity at the service of Spain's and America's interests.

Pensacola was not an easy target, largely because of its geographic location. For this reason, it was essential to capture other English holdings to prevent aid from reaching Pensacola. The successful capture of Mobile is considered decisive in paving the way to Pensacola. On October 16, 1780, Gálvez's troops, supported by the fleet, set sail from Havana toward Florida. This fleet had to face the previously mentioned hurricanes and became dismasted. Nevertheless, the voyage was resumed on February 13, 1781, from Havana toward the Gulf of Mexico.

The Spanish ships reached Santa Rosa Island, which formed a protective barrier in front of Pensacola Bay, defended by the English commander Campbell. There, the ships anchored, and a strategy was devised. At this critical moment, disagreements arose between sailors and soldiers. The flagship of the fleet, the San Ramón, which had the deepest draft, ran aground on the bar at the entrance to the bay. Commander Calvo de Irazabal, leading the fleet, objected to entering the bay, believing it was too shallow and that the ships would be easy targets for British batteries.



Plan of the capture of Pensacola (Navy Historical Archive)

Gálvez then made the decision that would make him a war hero: he chose to lead the bay incursion with the four ships under his direct command, sailing aboard the Galveston. According to some accounts, it was then that the commander-in-chief, ignoring the sailor's cautions, called to his men, shouting, "Whoever has honor and courage, follow me!"

Fortunately, the four ships under Gálvez's direct orders crossed the bar without incident and largely avoided enemy fire, which caused minimal damage. The rest of the fleet –except for Calvo de Irazabal, who accused Gálvez of treason and returned to Havana– managed to enter the bay. Once anchored, Gálvez decided to wait for reinforcements, which arrived on April 19, 1781, with a squadron from Cádiz. At that time, Gálvez's forces totaled nearly 7,500 soldiers and 19 ships.

Opposing them, under General John Campbell, were 3,600 men, including British regiments, sailors, armed civilians, and around 950 Native Americans. After a heroic defense from Fort George, the English were forced to raise the white flag and surrender Pensacola to the Spanish forces. The capitulation was signed on May 9, and the following day the Spanish took possession of the city, raising the Spanish flag.

From the moment of the English surrender at Pensacola, this victory was considered decisive in determining the end of the war, as Thomas Jefferson wrote to Gálvez, expressing his gratitude for Spain's support of the revolutionary forces.

Bernardo de Gálvez's feat was also recognized by Charles III, who, referencing his entry into the bay despite the more cautious advice, granted him the motto "Yo solo" ("I alone") on his coat of arms. His legacy will always be associated with that expression.

5. The end: a bittersweet victory

When we previously discussed the secret Treaty of Aranjuez (1779), in which Spain and France committed to enter the war jointly, we already noted that not all of the treaty's provisions were respected by both parties. In particular, it is worth highlighting Article 7, which established the conditions that were to be met when the peace agreements were signed:

> The Catholic King, for his part, intends to obtain through the war and the future peace treaty the following advantages: –1st the restitution of Gibraltar: –2nd possession of the Mobile River and fort: –3rd the restitution of Panzacola along with the entire Florida coast corresponding to the Bahama Channel, so that all foreign domination is excluded from it: –4th the expulsion of the English from the Bay of Honduras, and

> the enforcement of the prohibition agreed upon in the last Treaty of Paris of 1763, forbidding them from establishing any settlement there or in any other Spanish territories; –5th, the revocation of the privilege granted to the English to harvest logwood on the coast of Campeche; –and 6th, the restitution of the island of Menorca.

In other words, none of the allies were to sign separate treaties with other powers, and those treaties had to be subject to the acceptance of the demands set by the monarchs of France and Spain.

As we have noted, Article 7 lists some of these conditions, and the first –the great ambition of Spain upon entering the war, which was the recovery of Gibraltar–was not achieved. When the war was well advanced and the British defeat seemed imminent, the United States sent John Jay to negotiate with Spain. This representative, who met with Floridablanca on several occasions, demanded that Spain recognize the independence of the United States, regardless of what would happen with Gibraltar.

Despite its military defeat, England played its cards well in the diplomatic war. He went ahead to sign a peace treaty with the United States on November 30, 1782. This bilateral agreement succeeded in excluding France and Spain from the initial negotiations. Later the final treaties between Britain and the United States were signed in Paris, as well as separate agreements between the English and France and Spain.

This British manoeuvre caused France to "forget" its commitment not to sign the peace treaty until Gibraltar was returned to Spain. Spain also failed to obtain recognition of its right to the territories on the west bank of the Mississippi taken during the campaign of Bernardo de Gálvez, nor the right to possession of the Bahamas, which once again became part of the British crown.

Thus, despite being part of the bloc that had won the war, Spain did not achieve all the objectives it hoped for by allying with France and the United States. Gálvez's victories, so praised by the Americans, did not translate into Spain's possession of all the lands conquered by Gálvez, nor into absolute control of navigation on the Mississippi.

The United States, the main victor of the war, was born as an independent republic, and its Constitution went into effect in March 1789. George Washington took the oath of office as the first president on April 20 of that year. During the ceremonial inauguration events, Gardoqui was honored by Washington himself to stand by his side in the honor parade, demonstrating not only the friendship between them but also his gratitude toward Spain. For several days, the newly inaugurated president toured various towns, where he was received as a hero. In

Elizabethtown, alongside other officials, he boarded a specially constructed barge to travel to New York. At this port was the *Galveztown*, the brig of Bernardo de Gálvez, which had played such a prominent role in American independence and, once repaired, was able to salute the new president with fifteen cannon shots. This act highlighted that Spain had supported the American cause until the new republic was firmly established as a nation.

Reception of President Washington in New York, April 1789.
J. Rogers and J. M. Nevin. Ca. 1857. Naval Museum of Madrid.

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