

Foreign Policy

Joint Crisis Committee Walker Model Congress 2016

Background

Introduction:

As a newly emerging nation at the end of the 18th century, one of the prime challenges of the nascent United States was establishing a stance on foreign policy. George Washington, unanimously elected to the presidency in both 1789 and 1792, though not belonging to a political party, unofficially aligned himself with the Federalist Party. John Adams, his successor as of 1797, was officially a member of the Federalist Party.

History of the Problem:

To understand how the United States dealt with its world neighbors, it is necessary to understand its roots in colonial foreign policy. However, as a subsidiary to the British Empire, the colonies had no role in foreign interaction until they decided to fight for independence in the American Revolution. At this time, the rebelling parties began to find allies in Europe - namely, France, Spain, and the Netherlands - out of necessity, as it would very well take foreign assistance to defeat the British should they declare war. These military and economic alliances can be attributed to the unifying factor of a common enemy amongst each nation - Great Britain herself. To this end, the American colonies and France signed in 1778 the proposed Treaty of Alliance and Treaty of Amity and Commerce. The Treaty of Alliance established, as the name suggests, a political, economic, and military alliance between the rebelling colonies and France in the event of a conflict with Great Britain. Its sister document, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, established trade between France and the colonies, and officially recognized the United States as a sovereign entity in the eyes of the French. This early colonial alliance with France was arguably one of the most critical foreign policy decisions of the pre-independence United States, especially in the securing of national independence.

In the early post-independence era of the country, the United States began to meet some challenges in foreign policy decisions. The first came in Washington's administration, with the rise of the French Revolution beginning in 1789. With rising discontent regarding the disproportionately large role of the aristocracy and monarchy over the peasants in the French political system, the Third Estate - consisting of the common people - broke off and formed the National Assembly, signaling the start of a massive political upheaval. Drawing upon its parallels to the recently-concluded American Revolution, French revolutionaries pleaded for assistance from Washington. By 1793, the president, however, declined to assist. At this point, warfare had engulfed the majority of Europe, with one camp encompassing Britain and her allies and the other encompassing France and her allies. After American independence, the United States maintained friendly relations with France as recompense for its assistance in the revolution; the United States also maintained civil relations with Great Britain for trade and economic purposes, as the British Empire was irrefutably the world economic and political power at the time. The nature of the French Revolution caused a major political division within the United States; while the Federalists, the party consisting of those who favor strong central administration, supported the British over the French due to a desire to keep the "anarchy" of the French Revolution out of the United States, the Democratic-Republicans, the party that emerged from the Anti-Federalists and their ideals, supported the French in accordance with their principles of limited central government and individual power. Due to this conflict of foreign interest, Washington announced in the

Proclamation of Neutrality the intent of the United States to remain “friendly and impartial to belligerent powers.” With this address, Washington established a precedent of neutrality and isolationism that would carry into the next century.

While the United States maintained trade relations with Great Britain, tensions were nevertheless still pervasive in their relations. In 1794, Washington sent diplomat John Jay to Great Britain to negotiate a treaty that would resolve outstanding issues such as violations of free trade, impressment of American trade ships, and the late evacuation of the British from northern settlements as agreed upon in the Treaty of Paris in 1783. After looking to Alexander Hamilton, the Secretary of the Treasury at the time, for guidance, Jay left for Britain with the goal of a resolution that would stabilize both political and trade relations with Britain. Jay’s only significant bargaining tool was the threat that the United States would begin defending its status of neutrality should Britain continue to seize American ships; Hamilton, however, had independently informed the British diplomats that the United States would not do so, leaving Jay with little leverage for negotiation. As a result, the treaty addressed few American interests and ended up giving more rights to the British: Jay was only able to receive a promise that the northern settlements would be evacuated, which had already been agreed to in 1783, and a commercial treaty granting the United States “most favorable nation” status in the eyes of the British, while the British in return were permitted to seize American ships so long as they paid for American goods, though they could seize any French goods gratis. Upon his return, Jay was burned in effigy in the streets of New York, and this vastly unpopular foreign policy decision was considered the nadir of Washington’s administration.

In the following year, Washington sent Thomas Pinckney, a United States minister to Great Britain from South Carolina, to Madrid to negotiate a territorial settlement with Spain, who controlled the southernmost portions of the United States: from this settlement, the United States desired use of the Mississippi River, duty-free trade access through New Orleans, which was controlled by Spain at the time, and the removal of Spanish forts that were on American soil. Prior to 1789, Spain’s policy toward the United States had been to interact with the country as little as possible. As such, early attempts at this territorial settlement were not even entertained by Madrid. However, the advent of the French Revolution and its subsequent wars caused Madrid to realign its foreign policy stance, and so negotiations went smoothly when Pinckney arrived in Spain in 1795. Pinckney’s success with Spanish negotiations could be attributed to either different circumstances than those of John Jay or to better negotiating skills - Pinckney had threatened to leave Madrid twice if the Spanish would not agree to the conditions he alone wanted - but regardless, this foreign policy interaction was a complete volte-face from the provisions of the Jay Treaty. Formally known as the Treaty of San Lorenzo, the Pinckney Treaty accomplished not only what Pinckney had originally set out to gain with this territorial settlement, but also a promise from the Spanish to attempt to prevent any Native American attacks on Western settlers. Another result of the Pinckney Treaty was that the negotiation had placed the United States in a higher position in terms of foreign policy in relation to its European allies. As a member of the Federalist Party, Pinckney’s diplomatic success additionally bolstered the popularity of the party, and is generally considered the zenith of Washington’s presidency.

Recent Developments:

Washington stepped down from the presidency after the conclusion of his second term in 1797, and Adams was soon ushered into office after election. However, early in Adams’ administration, the United States began to face further issues with France. In 1797, the government of the French Republic began a series of attacks on and impressment of American ships in response to the United States refusing to repay its debt to France under the pretense that the debt was owed to the old regime. Adams, in a move to make peace, sent Elbridge Gerry, Charles Pinckney, and

John Marshall as delegates to France to speak with Charles Talleyrand, France's Foreign Minister at the time. Upon arrival in France, however, the delegates were told that they were unable to meet with Talleyrand, and were instead approached by diplomatic intermediaries: Nicholas Hubbard, Jean Hottinguer, Pierre Bellamy, and Lucien Hauteval. These intermediaries informed the delegates that Talleyrand would be willing to meet with them and come to some sort of an agreement if they agreed to make several financial concessions at the start, such as providing France with a low-interest loan, pay war retributions, and provide Talleyrand with a substantial bribe. The envoys, shocked at the conditions and skeptical that the French would change their foreign policy in any substantial manner, refused to pay and waited for Talleyrand, who eventually dropped the requirements but was unwilling to end naval impressment. News of the interaction reached the United States, and Adams, supported by the pro-war Federalists, was forced to prepare for conflict. The Democratic-Republicans, however, pressured Adams to release the official correspondence of the interaction. Adams obliged, changing the names of the French intermediaries to X, Y, and Z, leading the event to be known as the XYZ Affair. Realizing his mistake and wishing to avoid another large-scale international conflict, Talleyrand accepted a new commission of American delegates to France for the discussion of a peace negotiation. The negotiators chose to annul the previous treaties signed in 1778 and drafted the Treaty of Mortefontaine, also known as the Convention of 1800. While the whole affair caused the American public to become disenchanted with the Federalist Party, the agreement kept peace between the United States and France, although it terminated the United States' only official foreign alliance.

Federalist Point of View:

Arguably because of the party's elitist tendencies, Federalists tended to sympathize with the British in international relations. In addition to the economic and naval interests that would be boosted by supporting the British, they felt that diplomatic harmony with the rascals that executed the French monarchy and many members of its aristocracy throughout the Reign of Terror would stoke populist tensions within the United States and send the wrong message of supporting chaos and instability to investors and other nations' governments, many of which had unsettled monarchies of their own.

Democratic Republican Point of View:

In contrast to the Federalists, Democratic Republicans were staunch supporters of the French, particularly because of the French Revolution. Members of this party saw the French as a newer version of their democratic selves, as they too were just coming out of a revolution after overthrowing the monarchy. Additionally, because of the British impressment of sailors, they wished to press American-British relations to the point of war, since they believed the United States could defeat such a weak nation. As a result, they were infuriated by the Jay Treaty, seeing it as bowing down to Britain and as a personal insult to American pride.

Conclusion:

At the end of the 18th century, the newly-formed United States faced the challenge of establishing its new place in the world order as an independent nation. We will begin committee in 1789, immediately after the ratification of the United States Constitution and the inauguration of George Washington. Be prepared to discuss both these events and any that may arise during committee as crises or through other means. When drafting solutions, do not feel constrained by how the events historically unfolded; because the committee will be so dynamic, other solutions may better fit the situations.

Questions to Consider

- i. What were the positions of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists in relation to United States foreign policy? Why did these groups align themselves in such a way?
- ii. What were the provisions of the early treaties with the French, and what were their ramifications for foreign policy for the rest of the 18th century?
- iii. How did the political climate of Europe affect the foreign policy decisions of the United States?
- iv. Was Washington smart to issue the Proclamation of Neutrality? What were its effects on the United States, both domestically and in terms of its policy decisions abroad?
- v. How did the provisions of the Jay Treaty affect public sentiment? How did the outcome of the negotiation affect future policy decisions?
- vi. How did Pinckney's negotiations differ from Jay's? What were the provisions of the treaty, and how did it affect the status and mentality of the United States?
- vii. In sending a delegation to France, did Adams initially handle the situation of impressment and attack well?
- viii. Would it have been a smarter decision for the delegation to try to convince Adams to meet the requests of the French intermediaries? Why or why not?
- ix. Should Adams have refused to send a second delegation, instead opting for war with France? Why or why not?
- x. How did the outcome of the XYZ Affair affect American foreign policy?

Sources for Additional Research

- Library of Congress: Primary Documents in American History
■ <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/PrimDocsHome.html>
- U.S. Department of State: Office of the Historian
■ <http://history.state.gov>
- The Avalon Project
■ <http://avalon.law.yale.edu>
- U.S. History in Context
■ <http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/uhic>
- The American Presidency Project
■ <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php>
- George Washington's Mount Vernon
■ <http://www.mountvernon.org>
- Thomas Jefferson's Monticello
■ <http://www.monticello.org>
- The Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History

- <https://www.gilderlehrman.org>
- U.S. History Resources
- <http://www.ushistory.org>
- Archiving Early America
- <http://www.earlyamerica.com/early-america-review/>

Bibliography

Library of Congress. "Jay's Treaty." Primary Documents in American History. Accessed October 28, 2015. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/jay.html>.

Library of Congress. "Treaty of Alliance with France." Primary Documents in American History. Accessed October 26, 2015. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/alliance.html>.

Monticello and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. "XYZ Affair." Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Accessed November 1, 2015. <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/xyz-affair>.

Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. "Pinckney's Treaty (1795)." George Washington's Mount Vernon. Accessed October 30, 2015. <http://www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/primary-sources/pinckneys-treaty-1795/>.

Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. "XYZ Affair." George Washington's Mount Vernon. Accessed November 1, 2015. <http://www.mountvernon.org/research-collections/digital-encyclopedia/article/xyz-affair/>.

U.S. Department of State. "French Alliance, French Assistance, and European Diplomacy during the American Revolution, 1778–1782." Office of the Historian. Accessed October 26, 2015. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1776-1783/french-alliance>.

U.S. Department of State. "John Jay's Treaty, 1794–95." Office of the Historian. Accessed October 28, 2015. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/jay-treaty>.

U.S. Department of State. "Treaty of San Lorenzo / Pinckney's Treaty, 1795." Office of the Historian. Accessed October 30, 2015. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/pickney-treaty>.

U.S. Department of State. "The United States and the French Revolution, 1789–1799." Office of the Historian. Accessed October 27, 2015. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/french-rev>.

U.S. Department of State. "The XYZ Affair and the Quasi-War with France, 1798–1800." Office of the Historian. Accessed November 1, 2015. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/xyz>.

Yale Law School. "British-American Diplomacy: The Jay Treaty; November 19, 1794." The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. Accessed October 28, 2015. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jay.asp.

Yale Law School. "The Proclamation of Neutrality 1793." The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. Accessed October 27, 2015. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/neutra93.asp.

Yale Law School. "Treaty of Amity and Commerce Between The United States and France; February 6, 1778." The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. Accessed October 26, 2015. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fr1788-1.asp.

Yale Law School. "Treaty of Friendship, Limits, and Navigation Between Spain and The United States; October 27, 1795." The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. Accessed October 30, 2015. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/sp1795.asp.