

## Diplomacy of John Adams

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John Adams and his generation absorbed European diplomatic thinking as the American Revolution developed. When they determined to declare independence from George III, it was to Europe that they turned for instruction about the conduct of American diplomacy. There were two ways of approaching European diplomacy in the eighteenth century. One was a realistic and traditional approach, and other an idealistic and progressive one.

Felix Gilbert sees Adams initially advocating idealistic diplomacy then progressively changing his diplomatic position to a more realistic stance. He considers Adams in 1776 to be at first an idealist. Gilbert sees Adams as initially one of the representatives of "a new diplomacy," insisting on free trade. Influenced by French philosophes, Adams attempted to bring about a "new age of peace," in which the American relationship with Europe would be purely commercial, open to all nations, and, consequently, a political diplomacy with alliances and the balance of power would disappear from the international scene. Gilbert argues, however, that, after his diplomatic service in Europe, Adams' diplomatic liberalism yielded to a more realistic and traditional diplomacy with the balance of power thinking.<sup>1</sup>

James H. Hutson rejects Gilbert's progressive view of American Revolutionary diplomacy, by insisting on "its old-fashioned European character." Hutson argues that the eman-

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icipation of commerce was not Adams' goal. He was willing to accept the British mercantilism under which America had prospered. It seems reasonable to support Hutson's suggestions that Adams, in his diplomatic thinking and in his execution of it, proceeded "in a straight line from the Declaration of Independence onward, in a line that can be described as customary, European, and conservative."<sup>2</sup> Based on Hutson's re-evaluation of John Adams' diplomacy, this essay advances the hypothesis that Adams was a realist, pursuing national interest within the framework of the balance of power. Rather than an idealist, Adams was in short a mercantilist, with a vision to form a commercial empire in America.

### I

Having matured in a mercantilist empire, in which American commerce had prospered, most of the revolutionary generation naturally saw themselves as mercantilists. When they rebelled against British mercantilism, they advocated without any contradiction the idea and practice of mercantilism itself. Mercantilists measured national power by national wealth and regarded commerce as a source of power and wealth. They emphasized expansion.<sup>3</sup>

When he was young, John Adams was thrilled by the prospect of America's potential power and visualized America as a mighty empire. He simply thought that America would become the "greatest power on earth."<sup>4</sup> His conviction of American power was central to his thinking about foreign policy. Benjamin Franklin, who had a "burning interest in westward expansion," visualized America becoming an empire by means of territorial gains including possible claims on Canada, the Spanish Floridas, and the West Indies.<sup>5</sup> Adams, however, believed the United States of America would become an empire by means of commercial pursuits and maritime trade.

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Adams believed that America could survive and thrive as a commercial empire. Considering the variety of resources--the fertility of American soil, a large population, the extent of land, and character of American people--Adams was confident that America had the necessary requirements to become an empire of her own, especially a commercial empire.

He recognized that America's chief occupation was farming, and that the main exports of America were agricultural productions. He saw agriculture as the key means for expanding commerce, and emphasized the primacy of agriculture over manufacturing. Since European manufactured goods were cheaper than Americans could make them, Americans could still more profitably import and purchase certain goods from Europe. In America, working on the land saved greater capital than working in a factory. Moreover, America had a plenty of wild and uncultivated land. Agriculture was, he argued, "the principal source of her growing wealth."<sup>6</sup> Thus, American agriculture was closely connected with and dependent on commerce, and it was commerce that could find the market for American growing surplus of agricultural goods.

In addition, a flourishing commerce demanded a large population. According to population theory which was contained in mercantilism, a strong nation needed a large population to provide supplies of laborers, consumers, and soldiers for effecting expansionist policies. Adams thought that American populace satisfied this theory. He estimated that there were almost three million people in America in 1774, in spite of the war and the interruption of migrations from Europe. Any addition to the population of America, by migrations from Europe, became a fresh resource, because, in such an agricultural country as America, the ability to raise a revenue would bear a constant proportion to the numbers of people. There were still immense tracts of uncultivated land to accomodate immigrants from Europe.<sup>7</sup>

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America had a seacoast of about two thousand miles in extent, with a great number of ports, bays, harbors, rivers, creeks, inlets, and islands. It was natural, Adams argued, that the great majority of Americans were, thus, engaged in commerce, navigation, and fisheries. Their cities were formed and existed upon commerce, and the character and habits of American people were highly commercial.<sup>8</sup>

When asked to draw a draft of the Plan of Treaties, or the so-called Model Treaty, in June, 1776, Adams had a strong conviction that America would become a mighty empire to match the "united force" of Europe.<sup>9</sup> As early as the fall of 1775, he already had an idea of securing assistance from France, for America desperately needed foreign assistance to win independence from England. Adams knew that if the British colonies in North America proclaimed independence from England, their revolt would be the decisive factor in the European balance of power, especially in the power struggle between England and France. He had studied the history of the five preceding centuries of relations between France and Britain. The former had suffered, through all that period, the humiliation of a subordinate role to the latter in the European political scene. By proposing a treaty with America, Adams saw that the United States would give the French a good opportunity to retaliate against England. Thus, the concept of the balance of power which was derived from Eighteenth-century European diplomacy guided Adams in charting the future course of American foreign policy.

The Model Treaty, the first major state paper dealing with the conduct of America with foreign countries, was a commercial treaty. In drafting the treaty, Adams' realistic approach to mercantilism was explicit. He laid the guiding principles of foreign policy for "No political connection. No military connection. Only a commercial connection."<sup>10</sup> In the treaty, Adams advocated commercial reciprocity rather

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than commercial freedom. He wrote that, in her ports, America would treat subjects of a foreign power as she treated her own citizens, if the foreign power would do the same for American citizens in its ports. A foreigner trading through an American port would not encounter restraints at the customs house. The objective of the Model Treaty was to insure that foreign governments did not discriminate against American traders in favor of their own citizens. Adams attempted to gain American participation in the European mercantile system, not freedom from their restraints. He disdained from an idea of "being again monopolized by any one nation whatsoever,"<sup>11</sup> concerning commerce.

In formulating the Model Treaty, he adopted principles of free ships, free goods; the freedom for a neutral to trade at a port of a belligerent; and, restricted and carefully defined lists of contraband not including foodstuffs or naval stores, which were American main exports. The treaty also stipulated the protection of France for American citizens and vessels from the Barbary corsairs. The Mediterranean trade had been lucrative for American merchants and shippers under the British flag. Adams believed that American vessels were certain to be attacked without a strong naval escort.<sup>12</sup> His intention in drawing from Eighteenth-century European diplomatic practice was clearly to maintain and increase American commercial prosperity.

When his draft came before Congress, many motions were made to insert articles of political alliance, of exclusive privileges, and of warranties of possessions. It was argued, especially by Samuel Adams and Richard Henry Lee, that there was no sufficient temptation for France to join the American with their war against England. The opposing gentlemen moved for concessions, but Adams studiously defended his draft.<sup>13</sup> He was fully convinced that the right to trade with America was "sufficient compensation for any aid given to it, even if

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the act of providing aid involved the other nation in a war with Great Britain." He thought that a treaty of commerce with the United States would "encourage France manufactures, increase her exports of the produce of her soil and agriculture, extend her navigation and trade, augment her resources of naval power," and raise France "from her present deep humiliation, distress and decay." Consequently, it would place France "on a more equal footing with England," if the French were admitted into "an equal participation of the benefits" of American commerce.<sup>14</sup> His confidence in the ability of the United States to sustain herself was too great to permit him to consent to any sacrifices.

Adams was strongly opposed to having a political alliance with France from the balance of power viewpoint. He thought that America should be in perfect neutrality in case of a future European war in order to gain complete independence. The United States had been "the sport of European intrigues, and politics." If Americans united with any one of European powers, he argued, they must become "too subordinate and dependent on that nation." Urging that the negotiation with France ought to be conducted with great caution lest America might enter into any alliance with her, he laid down the first principle and the maxim: maintain an entire neutrality in all future wars.<sup>15</sup> From this view point, he attempted to limit the treaty strictly to commerce, without political and military connections.

In the end, Adams' draft was passed without one article of alliance, exclusive privilege, or warranty. In case war with England resulted from France's acknowledgment of American independence, America would agree merely not to assist France's enemy with men, money, ships, or contraband. France was expected to agree to make no conquests of British dominions in North America or adjacent islands, which were to be left as territories for further American expansion. It was

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fortunate that France, at the time, no longer had any territorial ambitions in North America. Adams' guiding principles for American foreign policy appeared almost intact in the Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1778.

### II

In late November, 1777, Congress elected John Adams to replace Silas Deane as one of the American commissioners at the French Court. They signed the Treaty of Alliance as well as the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with Louis XVI on February 6, 1778. Adams departed for France on February 13, and learned about these treaties before he reached Bordeaux. Thus, he realized the purpose of his mission had been accomplished before he disembarked on French soil. In addition, against his will, the Treaty of Alliance was signed with France. This treaty stipulated that America assure France of her possessions in the West Indies, and France guaranteed the independence of America, promising not to lay down arms before the independence of America was recognized; neither France nor America were to conclude a separate peace. This alliance was overtly political. Consequently, America had been drawn into the constellations of European power politics through her own establishment of close political relations with France.

When Adams drafted the Model Treaty, he was not an expert in foreign affairs. Hence, his diplomatic service in Europe gave him a good opportunity to learn the practice of European diplomacy. He said, in a letter to Ralph Izard of October 2, 1778, that as America was young and American people did not practise in the art of negotiation, it was necessary "to look into all these things with as much caution and exactness as possible, and furnish ourselves with the best historical light and every other honest means of securing our rights."<sup>16</sup> What he saw, read, and heard in Europe was the practice of power

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politics. He learned how old-style diplomacy was practised. He became convinced that, in order to survive and thrive, the United States had to be kept well-informed "of the current chains of events, and of the political projects in contemplation."<sup>17</sup> Exact knowledge of the way European power politics functioned and continuous observation of the European political scene Adams recognized as crucial.

John Adams' conclusion to his observations was twofold: He realized European diplomacy was determined by national interest and diplomacy was carried out by force or power. He wrote to Franklin, in a letter of August 17, 1780, that "No facts are believed, but decisive military conquests; no arguments are seriously attended to in Europe, but force." Therefore, instead of amusing themselves with the illusion of peace, Adams suggested, Americans ought to "bend the whole force of their minds to augment their navy, to find out their own strength and resources, and to depend upon themselves."<sup>18</sup>

Since she was still a weak and growing nation, America was watchful of the changing situations in the European political system. Adams analyzed the European situation based on a realistic evaluation of traditional factors. England had become a great power with a strong navy because of her commerce and extensive settlements abroad. However, he thought that England was losing her power and running toward her ruin, as he noted to the President of Congress, on August 4, 1779, "Her riches, in which her power consisted, she has lost with us and never can regain."<sup>19</sup> Applying Bolingbroke's conception of the balance of power, Adams regarded Great Britain in the sinking scale of the political power balance. Yet, England could not easily shake off her habitual prejudices of superior wealth and power. The English still considered themselves "a match for France and Spain and America, if not for all the world."<sup>20</sup>

According to Adams' analysis, France, like other princi-



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pal powers of Europe such as Spain and Holland, was the most careful to watch the variations of this power balance. That was why the French King took an earlier and a greater part in the American Revolution than any other sovereign in Europe. France was possessed with the great importance of American independence for its own interests. France, Spain, and Holland continued to dread England, a power no longer able to hurt them.<sup>21</sup>

As for America, Adams considered her in the rising scale of the European political power balance. According to theory of Bolingbroke, whose political writings Adams thought were more admired than any written in English, "they who are in the rising scale do not immediately feel their strength, nor assume that confidence in it which successful experience gives them afterwards."<sup>22</sup> Adams conjectured, however, that probably the balance of power was not shifted "in so remarkable a manner and in so short a space of time."<sup>23</sup>

Adams' empire thought was reinforced by Pownall's arguments. Thomas Pownall, a member of Parliament, formerly Governor of Massachusetts, and Lieutenant-Governor of New Jersey, in a pamphlet entitled "A Memorial to the Sovereigns of Europe, on the Present State of Affairs, between the Old and New World," took it for granted that America was growing "into an independent organized being, a great and powerful empire," taking its equal station with other European powers. If the United States conducted her policy intelligently and made ingenious use of the rivalries between the European powers, she would be able to acquire hegemony over the entire continent.<sup>24</sup> Pownall's idea that America could remain outside the system of the great European powers and form a gravitation center of her own if her connection with European nations would be confined to commerce, gave Adams confidence for America's greatness and helped in determining the future course of action for American foreign affairs in the international world.

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Adams perceived that European powers did not desire for America to become a new primary planet forming a gravitation center of her own and remaining outside the system of European powers. Although it seemed that almost all European powers rejoiced in the American Revolution and considered the independence of America "as for their interest and happiness in many points of view, both respecting commerce and the balance of Europe," Adams noticed that none of them, including even France and Spain, wished "to see America rise very fast to power." Therefore, in a report to Congress, he stated, "We ought to be cautious how we magnify our ideas, and exaggerate our expressions of the generosity and magnanimity of any of these powers." He also reiterated his primary maxim to avoid entanglement with European politics and wars as much as possible and to keep diplomatic relationships with Europe purely commercial.<sup>25</sup>

From his negotiations with the French, Adams became wary of French foreign policy. He became aware of intrigues in which France had made some secret arrangements with Spain over the vital area to America. A close alliance existed between the two Bourbon powers of France and Spain, and France wanted to bring Spain into the war against Great Britain. To this end France promised not to make peace with England until Spain conquered Gibraltar. France also supported Spanish claims for vast territories on the left bank of the Mississippi. As these negotiations were conducted in secrecy, the American people were in the dark about the diplomatic bargaining between France and Spain.

Count Vergennes, a French Foreign Minister, considered his policy to support American independence within the framework of power politics. American independence would take away a considerable weight from England in the balance of power. Vergennes' aim of diplomacy was to evaluate the interplay of opposing forces and interests and to create a situation favor-

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able to France's conquest and expansion. Finding out that the French were attempting to make America dependent on France in the future European wars, Adams warned the American people not to receive any advice whatsoever, but to always judge for themselves. It seemed to him that their duties were to form "establishments for a greater nation and a new world."<sup>26</sup>

Adams was convinced that power was aggressive and that it should be balanced by countervailing power. Fearful that the jealousies and intrigues of France were directed against the United States, Adams was determined to go to Holland to render America "less dependent on France."<sup>27</sup> He thought that a loan from Holland would enable a means to escape complete reliance on French money to win independence. He explained to the Dutch that a loan from Holland would serve "to give an ample extension" to America's commerce with foreign nations, especially the Dutch. Adams also argued that commercial interests would draw America and Holland together.<sup>28</sup> His success in obtaining a loan from Holland and its acknowledgment of American independence, by concluding the Treaty of Peace and Commerce on October 8, 1782, indicated a good example of the practice of Pownall's theory that America would become "an independent organized being," if she made clever use of the rivalries between the European powers and her relations with them were purely commercial.

### III

Great Britain acknowledged American independence by signing the Definitive Treaty of Peace with the United States, on September 3, 1783. Adams did not think, however, that America was completely independent. He realized that America was merely an object of jealousies among European powers. After his service abroad in Europe, he was only too aware of how little America's former European friends could be trusted.

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European powers seemed to desire to see America weakened and her growth retarded. America, although destined to become "the greatest power on earth, and that within the life of man," at present had no system of maritime defense to protect American commerce which Adams regarded as a source of national power and wealth. Of course, America was different from Holland and Switzerland which were small powers limited by nature and would be defended by their neighbors and allies.<sup>29</sup> But, it was obvious to Adams that all of the European powers would continue to maneuver with America to draw her into their "real or imaginary Ballances of Power." They would desire to make America "a Make Weight Candle," when they were "weighing out their Pounds."<sup>30</sup> His experience in Europe gave Adams a lesson that European diplomacy was determined by power.

Though America considered herself a rising power, France and England did not. The French and English governments in particular still had a tendency to regard America as merely a possible tool, even after acknowledging America's independence. Adams perceived that these powers endeavored to involve America in their future wars. It appeared that France and England were "most perfectly united in all artifices and endeavours" to keep down American reputation in the international scene.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, Adams again pushed his fundamental maxim for American foreign policy that America avoid depending too much upon any one European power and avoid all obligations and temptations to take part in future European wars. He stubbornly held to his foremost policy: America's relations with Europe must solely involve commerce, not politics or war.

Adams thought it would be best if America formed immediate connections with neutral commercial and maritime powers. If America wanted commercial expansion, freedom of the seas was indispensable. At present, America did not have a navy to protect her commerce. Therefore, Adams wanted to see America unite with neutral powers by making commercial treaties

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in order to enforce freedom of the seas. Adams thought this freedom of the seas would produce a balance of power on the seas. It was essential, he argued, that every commercial power ought to "make his nation's flag respected in all the sea and by all the nations of the world." It was chimerical to have a desire of "being sole master of the sea," and of "commanding all the commerce," because Providence had not granted "an exclusive empire upon the sea" to any people.<sup>32</sup>

Adams' priority of commercial expansion and his principle of maintaining perfect neutrality in the European political system were important factors in his decision to negotiate with Prussia. He thought it natural for a neutral nation to consult with other neutral nations. Moreover, Adams was convinced that the maritime and commercial powers of the world considered America as forming a weight in the European political power balance.<sup>33</sup>

On July 13, 1783, Adams explained, in a letter to Robert R. Livingston, three beneficial reasons for America to make a commercial treaty with Prussia. First, "as Emperor of Germany, and King of Bohemia and Hungary," Frederick the Great was "at the head of one of the greatest interests and most powerful connections in Europe." And, Prussia was "the greatest weight in the scale" of the European political power balance, opposed to the House of Bourbon. Thus, Adams hoped a treaty of commerce with Prussia would be a means to preserve the respect the House of Bourbon held for America. Second, if England should attack America, England probably would not obtain Prussia's assistance against America. Adams deemed Prussia would not violate a friendship once established by a commercial treaty, because Prussia had no dominions near America and no interest to quarrel with America. Consequently, a commercial treaty with Prussia would also be a means to secure the respect of the English which would keep America out of a European war in the future. Finally, the countries

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belonging to Prussia were great courses of commerce for the United States. If a free navigation of the Danube, the Black Sea, and the Archipelago could be opened, the Emperor's hereditary dominions would become respectable commercial countries. Thus, American commercial relations with Prussia would give America a good opportunity not only to extend American commerce, but also to show to all the world that "their system of commerce embraces, equally and impartially, all the commercial states and countries of Europe."<sup>34</sup>

From his first diplomatic service in Europe, Adams well understood that the rivalry between France and England along with Prussia's desire for developing the port of Emden to introduce commerce between Prussia and America had made Frederick the Great interested in American independence. Since Prussia was England's ally, the Emperor refrained from embroiling himself with the Court of London by establishing commercial relations with America during the revolutionary war. After the conclusion of peace treaty with Great Britain, the way was open for Prussia. The Emperor indicated his inclination to have a treaty of commerce with America. On February 19, 1784, Baron de Thulemeier, a Prussian Foreign Minister, visited Adams at the Hague to deliver the Emperor's suggestions to exchange Silesian linens and Saxony's porcelain for American tobacco, rice and indigo.<sup>35</sup> Adams seized the opportunity to have a treaty of commerce with Prussia. Thus, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce was concluded on September 10, 1785.

In order to realize his vision of America as a commercial empire, remaining outside the European system and forming a gravitation center of her own, Adams believed in 1784 that it was necessary and urgent for America to free herself from French debts which kept her dependent on France.

Adams sought aid from two sources: the Mediterranean trade and, again, a loan from Holland. Despite opposition from the American people, Adams considered that the commercial

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profit from the Mediterranean trade was a good means to pay off French debts. To this end, Adams endeavored to make a treaty with the Barbary states. To the contrary, most American people opposed treaties with the Mediterranean states. They considered the Mediterranean trade to be more harmful than helpful. Although the Mediterranean trade seemed lucrative to American merchants and shippers, a rich trade was not able to be carried out without bribes, ransoms and presents. Adams, however, still considered the Mediterranean trade highly valuable, even though a rich trade was exposed to the depredations of piratical states. He conceded that naval protection was necessary in the Mediterranean if the United States were to reap her full economic benefits. But unless it were possible to persuade the European maritime powers to unite in the suppression of Mediterranean pirates, Adams suggested, the best policy remained for America to obtain treaties with the Barbary states in order to enjoy the Mediterranean trade with freedom.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, it was well-known to Adams that economic prosperity derived from the Mediterranean trade could not completely compensate the American debt to France. Thus he suggested to ask for another loan from Holland in order to help pay off the American debt to France. He took it for granted that Holland was the only place to borrow money. He wished Congress would not owe "a shilling anywhere but in Holland."<sup>37</sup> He had a strong conviction that, as long as America was dependent on any one power of Europe, even in the form of debt whose interests were constantly accruing, America would not be independent at all, and would not be a commercial empire of her own. Thus, Adams' main motives to have treaties with the Barbary states and to have another loan from Holland were to render America less dependent on France.

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### IV

Adams contributed to American commercial expansion in the Mediterranean as well as in Europe by gaining commercial treaties with Prussia and the Barbary states. But, American commerce in the Caribbean, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and elsewhere was still in a precarious situation because America did not have a navy. Adams was convinced that commerce was the source for national wealth and strength and that a navy was necessary to protect that commerce. Marine fleets, he argued, had drained "the wealth of Europe itself into the coffers of two or three of its principal commercial powers."<sup>38</sup> The world did not give any examples of flourishing commerces without maritime protection. A mercantile marine had to work together with a military marine. Fortunately, he thought, America abounded with all the materials and skills for ship-building and commanders and the number of seamen was not wanting.<sup>39</sup>

To establish a strong navy in America was Adams' obsession from the very beginning of his career in international diplomacy. When Adams assumed the Presidency, the opportunity to establish and enlarge a navy was wide open. And, he seized it.

It was the British monopoly of the seas that disturbed America's expanding commerce during and after the American Revolution, but it was French depredations of American commerce that undermined American prosperity on the seas after the Jay Treaty of 1794. The French Directory's decree of March 2, 1797, allowing French warships to bring into French ports all neutral vessels caught carrying British goods, violated the principle of free ships, free goods, stipulated in the Franco-American Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1778. This decree made American merchants and shipowners panic. The insurance rates on American vessels headed for French



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ports jumped 10 per cent overnight, requiring a "war premium" from ships bound for the British West Indies. By the spring of 1798 insurance rates for a Caribbean voyage from an American port had climbed from 30 to 33 per cent. Furthermore, convinced that America could not afford to protect her own commerce on the seas, French privateers grew bold. They attacked American ships within sight of American shores.<sup>40</sup>

Under these circumstances, President Adams had three possible policies to implement with France: (1) He could stage an embargo on American shipping, mainly on cargoes destined for the Caribbean and French ports; (2) He could wage war with France in defense of the national interest; or (3) He could pursue "amicable negotiation," as a reparation for the injuries that had been committed on American commerce and citizens.<sup>41</sup>

Adams chose the last possibility. He knew well that the American naval power was too weak to win in combat against France.

Adams suggested, in a speech to Congress, on May 16, 1797, that it was France who had violated the Franco-American treaty of 1778 treating the American people "as a degraded people, humiliating, under a colonial spirit of fear and sense of inferiority." Since complete independence was indispensable for pursuing national interest, he recommended to send a peace mission to France. At the same time, he urged American people to recognize the absolute necessity of a maritime defense.<sup>42</sup>

Under pressure from Hamiltonian men such as Timothy Pickering, Oliver Wolcott, and James McHenry who thought America could pursue her national interest under British protection, Adams agreed to take measures for national defense while negotiating with France; but, he opposed war itself. Adams was convinced that America should avoid any involvement in European war to pursue her own national interest. However, it was appropriate, thought Adams, to arm American merchant ships and to create naval forces capable of providing convoy escorts to protect American ships.

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There were strong pro-French feelings among American people after the French Revolution. They regarded France as America's sister republic. There was also a tendency in America not to favor a strong navy, because it was considered as the instrument for oppressing American people and their liberty as well as a tool for use in the power struggle with other mercantile empires. Therefore, Adams reasoned that it was the obligation of the President to persuade Americans that enlarging the naval forces would be used not for war with France, but for American prosperity and happiness. He argued that commerce was essential to American growth, prosperity, and happiness. A strong navy could provide "an adequate protection" for American commerce. And, the widely extended seacoasts of America could be more easily defended by a navy than by any other means.<sup>43</sup>

Since America's chief occupation was agriculture, it was necessary for the President to receive support for creating the navy from the American people engaged in agriculture. So Adams emphasized the importance of the navy by explaining its interrelationships to agriculture and commerce. American agriculture, according to his argument, was closely connected with and dependent on commerce. Since America's main exports were agricultural goods, it would be beneficial for American farmers to have a strong navy to protect American commerce. Consequently, it was the obligation of the President, thought Adams, to defend American commerce by enlarging her navy.<sup>44</sup>

On March 4, 1798, dispatches from the American envoys arrived at the State Department. A peace mission failed because of their refusal of an American loan to France and a bribe for French Foreign Minister Talleyrand himself. It appeared that Adams was not surprised at this XYZ affair. He recognized, from his experience in Europe, that it was true that a man might "serve his country by a bribe well placed, or an intrigue of pleasure with a woman."<sup>45</sup> Instead of a

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setback, the failure of the mission finally gave Adams an opportunity to enlarge the navy.

The publication of the XYZ dispatches made the American people's biases anti-French. Federalist congressmen utilized these sentiments to enact the "war measures." In April, 1798, the Department of Navy was created, separately from the War Department. Adams signed the Non-Intercourse Act, on June 13, which made it illegal for Americans to trade with France and her possessions. On July 7, the President signed an act abrogating all treaties with France. The measure passed the Senate by a vote of 14 to 5 with more than a third of the members, mostly Republicans, absent.

Against Adams' principle that America should avoid involvement in any European war, a limited war started between America and France, mainly in the Caribbean. It seems that Adams did not regard it as a formal war, rather he regarded it as merely "controversies with France." While the "war measures" were being enacted in Congress, Adams left the door unlocked for diplomatic negotiations with France. He was convinced that "efficient preparations for war" could alone ensure peace and give America "an equal treaty." Therefore, while Adams suggested the possibility of "an amicable settlement of all controversies with France," he recommended in December, 1798, that America would lay the foundation to enlarge her navy, "to a size sufficient to guard" the American coast and protect American commerce "without loss of time."<sup>46</sup>

Adams held the maxim that it was necessary to have "early, punctual, and continual" information of the political projects in contemplation in order to keep America separate from the European political system. He was kept informed about European situations by his son, John Quincy Adams, and William Vans Murray, an American minister to the Batavian Republic. They both described France's change of attitude toward the United States. Talleyrand indicated his willingness to negotiate with

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America because he entertained a great vision for building a colonial empire in the Mississippi Valley. He feared that a premature war with America and an Anglo-American alliance against France would spoil his vision. Talleyrand thought it wise to preserve peace with America.<sup>47</sup>

Convinced of the authenticity of the French overtures, Adams acted independently for peace with France by refusing to extend the "controversies with France" to a general war at the bidding of High Federalists. There were many differences between Hamilton and Adams, but the decisive one concerned the two men's military policies. While Hamilton manifested a passion for a large army, Adams emphasized on a strong navy. Hamilton wanted a sizable army because he wanted to join in the further expansion of the British empire in the Western Hemisphere. High Federalists sided with Hamilton, favoring army over navy. They wished to use the army as a political instrument, especially to maintain the Federalist Party in power. This could not be done with a navy. Furthermore, they were optimistic about the present maritime defense, believing that a navy was not necessary because the British fleets would protect American ships.

Pickering, Wolcott and McHenry, who favored war with France, thought that America would cooperate with England to drive the French from the West Indies. In Saint Domingue, former slaves led by Toussaint L'Ouverture drove French planters from their island in 1793. England was looking for an opportunity to conquer the island. Profit derived from trade with Saint Domingue, which produced as much sugar as all the British West Indies together, also attracted Americans to the island. Toussaint's revolt ended the export trade, but it could not stop the American from desiring to gain great profits from the cheap sugar of Saint Domingue.

When Britain proposed that England and America should control Saint Domingue through a joint commercial company, as

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early as January of 1799, Adams refused such a joint action or alliance with England. He believed that control of Saint Domingue by a joint commercial company would "excite alarms and jealousies in Spain and Holland, such as will attach them and subject them entirely to France," and that the result might subject America more to the British policy.<sup>48</sup> He did not want involvement in the diplomatic maneuvering of the European powers. As long as the American navy was not strong enough to defend the great profits derived from the Caribbean trade, Adams wanted to produce a balance of power on the seas in the Caribbean. For the same reason, he did not desire the independence of Saint Domingue either. The best circumstance would be, he thought, the West Indian Islands "under the government of England, France, Spain, or Holland all together, and least of all under the same powers in parcels and divisions, as they are now."<sup>49</sup> American commerce without a strong navy to protect it could prosper if the balance of power in the European political system was maintained. The British offer for joint control of Saint Domingue with America reinforced Adams' desire to establish a strong navy in America to keep America from becoming dependent on Great Britain.

In France, the coup d'etat of the 18th Brumaire abolished the Directory and put France under the control of Napoleon Bonaparte as First Consul. Bonaparte wanted peace with America only to build a French colonial empire there. For doing so, Bonaparte deemed three steps necessary: amity with America, the Spanish retrocession of Louisiana and the Floridas, and, finally, victory in war with England. Consequently, the diplomatic negotiations began between France and America on April 2, 1800.

When he made a speech to Congress, on November 22, 1800, Adams was still in the dark as to the result of the mission to France, though the Convention of Peace, Commerce and Navigation was signed on September 30. He urged that Americans

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should not abandon measures of self-protection. As long as predatory war was carried on against American commerce, the system of maritime defense ought to be employed with effect. He emphasized that America should not "for a moment" relax her endeavors to strengthen maritime defense. He was afraid that the American people might give up their attempts to build a strong navy by signing the treaty with France. Although the American navy was called "suddenly into existence by a great national exigency," Adams tried to remind the American people that a well organized navy alone could maintain the efficient defense of America to protect American property "committed to the ocean." He was sure that an American policy of maritime defense would make America a rival to any European naval power "not only in the number, but in the quality of arms," and that it would raise America "in the esteem of foreign nations."<sup>50</sup>

John Adams' principle of foreign affairs was that the United States keep her connection with European powers purely commercial, and that she separate herself, "as far as possible and as long as possible," from all European politics and wars. He said to Benjamin Rush, in a letter of September 30, 1805, that it was this principle that invariably guided Adams in conducting diplomacy from the very beginning when he initiated his principle in the Model Treaty to the time he was writing this letter to Rush.<sup>51</sup>

Adams' principle of foreign affairs implied that commercial expansion was the key to national wealth. Adams, thus, devoted his energies to build a commercial empire in America of her own. But, during the times of his diplomatic services in France, Holland, and England, as well as, during his office as the President of the United States of America, his country was young and weak. Consequently, Adams placed his emphasis on the creation and strengthening of the American navy, while

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exploiting the policy of neutrality in the European political system. Late in life, John Adams offered Thomas Jefferson the title of the father of the American navy, and Jefferson accepted it. But, it was Adams who deserved to be called the father of the American navy because he had employed the American navy first in the defense of commerce.

### Notes

- 1) Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 56-69.
- 2) James H. Hutson, *John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky, 1980), pp. 145, 147, 155.
- 3) William Appleman Williams, "The Age of Mercantilism: An Interpretation of the American Political Economy, 1763 to 1828," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. XV (October 1958), pp. 420-421.
- 4) Hutson, P.4
- 5) Gerald Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin and American Foreign Policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p.54.
- 6) John Adams to Hendrik Calkoen, October 17 and October 27, 1780, Charles F. Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, 10 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1850-1856), 7:294, 311; hereafter cited as *Works*,
- 7) *Ibid.*, October 6, 1780, 7:272-273; October 26, 1780, 7:298.
- 8) *Ibid.*, October 7, 1780, 7:274-275; Adams' speech to Congress, November 23, 1797, 9:122.
- 9) Hutson, p.6.
- 10) *Works*, 2:488-489.
- 11) Adams to Calkoen, October 5, 1780, *ibid.*, 7:269.
- 12) Hutson, pp. 147-148.
- 13) Adams to John M. Jackson, December 30, 1817, *Works*, 10:269.
- 14) John Adams, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield et al., 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1961-1966), 2:236, 3:337-338; Robert J. Taylor, ed., *Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), vol. 4, p.266.
- 15) *Diary*, 3:329.
- 16) Adams to Ralph Izard, October 2, 1778, *Works*, 7:55.

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- 17) Adams' speech to Congress, May 16, 1797, *ibid.*, 9:117.
- 18) Adams to Benjamin Franklin, August 17, 1780, *ibid.*, 7:248.
- 19) Adams to the President of Congress, August 4, 1779, *ibid.*, 7:103.
- 20) Adams to M. Genet, April 29, 1780, *ibid.*, 7:156.
- 21) *Ibid.*
- 22) *Ibid.*
- 23) *Ibid.*
- 24) Quoted in Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address*, pp. 107-110.
- 25) Adams to the President of Congress, April 18, 1780, *Works*, 7:151.
- 26) *Ibid.*, August 4, 1779, 7:102-103.
- 27) Adams to Franklin, August 17, 1780, *ibid.*, 7:247.
- 28) Adams to Calkoen, October 17, 1780, *ibid.*, 7:294-295, 299.
- 29) Adams to Jay, May 8, 1785, *ibid.*, 8:245.
- 30) *Diary*, 3:60-61.
- 31) Adams to the President of Congress, September 5, 1783, *Works*, 8:145.
- 32) *Ibid.*, March 12, 1780, 7:131-132.
- 33) Adams' speech to Congress, May 16, 1797, *ibid.*, 9:117.
- 34) Adams to Livingston, July 13, 1783, *ibid.*, 8:95-96.
- 35) Adams to the President of Congress, March 9, 1784, *ibid.*, 8:189-190.
- 36) *Ibid.*, November 3, 1784, 8:211-212; to Jay, December 15, 1784, 8:218.
- 37) Adams to Willink, January 10, 1785, *ibid.*, 8:220.
- 38) Adams' speech to Congress, November 23, 1797, *ibid.*, 9:127.
- 39) *Ibid.*, May 16, 1797, 9:116.
- 40) Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France 1797-1801* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), pp. 124-125.
- 41) Adams' inaugural speech to Congress, March 4, 1797, *Works*, 9:109-110.
- 42) Adams' speech to Congress, May 16, 1797, *ibid.*, 9:112-114.
- 43) *Ibid.*, 9:115.
- 44) *Ibid.*, November 23, 1797, 9:122-123.
- 45) Adams to Livingston, February 5, 1783, *ibid.*, 8:39.
- 46) Adams' speech to Congress, December 8, 1798, *ibid.*, 9:130-131.
- 47) Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973), pp. 98-99.
- 48) Adams to Timothy Pickering, April 17, 1799, *Works*, 8:634-635.
- 49) *Ibid.*
- 50) Adams' speech to Congress, November 22, 1800, *ibid.*, 9:145, 149.
- 51) *Ibid.*, 1:200.