Chapter 12
Foreign Affairs in the Young America

To what extent should the United States have become involved in world affairs in the early 1800s?

Section 1 Introduction

President Washington: Isolationism as a Foreign Policy

When George Washington took office as the nation’s first president in 1789, the United States Army that Washington had commanded during the American Revolution has disbanded. It had not been replaced for two reasons. First, the government did not have money to keep its army active. Second, Americans had feared that a standing national army could be used to take away their liberty, as the king had done in the past. So, they believed that state militia troops could handle any threats the country.

The nation was surrounded by threats of unfriendly powers. To the north, Great Britain still controlled Canada. The British also refused to abandon their forts in the Ohio Valley area, even though this region belonged to the United States according to the Treaty of Paris of 1763. To the south and west, Spain controlled Florida and Louisiana. (See map on the next page)

Events in Europe also threatened our new nation. In 1789, the French rose up against their king in a revolutionary war and declared that France would be a republic. Most Americans were thrilled by the French revolution. However, in 1793, France declared a war against Great Britain. The war between France and Great Britain presented President Washington with a difficult problem of deciding which side to take.

The United States signed a Treaty of Alliance with France in 1788. Alliances are agreements made with other nations to aid and support each other. In the treaty, the United States had promised to aid (help or support) France in time of war. Many Americans were happy to honor at this pledge and help out the nation that supported them during the American Revolution.

Washington knew that the United States was not prepared for war. Instead he announced a policy of neutrality. Neutrality is a policy of not choosing sides in a dispute or war between other countries. Under this policy, the United States would do nothing to aid either France or Great Britain in this war.

Before leaving office, Washington summed up his foreign policy in the Farewell Address to the nation. So United States could gain nothing by becoming involved in other nations affairs. He declared, “It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.” Washington’s policy of avoiding alliances with other countries became known as isolationism. Isolationism is a policy of avoiding or military agreements with other countries. For the next century, isolationism would be the foundation of the US foreign policy.
North American Land Claims in 1796
Section 2- Washington’ and Adam’s Dilemma in Protecting U.S. Ships

Isolationism sounded good in theory. But it often was hard for the first 5 presidents to stay out of other countries conflicts. The next sections will explain how each president dealt with foreign policy issues. We will compare each president’s reaction on a spectrum of isolationism.

Jay Treaty

Washington himself found that isolationism would be difficult starting with Great Britain. Great Britain refused to leave the Ohio Valley area. The French secretly hope that this would lead to war between Great Britain and the United States. Washington sent the US chief justice of the Supreme Court, John Jay, to London to settle the Ohio Valley issues with Britain. Do United States and Great Britain signed a treaty in 1794 known, as the Jay Treaty that stated the British would pull their troops from the Ohio Valley area.

Even though Jay Treaty avoided war between the U.S. and Great Britain, examine the political cartoons that came out of the event. How did some people view the treaty?
The XYZ affair

John Adams won the election of 1796. He defeated Thomas Jefferson with just 3 votes. John Adams, our second president, also had difficulty with isolationism. France viewed the Jay Treaty as a violation of its own treaty with United States that was made back in 1778. In July of 1796, the French Navy began attacking US merchant ships heading to Great Britain. Over the next year, the French war ships seized 316 American ships.

President Adams sent several envoys or representatives, to France to ask the French to end the attacks. The French foreign minister refused to speak to the Americans. Instead, the US representatives were met by secret agents that were identified only as X, Y, and Z. The agent said that no peace talks would be held unless the French minister received a large sum of money as a tribute. A 

**tribute** is money given to someone in exchange for that person’s protection. The US representatives were shocked by the request and refused to pay the tribute.

The XYZ affair outraged Americans when the story reached home. President Adams requested Congress to recruit 10,000 men for in an army. Congress approved and also voted to build 12 new ships for the nations tiny Navy. Their slogan against France was, “Millions for defense but not one cent for tribute!”

Congress authorized US warships and privately owned ships to launch what was known as the “half war” at sea. During this undeclared war, American ships captured more than 80-armed French vessels. During this undeclared war, American ships captured more than 80-armed French vessels (ships).

Adams Pursues Peace

President Adams, a federalist, was never a while love leader. But with the half war, he found himself gaining popularity among many parts of the country. President John Adams knew that no matter how good positive the war might be for the Federalist Party, it would not be good for the country. In February 1799, he announced that he was sending a group of men to France to work for peace. Other federalist leaders were furious. They pleaded with the president of changed his mind, but Adam’s would not budge. At the same time, The French military leader named **Napoleon Bonaparte** had taken over the French government and was eager to make peace with both great Britain and the United States. He ordered the French Navy to stop seizing American ships and to release captured American sailors.

France and the United States wrote a **new treaty in 1800**. Napoleon agreed to end the 1778 Alliance with the United States. In exchange, he asked the Americans not to ask for payment for all the ships/cargo that had been seized by the French. This meant that the United States government would have to pay American ship owners for any of their property loss during the French seizures. Adams felt that this was a small price to pay for peace with France.

When Adams chose peace over war, it cost him his political popularity. The pursuit for peace also created strong disagreements within the Federalist Party. These disagreements lead to John Adams loss for reelection in 1800. Thomas Jefferson defeated Adams in the election and became our third president. After the Adams versus Jefferson election, the Federalist Party lost much of its support and over the next few years the Federalist Party slowly faded away.
Side Note:

**Election of 1800**

A tie in the electoral college resulted in a deadlock in the election of 1800. To avoid such a result in future elections, Congress passed the Twelfth Amendment.

Since there was a tie in the original election, the Constitution sends the election to the House of Representatives. There, each state gets one vote. There was another tie!!! So they voted again and Hamilton casted the last vote that broke the tie. He voted for Adams.

According to the original wording of the Constitution, Thomas Jefferson became Adam’s vice-president. This caused major issues since the two ran dirty negative campaigns against each other during the run for president. Now the two top leaders of the nations were from two opposing political parties and had to work together. This major issue was also resolved in the 12th amendment.