

A REPUBLICAN ABROAD:
JOHN ADAMS AND THE DIPLOMACY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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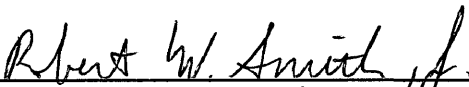
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to determine how John Adams's political philosophy influenced his ideas on diplomacy, and how his experiences as a diplomat during the American Revolution affected his political philosophy.

John Adams was a republican, which, among other things, meant that he was committed to the idea of a balance between branches of government to preserve liberty. Similarly, Adams believed that a balance of power among nations was necessary to preserve American independence. Adams also believed that virtue was necessary for a republic. However, as the United States became more dependent on its French ally, Adams came to realize that Americans were not especially virtuous, and believed even more in the need for a balance of power. Political philosophy and diplomatic experience reinforced each other, in that they both led Adams to the conclusion that a balance of power was essential to preserve liberty and independence.

A REPUBLICAN ABROAD:

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout his public career, John Adams remained a committed republican. Republicanism, to Adams and his contemporaries, meant more than just abolishing a hereditary monarch and nobility. Republicanism was an ideology that shaped the way its adherents viewed the world. Belief in the eternal struggle between power and liberty, and in the need for public virtue to support liberty, were at the center of republican ideology.¹ John Adams's thought fell within these general guidelines, and Adams made the need for a balance of power to preserve liberty a central theme in his theoretical works on government.

In neither his 1776 pamphlet Thoughts on Government nor his 1787-1788 book A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America does Adams discuss the nature of republican diplomacy. However, republican ideology led Adams to view domestic and foreign

¹Robert E. Shalhope. "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, Vol. XXXIX, no. 2 (April, 1982). p.334-335.

policy in the same light. If republican ideology taught Adams to fear the powers of his native government, it taught him to fear foreign powers even more. Adams concluded that the United States could not afford to help either France or Great Britain become the predominant power in the world. In actual operation, Adams's pursuit of a balance of power diplomacy looked like traditional British diplomacy. However, British diplomacy had no philosophical basis, and was based on practicality, not ideology.² Adams arrived at a belief in a balance of power by viewing the world through a republican lens.

Adams was not as certain about American virtue as he was about the need for a balance of power. Adams veered between optimism about American virtue in 1775 and 1776 and a deep pessimism in the 1780s. During his first five years in Europe, Adams saw the Continental Congress as increasingly indecisive and subservient to France. Adams, like many Americans, considered the years 1775 and 1776 a golden age of virtue, and that whatever special virtue the Americans had was used up in the drive toward independence.³ Adams's fear of a decline in American virtue is evident in his letters home from Europe between

²David Bayne Horn. Great Britain and Europe in the Eighteenth Century (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 383.

³Edmund S. Morgan. "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, Vol. XXIV, no. 1 (January, 1967). p.19.

1778 and 1788. His Defence of the Constitutions is the fullest expression of his belief in the ability and the necessity of a balanced government to counteract the lack of virtue.

While in Europe, Adams faced the task of preserving the independence and potential for growth of a small power by playing two larger powers against each other. Adams hoped to use the United States's only real weapon, its trade, to lure France into the war by offering the French a chance to increase their power relative to Great Britain. Later, when a close connection with France threatened to suffocate the newborn United States, Adams again used American trade to force Great Britain to come to terms, lest the United States permanently cast its lot with the French. As a republican at home, Adams sought to preserve liberty through a balanced constitution. As a republican abroad, Adams sought to preserve American independence by balancing France against Great Britain, by making American trade too valuable for one power to let the other dominate it. Adams pursued a diplomacy that was traditionally British in operation, but republican in outlook.

PART I

A VIRTUOUS REPUBLIC

John Adams, like many Americans in the Revolutionary era, believed that America was set apart from other nations and had a special mission. "I always consider the settlement of America with Reverence and Wonder," wrote Adams in an unused fragment from his 1765 pamphlet, A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, "as the Opening of a grand scene and design in Providence, for the Illumination of the Ignorant and the Emancipation of the slavish Part of Mankind all over the Earth."⁴ This belief came in part from Adams' cyclical view of history, where one nation would rise, have its day as a great empire, and then give way to another nation. The center of power passed from Assyria to Egypt to Greece to Rome to France to England. America was the next step, as America was a young nation, just beginning its rise to power. Each new empire built on the previous one, and America would build her empire on British ruins. The American Revolution

⁴John Adams. Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, 4 vols. L.H. Butterfield, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 1:257.

marked the first step toward its goal.⁵ In this way, the American Revolution was an act of self-preservation: the only way to preserve American power and virtue was to break away from a declining Great Britain.⁶

How to preserve American liberty against all efforts at tyranny, both foreign and domestic, was the problem that faced John Adams throughout the American Revolution. Adams found his solution in the concept of balance. To prevent domestic attempts at tyranny, Adams advocated a constitution of separate branches, with power balanced among them. To prevent foreign encroachments on American liberty, Adams advocated American participation in the European balance of power, not by engaging in Europe's wars, but by making American independence too valuable to all European powers for any one power to threaten it.

Adams shared the Whig notion that the central question of politics was the distribution of power. Whig theory defined the minimum amount of power each man deserved as liberty. To maintain liberty, power must be dispersed as widely as possible, so that no one would receive more than his share.⁷ For Adams, power was the ability to control

⁵John R. Howe, Jr. The Changing Political Thought of John Adams (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 36-44.

⁶Gordon S. Wood. The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 108.

⁷ibid, 21-22.

others. Power was naturally aggressive and expansive, and gained at the expense of liberty and right.⁸ Adams, in A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, described power as the "Desire of Dominion, that encroaching, grasping, restless and ungovernable Principle which has made so much Havock and Desolation."⁹ "Power naturally grows. Why?" Adams wrote to Roger Sherman. "Because human passions are insatiable. But that power alone can grow which is already too great; that which is unchecked; that which has no equal to control it."¹⁰ This fear of unchecked power, and the historical examples of Julius Caesar and Oliver Cromwell, led to a fear of standing armies.¹¹

A balanced republic could restrain power, but, Adams believed, a republic had to be founded on virtue.¹² "The Preservation of Liberty depends upon the intellectual and moral Character of the People," Adams wrote in his notes for a speech in Braintree in 1772. "As long as Knowledge and Virtue are diffused generally among the Body of a Nation, it is impossible they should be enslaved."¹³

⁸Bernard Bailyn. The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 55-59.

⁹John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 1:255-256.

¹⁰John Adams to Roger Sherman, July 18, 1789, in John Adams, The Works of John Adams, 10 Vols. Charles Francis Adams, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1850-1856), 6:431.

¹¹Bailyn, Ideological Origins of American Revolution, 63.

¹²Peter Shaw. The Character of John Adams (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 92.

¹³John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 2:58.

People who remained virtuous and vigilant were able to balance the forces in society and maintain their liberty. Americans praised the British constitution for its ability to balance the forces of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, represented by the crown, lords and commons.¹⁴ However, in the late-eighteenth century the British seemed to have lost their virtue. The degeneration of the British people allowed the crown to grow too powerful, and the crown in turn corrupted the House of Lords and House of Commons, destroying the balance of power.¹⁵ The republics of Greece and Rome had similarly grown corrupt and fallen in turn, as the loss of freedom quickly followed the loss of virtue.¹⁶ But were the Americans up to the task? Did they have enough virtue to maintain a republic? Adams always had doubts about American virtue, doubts that became more pronounced over time. However, in the 1770s, Adams believed the Americans were virtuous, or at least that the American Revolution would create virtue. "It may be the Will of Heaven that America shall suffer Calamaties still more wasting and Distresses yet more dreadfull," Adams wrote to his wife Abigail after Congress agreed to declare independence; "If this be the Case, it will have this good

¹⁴Bailyn, Ideological Origins of American Revolution, 65-77.

¹⁵Wood, Creation of the American Republic, 52.

¹⁶H. Trevor Colbourn. The Lamp of Experience (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 25.

Effect, at least: it will inspire Us with many Virtues, which We have not, and correct many Errors, Follies, and Vices, which threaten to disturb, dishonour, and destroy Us."¹⁷

One reason the Americans had the capacity for virtue was that they were a young and agricultural people. Adams sympathized with the French Physiocratic view that land ownership was the basis of wealth.¹⁸ Adams preferred agriculture even to New England's lifeblood, the fishing industry. Although Adams agreed the fisheries were a prime source of wealth, he wrote to Ralph Izard, "Agriculture is the most essential interest of America, and even of the Massachusetts Bay, and it is very possible to injure both, by diverting too much of the Thoughts and Labor of the People, from the cultivation of the Earth, to Adventures upon the Sea."¹⁹ Adams believed commerce tended to subvert virtue, and hence subvert republicanism. He wrote of the "Spirit of Commerce," to Mercy Otis Warren, arguing this spirit was, "incompatible with that purity of

¹⁷John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 3, 1776, in L.H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender, eds. Adams Family Correspondence, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963-1973), 2:28.

¹⁸Zoltan Haraszti. John Adams and the Prophets of Progress (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 11.

¹⁹John Adams to Ralph Izard, Sept. 25, 1778, in John Adams, Papers of John Adams, 8 vols. to date. Robert J. Taylor, et al, eds. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977- .),7:73.

Heart, and Greatness of soul, which is necessary for a happy Republic."²⁰

Adams did have his doubts about American virtuousness. Through the study of moral philosophers, and his own observations, Adams saw that emotion often ruled over reason.²¹ Americans were not immune. "Virtue and Simplicity of Manners are indispensably necessary in a Republic, among all orders of Men," Adams wrote to Mercy Otis Warren, "But there is so much Rascallity, so much Venality and Corruption, so much Avarice and Ambition, such a rage for Profit and Commerce among all Ranks and Degrees of Men even in America, that I sometimes doubt whether there is public virtue enough to support a Republic."²² However, the high ideals of the Revolution helped temporarily remove those doubts. "Human nature, with all its infirmities and deprevation, is capable of great things," he wrote Abigail, "it is capable of attaining to degrees of wisdom and of goodness, which we have reason to believe, appear respectable in the estimation of superior intelligences."²³

Given that all men seek to acquire power, and that

²⁰John Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, April 16, 1776, in John Adams, Papers, 4:125

²¹Howe, Changing Political Thought of John Adams, 16-18.

²²John Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, Jan. 8, 1776, in John Adams, Papers, 3:398.

²³John Adams to Abigail Adams, Oct. 29, 1775, in Butterfield and Friedlaender, eds. Adams Family Correspondence, 1:317.

even the most virtuous should not be trusted with unlimited power, a republic had to balance power and uphold the rule of law.²⁴ To Adams, an example of such a republic was the British constitution. Adams wrote in his "Novanglus" essays in early 1775 that the "republican spirit ... is a spirit of true virtue and independence. ... This spirit is so far from being incompatible with the British constitution, that it is the greatest glory of it, and the nation has always been most prosperous when it has most prevailed and been most encouraged by the crown."²⁵ Adams concluded from this observation that, "the British constitution is much more like a republic than an empire. They [Aristotle, Livy and Harrington] define a republic to be a government of laws, and not of men. If this definition is just, the British constitution is nothing more or less than a republic, in which the king is nothing more than the first magistrate."²⁶

The American Revolution did not intend to destroy society as it stood under the British constitution. Indeed, in the face of British decay, the Americans sought to preserve the British constitution, even if the British themselves chose to abandon it.²⁷ The problem now facing

²⁴Howe, Changing Political Thought of John Adams, 90-93.

²⁵"Novanglus," Jan.-April, 1775, in John Adams, Papers, 2:278.

²⁶"Novanglus," Jan.-April, 1775, in ibid, 2:314.

²⁷Bailyn, Ideological Origins of American Revolution, 19.

Adams and other American leaders was how to construct a government that could maintain a social order in the midst of a potentially socially disruptive event such as the American Revolution.²⁸ Adams believed he found his answer in a balanced government, something of a purified British constitution. Adams wrote to Richard Henry Lee, "a Legislative, an Executive and a judicial Power, comprehend all of what is meant and understood by Government. It is by balancing each of these Powers against the other two, that the effort in human Nature towards Tyranny alone can be checked and restrained and any degree of Freedom preserved in the Constitution." Adams recommended that the lower house of the legislature be popularly elected, that the upper house, or council, should be chosen by the lower house, and that the governor should be chosen by both houses.²⁹

Adams expanded on these ideas in his first theoretical work, Thoughts on Government, which began as a letter to George Wythe and emerged as a pamphlet in April of 1776.³⁰ Adams implied virtue was necessary to implement his model, writing that, "the noblest principles and most generous affections in our nature then, have the fairest

²⁸Howe, Changing Political Thought of John Adams, 7-8.

²⁹John Adams to Richard Henry Lee, Nov. 15, 1775, in John Adams, Papers, 3:307.

³⁰"Thoughts on Government," editorial note, in John Adams, Papers, 4:65-66.

chance to support the noblest and most generous models of government." Adams linked his ideas of the republican nature of the British constitution to his theory of government, and emphasized the rule of law. He wrote, "that form of government, which is best contrived to secure an impartial and exact execution of the laws, is the best of Republics."³¹

Adams' suspicion of human nature led him to advocate a bicameral legislature. "A single assembly is liable to all the vices, follies and frailties of an individual," wrote Adams, "subject to fits of humour, starts of passion, flights of enthusiasm, partialities of prejudice, and consequently productive of hasty results and absurd judgement." However, a properly balanced government could act as guarantor of virtue. Adams advocated laws for promoting education, and, to keep the spirit of luxury and commerce under control, sumptuary laws. "Frugality is a great revenue," wrote Adams, "besides curing us of vanities, levities, and fopperies which are antidotes to all great, manly and warlike virtues."³² A constitution, Adams concluded, could be a great inspiration to the people. A properly designed constitution could, "make the

³¹"Thoughts on Government," in ibid, 4:86-87.

³²"Thoughts on Government," in ibid, 4:88, 91.

common people brave and enterprizing. That ambition which is inspired by it makes them sober, industrious, and frugal."³³

In 1779, between his two tours of duty in Europe, Adams had the opportunity to design a government for Massachusetts. Adams' contributions to constitution-making included the division of the constitution into articles and sections.³⁴ Adams, in the preamble, again emphasized the rule of law, writing that the constitution was to "provide for an equitable mode of making laws, as well as for an impartial interpretation; and a faithful execution of them, that every man, at all times, find his security in them."³⁵ Adams included many of his ideas from "Thoughts on Government," such as a bicameral legislature, an independent judiciary, a strong executive, and, to encourage virtue, support for public education.³⁶

The constitution of Massachusetts marked the most concrete of Adams' efforts to establish balanced government, and, like Adams' earlier works, reflects a fair amount of optimism about American virtue, with some safeguards to prevent, or at least mitigate, a decline in virtue. However, Adams' years abroad brought out more fully

³³"Thoughts on Government," in *ibid*, 4:92.

³⁴Massachusetts Constitution, editorial note, in *ibid*, 8:231.

³⁵Massachusetts Constitution, in *ibid*, 8:237.

³⁶Massachusetts Constitution, in *ibid*, 8:237-261.

his pessimism about American virtue. By the mid-1780's, Adams changed some his perceptions about America, especially in regard to American virtue and American commercial activity.

PART II

A COMMERCIAL REPUBLIC

During John Adams's time in Europe, his views of America had changed, or rather, he believed that America itself had changed. By the 1780s Adams put his faith more in virtuous leaders than in the virtue of the American people. Adams concluded that the American people were not especially virtuous and could not escape the common fate of Europe.³⁷ America's failure to overcome French influence in foreign affairs was a result of the loss of virtue.³⁸ Adams held out little hope for a moral regeneration. "Moral Reflections, wise Maxims, religious Terrors, have little effect upon Nations when they contradict present Passion, Prejudice, Imagination, Enthusiasm or Caprice," Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson; "I have long been settled in my own opinions, that neither Philosophy, nor Religion, nor Morality, nor Wisdom, nor Interest, will ever govern nations or Parties, against their Vanity, their Pride, their Resentment, or Revenge, or their Avarice or Ambition.

³⁷Wood, Creation of the American Republic, 569-574.

³⁸Howe, Changing Political Thought of John Adams, 130-131.

Nothing but force and Power and Strength can restrain them."³⁹ If American society was not virtuous, Adams and other American leaders had to determine what American society was and how to organize a republic around it.

Adams, like other American thinkers, believed each society passed through four stages: hunting, pasturage, agriculture and commerce. Commercial society brought wealth and sophistication, but also brought luxury, which undermined virtue. Thomas Jefferson and his supporters believed that a republic could exist only at stage three. Jefferson believed that European nations turned to manufacturing and commerce only when they ran out of arable land. The United States had enough land to grow wealthy from agriculture, and therefore need not turn to manufacturing.⁴⁰ Therefore, Jefferson preferred farming as a profession, almost to the total exclusion of manufacturing and shipping. In his famous Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson wrote that, "those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue." Manufacturing had no place in Jefferson's America, and he preferred to

³⁹John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Oct. 9, 1787, in Lester J. Cappon, ed. The Adams-Jefferson Letters (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 202-203.

⁴⁰Drew R. McCoy. The Elusive Republic (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 10, 14, 19-22.

"let our work-shops remain in Europe."⁴¹ Jefferson did favor commerce, but to Jefferson "commerce" meant transporting American agricultural products to Europe. How they got there was of little importance, and Jefferson seems to have wanted Europeans rather than Americans to do the carrying. Jefferson wrote to John Jay that Americans should be farmers, and while there was land to till, "I would not convert them into mariners." Further, Jefferson argued, if Americans engaged in the carrying trade, the United States would be dragged into Europe's wars. Jefferson preferred that "foreign nations ... be invited to bring us what we want and to take our productions in their own bottoms."⁴² On the other end of the spectrum, Alexander Hamilton wanted the United States to move into stage four, the commercial and manufacturing stage. Hamilton foresaw a great nation based on industrial and financial power rather than agrarian virtue. Unlike Jefferson, Hamilton rejected the model of the classical republic.⁴³

John Adams can be seen something of a transitional figure in this debate. Adams might have railed against the

⁴¹Thomas Jefferson. Notes on the State of Virginia (1787). William Peden, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), 164-165.

⁴²Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, Aug. 23, 1785, in Thomas Jefferson, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 8. Julian Boyd, ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), 426-427.

⁴³McCoy, Elusive Republic, 132-134.

"spirit of commerce" in his early writings, but he sought to control its effects, not eliminate commerce. Adams might have sympathized with Jefferson's agrarianism as an ideal, but he believed that America was already a commercial nation.⁴⁴ "Our Country is grown," Adams lamented to Cotton Tufts.⁴⁵ The American character could not have changed so drastically between the 1770s and 1780s, and Adams concluded, like Hamilton, that the Americans had never been or would ever be fit for Samuel Adams' "Christian Sparta." America would probably be better off as a result.⁴⁶ "It is most certain that our Countrymen are not and never were, Spartans in their Contempt of Wealth, and I will go farther and say they ought not to be," Adams wrote to James Warren, "Such a trait in their Character would render them lazy Drones unfit for the Agriculture, Manufactures, Fisheries, and Commerce, and Population of their Country."⁴⁷

Adams believed a healthy American economy depended on agriculture, shipping, and manufactures. Unlike Jefferson, who wanted to depend on foreigners for the last two,

⁴⁴Howe, Changing Political Thought of John Adams, 133-134.

⁴⁵John Adams to Cotton Tufts, July 4, 1786, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Letterbook, reel 113.

⁴⁶McCoy, Elusive Republic, 71-72, 97.

⁴⁷John Adams to James Warren, July 4, 1786, in Warren-Adams Letters, 2 vols. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, LXXII-LXXIII, 1917-1925), 2:277.

Adams believed that the American economy should, as much as possible, be controlled by Americans. "I wish We were wise enough," Adams wrote to Cotton Tufts, "to depend on ourselves for every Thing, and upon them [Europeans] for nothing."⁴⁸ While Adams portrayed America as an agricultural nation to the Count de Vergennes, he also cited American interest in shipping, if, "only to carry the produce of their lands ... to the European market."⁴⁹

In his economic thought, Adams was no doubt influenced by the economic situation of New England in the eighteenth century. "My Practice as a Barrister in the Counties of Essex, Plymouth and Barnstable," Adams wrote in his autobiography, "had introduced me to more Knowledge both of the Cod and whale fisheries and their importance to the commerce and Naval Power of this Country than any other man possessed."⁵⁰ Adams's statement reflects the importance of fishing to New England. Not only did the fisheries give New England a "crop" for export, but by transporting fish in their own boats, New Englanders cut their trade deficit with Great Britain. Lack of agricultural products led New Englanders to develop America's first service industry, the

⁴⁸John Adams to Cotton Tufts, Dec. 9, 1780, Adams Family Papers, Letterbook, reel 102.

⁴⁹John Adams to the Count de Vergennes, quoted in Charles Francis Adams. The Life of John Adams, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott and Co., 1871), 1:460.

⁵⁰John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 4:5.

carrying trade, providing ships and cargo space for others. New Englanders engaged in farming and manufacturing to meet their immediate needs and made their money off the carrying trade.⁵¹ For Adams, the diverse New England economy reflected the future American economy. He wrote Rufus King, "Agriculture, Manufactures and Commerce with one another will make us flourish."⁵²

This statement is not to suggest that Adams shaped his republican beliefs around New England's economic interests. The advanced state of New England's economy gave Adams a perspective Jefferson did not have. Jefferson could look out his window and see the uncultivated land needed to keep America an agricultural republic and the corrupting influence of commerce away. Adams saw commerce already well-established and could, with less trouble, picture a commercial republic. If commercialism undermined virtue, Americans had to construct what Gordon Wood calls, "a new and original sort of republican government," one that did not depend on virtue for its success.⁵³

In many ways Adams's three-volume work, A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of

⁵¹John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard. The Economy of British America 1607-1789 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 72, 92, 100, 110.

⁵²John Adams to Rufus King, June 14, 1786, Adams Family Papers, Letterbook, reel 113.

⁵³Wood, Creation of the American Republic, 475.

America, published in 1787-1788, is an attempt to come to terms with the idea of a non-virtuous republic. Adams wrote the Defence in response to the French philosopher Turgot, who criticized the United States for following British forms too closely.⁵⁴ Adams responded by praising the British constitution, writing, "I only contend that the British constitution is, in theory ... the most stupendous fabric of human invention; and that the Americans ought to be applauded instead of censured, for imitating it as far as they have done."⁵⁵

J.G.A. Pocock calls Adams's Defence of the Constitutions the last major work of classical republicanism.⁵⁶ However, in the first passages, Adams noted the differences between the classical and modern worlds. "The inventions in mechanic arts, the discoveries in natural philosophy, navigation, and commerce, and the advancement of civilization and humanity," Adams wrote, "have occasioned changes in the condition of the world, which would have astonished the most refined nations of antiquity."⁵⁷ The most recent change, and probably among the most urgent to Adams, was the increase of wealth and commerce in the United States. Such a change would have

⁵⁴Howe, Changing Political Thought of John Adams, 166.

⁵⁵"Defence," vol. 1, in John Adams, Works, 4:358.

⁵⁶J.G.A. Pocock. The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 526.

⁵⁷"Defence," vol 1, in John Adams, Works, 4:283.

ruined a classical republic, but Adams believed that a balanced constitution could offset the effects of commerce in a modern republic. "In the late war, the Americans found an unusual quantity of money flow in upon them, without the least degree of prudence, foresight, consideration, or measure, rushed headlong into a greater degree of luxury than ought to have crept in for a hundred years," Adams wrote, "... In a country like America, where means and opportunities for luxury are so easy and so plenty, it would be madness not to expect it, be prepared for it, and provide against the dangers of it in the constitution."⁵⁸

Adams again portrayed a balanced government as guarantor of liberty. In Defence of the Constitutions, balance took on the tone of protecting the few and the many against each other. In a single assembly, commoner and noble would battle for power and destroy liberty. "Whether the assembly consists of a larger or smaller number of nobles or commons, of great people or little, of rich or poor, of substantial men or the rabble, the effects are all the same," Adams wrote, "No order, no safety, no liberty, because no government of law."⁵⁹ Adams again gave England as the best example of such a balanced government, writing,

⁵⁸"Defence," vol. 3, in ibid, 6:96.

⁵⁹"Defence," vol. 2, in ibid, 5:288-289.

"we have seen one of the first nations in Europe ... which has still preserved the power of the people by the equilibrium we are contending for, by the trial by jury, and by constantly refusing a standing army.⁶⁰

Unlike James Madison, Adams does not seem to have given much consideration to the amount of territory needed to maintain a balanced government. Madison, in the tenth Federalist, argued that a republic needed to be physically large to multiply and diffuse factions. "Extend the sphere," Madison wrote, "and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests."⁶¹ Adams sought to control parties within a balanced government. Adams, when discussing medieval Florence, blamed the fall of the Florentine republic on its unicameral legislature rather than its small size.⁶²

Adams had always hoped for a republic based on virtue. In Defence of the Constitutions, Adams argued that balance might compensate for the lack of virtue. "The best republics will be virtuous, and have been so; but we may hazard a conjecture, that the virtues have been the effects of a well-ordered constitution, rather than the cause," Adams wrote, "and perhaps it would be impossible to prove

⁶⁰"Defence," vol. 1, in ibid, 4:381-382.

⁶¹Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison. The Federalist. Jacob E. Cooke, ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 64.

⁶²"Defence," vol. 2, in John Adams, Works, 5:22.

that a republic cannot exist even among highwaymen, by setting one rogue to watch another: and the knaves themselves may be made honest by the struggle."⁶³ This represented Adams's final break with the classical world, that virtue was not necessary to start a republic. Adams believed virtue was still possible, but would not risk a government on it.

Adams' diplomatic career during the American Revolution reflects both the optimistic and pessimistic trends in his political philosophy. Because America was a young nation, Adams believed it should avoid the corruption of a European alliance. Even if American society was not as virtuous as Adams previously believed, Adams feared a foreign alliance would harm America by dragging it into European wars. Because Adams regarded America as a commercial nation, he sought to expand trade through the Model Treaty, protect the carrying trade by appealing to the Armed Neutrality, and protect American rights to the fisheries. Because Adams believed in the rule of law, he accepted the French alliance, and because Adams believed that leaders should be virtuous, he objected to Franklin's personal style of diplomacy. Above all, Adams believed that

⁶³"Defence," vol. 3, in *ibid*, 6:219.

American independence, like American liberty, could be preserved through a balance of power.

PART III

THE DIPLOMACY OF A SHORT WAR

1775-1776

John Adams believed in a balance of power in both government and international relations. Balance of power diplomacy fit into his conception that, as a force hostile to freedom, power had to be checked for freedom to survive. In the international arena, the unchecked power of one nation could threaten the freedom of others. Although Americans could create constitutions that balanced executive, legislative, and judicial powers at home, America could not as easily balance the power of Great Britain. Adams was certain that America would one day be as powerful as Great Britain, and his belief in America as a rising empire influenced his ideas of diplomacy. According to legend, the Pilgrims carved the phrase, "The eastern nations sink, their glory ends/ An empire rises where the sun descends," on Plymouth Rock. Adams believed the phrase, if not the legend. Adams had accepted Benjamin Franklin's

theory that the American population would double every 20 years.⁶⁴ Adams wrote in 1755, "if we can remove the turbulent Gallicks, our People according to the exactest Computations, will in another Century, become more numerous than England itself. Should this be the Case, since we have (I may say) all the naval stores of the Nation in our hands it will be easy to obtain mastery of the seas, and than the united force of all Europe will not be able to subdue us."⁶⁵ When the Britons became turbulent in 1775 and 1776, the Continental Congress faced the problem of how to shepherd this growing, but still weak, nation through the American Revolution without being destroyed by Great Britain. To Adams, in 1775 and 1776, the answer lay in creating a balance of power on the North American continent by conquering Canada, and a balance in diplomacy by using American commerce.

Adams fully supported the 1775 American invasion of Canada, writing in his autobiography that he was "wholly occupied" by its conduct.⁶⁶ Congress, in planning the invasion, had the dual political agenda of presenting a

⁶⁴James H. Hutson. John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 1-8.

⁶⁵John Adams to Nathan Webb, Oct. 12, 1755, in Adams, Papers, 1:5.

⁶⁶John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:327.

united front against Great Britain and appealing to the Canadians as fellow Americans suffering from British oppression.⁶⁷ Adams probably believed that strategic reasons for taking Canada were more important. France had used Canada as a base from which to attack British settlements. The Americans could expect the same from the British. "In the Hands of our Enemies, it [Canada] would enable them [the British] to influence all the Indians upon the Continent to take up the Hatchet," Adams wrote to James Warren, "and commit their Robberies and Murder upon the Frontiers of all the Southern Colonies as well as pour down Regulars Canadian and Indians together upon the Borders of the Northern."⁶⁸

Two different, and uncoordinated, American forces attacked Canada. In July of 1775, Congress ordered General Philip Schuyler to invest Fort Ticonderoga, and from there moved up the Richelieu River to Montreal. Schuyler remained at Ticonderoga until General Richard Montgomery advanced to Lake Champlain in September. George Washington, on his own accord, sent a force under Colonel Benedict Arnold from Cambridge, through Maine, to Canada.⁶⁹

The Americans were initially successful. Montgomery

⁶⁷Don Higginbotham. The War of American Independence (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 108.

⁶⁸John Adams to James Warren, Feb. 18, 1776, in John Adams, Papers, 4:28.

⁶⁹Higginbotham, War for Independence, 109-110.

lay seige to St. Johns in October, and took the fort after 55 days. General Sir Guy Carleton retreated before Montgomery's advancing force, and Montgomery took Montreal in November. Montgomery, upon learning that Arnold had reached Canada, left a garrison at Montreal and took 375 men to meet Arnold. Montgomery joined Arnold's 675 men on December 2, at Point aux Trembles, 20 miles from Quebec.⁷⁰

The Americans did not have enough supplies to lay seige to Quebec and had to attack before Arnold's troops, whose enlistments were up on December 31, left. The Americans attacked on the snowy night of December 30. The attack failed, and Montgomery was killed.⁷¹

In February 1776, Adams proposed a commission be sent to Canada. Congress selected Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Chase of Maryland, who supported the invasion of Canada, and two Catholics, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, a member of the Maryland safety committee, and John Carroll, a Jesuit priest.⁷² In the instructions to the commissioners, dated March 20, 1776, Adams took great pains to show that French Catholics would be welcome in a union with American Protestants. "You are to ... declare, that we

⁷⁰ibid, 111-112.

⁷¹ibid, 112-114.

⁷²Thomas O'Brien Hanley. Revolutionary Statesman: Charles Carroll and the War (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1983), 101-103, 109.

hold sacred the rights of conscience," Adams wrote, "and may promise the whole people, solemnly in our name, the free and unfettered exercise of their religion; and, to the clergy, the full, perfect, and peaceable possession and enjoyment of all their estates."⁷³

Upon reaching Canada, the commissioners realized their political mission was as hopeless as the military effort had become. Franklin noted that the French Catholics were hostile to America, and that at least half of the few Canadian Protestants were Loyalists. Franklin saw no reason to continue the mission and left Canada on May 11.⁷⁴

Before he left, the commissioners reported to President John Hancock that, if Congress had no hard money for the Canadian campaign, "it would be advisable, in our opinion, to withdraw our army and fortify the passes on the lakes to prevent the enemy, and the Canadians, if so inclined, from making irruptions into and depredations on our frontiers."⁷⁵ Charles Carroll wrote in his journal of the "bad prospect of our affairs in Canada."⁷⁶ Congress

⁷³Instructions to the Commissioners to Canada, March 20, 1776, in John Adams, Papers, 4:8.

⁷⁴Carl Van Doren. Benjamin Franklin (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), 546.

⁷⁵Benjamin Franklin. The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, vols. 22-27. William B. Wilcox and Claude A. Lopez, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982-1988), 22:418.

⁷⁶Charles Carroll. Journal of Charles Carroll of Carrollton. Brantz Meyer, ed. (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1876), 93.

learned of the failure of the Canadian mission in June. Adams blamed the loss of Canada on congressional indecision, lack of information regarding the political situation in Canada, lack of a competent general after Montgomery's death, and a general lack of supplies, money, men, and medicine.⁷⁷

As the Canadian debacle demonstrated, America could not defeat Great Britain completely on her own. America needed an ally, and the logical choice was France. However, the need for a foreign alliance created two problems. The first was whether an alliance should precede or follow formal independence. America was already acting like an independent nation. Would a formal declaration do any good, especially in view of the fact that America had no alliances?⁷⁸ Radicals like Samuel Adams urged Congress to charge forward. "Is not America already independent?" he wrote to Samuel Cooper; "Why then not declare it?"⁷⁹ Members opposed to independence feared that by cutting its last link to Great Britain, America would be at the mercy

⁷⁷John Adams to Samuel Cooper? June 9, 1776, in John Adams, Papers, 4:242-243.

⁷⁸Jack N. Rakove. The Beginnings of National Politics (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 89.

⁷⁹Samuel Adams to Samuel Cooper, April 3, 1776, in Paul H. Smith, ed. Letters of Delegates to Congress 1774-1789, 16 vols. to date (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1976- .), 3:481.

of foreign powers. "When We have bound ourselves to an eternal Quarrel with G.B. by a Declaration of Independence," John Dickinson said in his July 1, 1776, speech against independence, "France has nothing to do but hold back and intimidate G.B. till Canada is put into her Hands, then to intimidate Us into a most disadvantageous Grant of our Trade."⁸⁰ John Adams argued that, instead of needing a foreign alliance in order to declare independence, America needed formal independence before any nation would sign an alliance. "[F]oreign powers could not be expected to acknowledge Us," Adams wrote, "till We had acknowledged ourselves and taken our Station, among them as a sovereign Power, and Independent Nation."⁸¹ Adams dismissed Dickinson's fears of French domination, because America did not seek a political or military alliance. "I wish for nothing but Commerce," Adams wrote.⁸²

The second problem with a foreign alliance, more specifically a French alliance, was the question of the nature of such an alliance. Adams believed America should offer only a commercial treaty. Adams thought France, out of a desire to gain at British expense, would enter the war

⁸⁰John Dickinson's speech notes, July 1, 1776, in ibid, 4:354.

⁸¹John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:327.

⁸²John Adams to John Winthrop, June 23, 1776, in John Adams, Papers, 4:331-332.

without a formal military alliance. Besides, a political or military treaty might upset the international balance of power.⁸³ It was not in America's interest, Adams wrote in his autobiography, to enter into any European war, either to ally with France to destroy Great Britain, or to ally with Great Britain to destroy France. Americans learned after 1763 that freedom was in danger if any one nation became too powerful.⁸⁴ In March of 1776, Adams argued in Congress, "is any Assistance attainable from F[rance]? What Connection may We safely form with her? 1st. No Political Connection. Submit to none of her Authority -- receive no Governors, or Officers from her. 2d. No military Connection. Receive no Troops from her. 3d. Only a Commercial Connection."⁸⁵

Adams believed that American commerce would create a balance between Great Britain and France that would allow the United States to remain independent. All European nations would want American trade, as Thomas Paine put it, "while eating is the custom of Europe."⁸⁶ Adams wanted to break the British monopoly on American commerce, opening markets to France and other countries, as well as Great Britain. Both Great Britain and France would benefit from

⁸³Shaw, Character of John Adams, 281-282.

⁸⁴John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:329.

⁸⁵ibid, 2:236.

⁸⁶Thomas Paine. Common Sense (1776), (New York: The Viking Press, 1987), 83.

American commerce, and neither of them would attack the United States, for fear of retribution from the other.⁸⁷

Congress placed John Adams in charge of a committee to draft a treaty of alliance that would serve as the model for American treaties with European powers. The treaty became known as the Model Treaty. On September 17, 1776, Adams presented his draft of the Model Treaty. Adams, in writing the treaty, was influenced by the Treaty of Utrecht.⁸⁸ The 1713 Anglo-French Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the War of the Spanish Succession, gave mutual most-favored-nation status and established free navigation in the signatories' European possessions.⁸⁹ The Model Treaty's 30 articles guaranteed reciprocal trade, protection for each nation's ships in the other's ports, and a narrow definition of contraband -- excluding food and ships' stores -- that emphasized the principle of "free ships, free goods." The only military concessions were that the United States would remain neutral (rather than ally with Great Britain) if Great Britain declared war on France as a result of the treaty, and that the United States would not make a separate peace with Great Britain. Furthermore, the treaty barred France from taking any British colonies

⁸⁷Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 28-31.

⁸⁸Model Treaty, editorial note, in John Adams, Papers, 4:263.

⁸⁹Max Savelle. The Origins of American Diplomacy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), 150-151.

in North America.⁹⁰ Congress did permit some flexibility in presenting the treaty to France. On September 24, President Hancock informed the American commissioners in Paris that the article guaranteeing the safety of American ships in French harbors should be insisted upon. However, clauses relating to protection from the Barbary pirates and West Indian duties were not to hold up progress on signing the treaty. If asked to, the American envoys were allowed to give a more elaborate and explicit pledge not to ally with Great Britain if Great Britain declared war as a result of the treaty.⁹¹

American diplomacy to 1776 seems to have been based on the presumption that the revolution would be a short war. If America took Canada, Great Britain would have no foothold in North America and presumably would have to give in to American demands. It is possible that Congress believed that, when faced with the loss of American trade and the threat of French intervention, Great Britain would back down, preferring peace with an independent United States to war with both America and France. The Committee of Secret Correspondence wrote to the American commissioners in Paris that many believed, "the war might

⁹⁰Model Treaty, in John Adams, Papers, 4:265-277.

⁹¹Worthington Chauncey Ford, et al, eds. Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789, 34 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904-1937), 5:815.

soon be concluded, so were our military arrangements accommodated."⁹² However, the war was going badly. The Americans, as already seen, failed to take Canada. The British army, under General Sir William Howe, captured New York City, marched in triumph through New Jersey, and established winter quarters outside of Philadelphia. Congress fled to Baltimore.⁹³ Congress backed away from the Model Treaty. On December 30, the Committee of Secret Correspondence ordered the American commissioners to do whatever was needed to bring France or any other European nation into the war as soon as possible.⁹⁴ Despite John Adams's hopes and efforts, the United States could not win its independence without a military alliance. The question for Adams became less how to avoid plunging into European politics, and more how to plunge in without drowning American freedom.

⁹²The Committee of Secret Correspondence to the American Commissioners, Dec. 21-[23], 1776, in Benjamin Franklin, Papers, 23:51.

⁹³editorial note, in ibid, 23:96-97.

⁹⁴Committee of Secret Correspondence to the American Commissioners in Paris, December 30, 1776, in ibid, 23:97.

PART IV

JOHN ADAMS IN PARIS

1777-1779

The American envoys at Paris and John Adams moved at different paces toward the realization that the United States had to offer more than a commercial treaty to get France to enter the war. The Americans in Paris, Benjamin Franklin, Arthur Lee of Virginia, and Silas Deane of Connecticut, took the initiative in offering a closer connection. The Comte de Vergennes, the French foreign minister, saw the trap John Adams had laid for him. Vergennes knew that the United States wanted to deflect the war from the United States to Europe. If Adams intended to use France to secure American independence, Vergennes intended to use the United States to increase French power relative to Great Britain. To do this, Vergennes needed greater assurances that America would continue to fight.⁹⁵ The American commissioners moved to reassure

⁹⁵Gerald Stourzh. Benjamin Franklin and American Foreign Policy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 136-140.

Vergennes. In March 1777, they proposed that France and the United States share the Canadian fisheries, that France help the United States conquer continental British possessions in exchange for American help against the British West Indies, and that the United States declare war on British-allied Portugal if Spain entered the war on the American side.⁹⁶ John Adams held out against a close connection with France. "I have very often been ashamed to hear so many Whiggs groaning and sighing with Despondency, and whining out their Fears that We must be subdued unless France should step in," Adams wrote in disgust to James Warren, "Are We to be beholden to France for our Liberties?"⁹⁷

On November 7, 1777, Congress appointed John Adams to replace Silas Deane as a commissioner to France. Adams set sail on February 13, 1778.⁹⁸ Adams's mission accomplished nothing in terms of actual policy. However, the mission plunged Adams into personal and policy disputes that helped shape his view and system of diplomacy.

According to Charles Francis Adams, John Adams accepted the appointment to France, at the urging of congressional allies such as Henry Laurens, Richard Henry

⁹⁶The American Commissioners to Vergennes, March 14, 1777, in Franklin, Papers, 23:504-505.

⁹⁷John Adams to James Warren, May 3, 1777, in John Adams, Papers, 5:174.

⁹⁸Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 33-34.

Lee and James Lovell, in order to carry out his ideas of a proper foreign policy.⁹⁹ Adams would not get that chance. He arrived at Bordeaux on April 1, 1778, only to find that Franklin, Lee, and Deane had signed commercial and military treaties with France on February 6, accomplishing the goal of Adams' mission.¹⁰⁰ Despite earlier misgivings, Adams came to support the military treaty. As long as Great Britain held territory in North America, the United States needed French support.¹⁰¹ "We ... have the surest Ground to expect the Jealousy and Hatred of Great Britain," Adams wrote to Samuel Adams, "[therefore] We have the Strongest Reasons to depend upon the Friendship and Alliance of France."¹⁰²

Just as important, the treaties, once signed, held the force of American and international law. If the United States did not fulfill its obligations under the law, it could expect no further help from Europe. "This faith [in upholding the treaty] is our American Glory, and it is our Bulwark," Adams wrote to James Warren, "it is the only Foundation on which our Union can rest securely, it is the only Support of our Credit both in Finance and Commerce, it is our sole Security for the Assistance of Foreign

⁹⁹ Charles Francis Adams, Life of John Adams, 1:389-390.

¹⁰⁰ Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 37.

¹⁰¹ Stourzh, Franklin and Foreign Policy, 154-155.

¹⁰² John Adams to Samuel Adams, July 28, 1778, in John Adams, Papers, 6:326.

powers."¹⁰³ Adams believed French support was solid, informing Samuel Adams that, "Every suspicion of a wavering disposition in this court concerning the support of America is groundless."¹⁰⁴

Adams came to disapprove of the conduct of two of his colleagues, Silas Deane and Benjamin Franklin. Before Adams arrived, Arthur Lee accused Silas Deane of mixing his personal finances with those of the embassy. Franklin generally backed Deane against Lee. Adams arrived in France neutral toward Deane, and generally favorable toward Franklin and Arthur Lee, and hoping to keep out of conflicts within the commission.¹⁰⁵ Adams soon became involved in the aftermath of the Silas Deane affair. Deane had left Paris before Adams arrived. Congress recalled Deane on August 5, 1777, because Deane had granted too many commissions to non-English-speaking French officers. Soon Congress learned that Deane had used his position to further his private commercial interests.¹⁰⁶ Arthur Lee, who had clashed with Deane in Paris, wrote to Congress

¹⁰³John Adams to James Warren, August 4, 1778, in ibid, 6:347.

¹⁰⁴John Adams to Samuel Adams, February 14, 1779, in Francis Wharton, ed. The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 3:48.

¹⁰⁵Charles Francis Adams, Life of John Adams, 1:395-396.

¹⁰⁶Rakove, Beginnings of National Politics, 249-251.

accusing Deane of corruption.¹⁰⁷ Deane counterattacked at his first opportunity. He wrote an "Address to the Free and Virtuous Citizens of America," published in the Pennsylvania Packet on December 5, 1778. In this address, Deane accused the Lee family in general and Arthur Lee in particular of treason and disloyalty to the Franco-American alliance. The story reached Paris in February of 1779. John Adams was outraged at Deane's behavior, and Deane's attacks on Adams' allies, the Lees.¹⁰⁸ "That there appeared to me no Alternative left but the Ruin of Mr. Deane, or the Ruin of his Country," Adams wrote in his diary, "That he appeared to me in the Light of a wild Boar, that ought to be hunted down for the Benefit of Mankind."¹⁰⁹

Adams came into conflict with Franklin as well. Adams, the stern New Englander, disapproved of Franklin's hedonistic lifestyle.¹¹⁰ Adams also resented the attention Franklin received in Paris. Adams believed that the image of the "backwoods philosopher" Franklin cultivated was fraudulent and that he had a better claim to

¹⁰⁷Louis W. Potts. Arthur Lee: A Virtuous Revolutionary (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 185-186.

¹⁰⁸Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 42-43.

¹⁰⁹John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 2:345.

¹¹⁰Page Smith. John Adams, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1962), 1:378-379.

the title than the worldly Doctor Franklin.¹¹¹ More important, Adams and Franklin clashed over policy. Just as Adams called for a government of laws and not men, he advocated a diplomacy based on interests and not diplomats. Interest was the firm basis for a long-term policy.¹¹² Franklin based his diplomacy on his personal relationship with the French. Franklin overflowed with gratitude toward France for its generous help in public displays that Adams found distasteful. Franklin played on Louis XVI's ego rather than French interest alone.¹¹³ Here is the beginning of two conflicting systems of diplomacy; long-range, interest-based diplomacy and short-range, personality-based diplomacy.

Despite his feelings toward Franklin, Adams believed that it would do more harm than good to remove the doctor. "Yet such is his fame on both sides of the water," Adams wrote to Thomas McKean, "that it is best, perhaps, that he should be left there [in France]."¹¹⁴ Congress did just that on September 14, 1778, reorganizing the diplomatic corps and making Franklin sole minister in Paris. Adams received the news on February 12, 1779. After several months of trying to leave, Adams sailed for America on June

¹¹¹Shaw, Character of John Adams, 118.

¹¹²Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 11.

¹¹³Stourzh, Franklin and Foreign Policy, 155-156, 164-165.

¹¹⁴John Adams to Thomas McKean, September 20, 1779, in Wharton, ed. Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, 3:332.

17, 1779, arriving at Boston on August 2.¹¹⁵

Sitting on the docks at Nantes, waiting for a ship home, John Adams had time to draw some disturbing conclusions about his tour in France. Silas Deane had returned home and denounced Adams's allies, the Lees. Congress made Deane's ally, Franklin, sole minister to France and left Adams without a job, or even a formal letter of recall. Adams concluded that Franklin was the agent of his destruction.¹¹⁶ And was it a coincidence that Franklin was the French favorite? Adams took his suspicions home to America. When he returned to Europe, Adams believed it was his mission to guard American independence, against both its allies and its enemies.

¹¹⁵Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 41, 50-51.

¹¹⁶ibid, 49-50.

PART V

ALLIES AND ENEMIES

1779-1782

John Adams spent the summer and early fall of 1779 writing the constitution of Massachusetts. When he returned to Europe in late 1779 he pursued an agenda dictated more by his beliefs and experiences than by Congress. Over the next three years, Adams broadly construed his powers as peace commissioner so as to include any actions needed to force Great Britain to negotiate. Adams sought to base American diplomacy on American interest, and he defined American interests as persuading the French to provide naval cover and tying as many nations as possible to the American cause. In this way, Adams tried to defend American independence against all threats, whether concealed or open, whether from allies or enemies.

As many Americans feared, John Adams included, the French alliance dragged the United States further into European politics. In January 1779, Congress reaffirmed the

provisions of the 1778 treaty forbidding either side from making a separate peace with Great Britain.¹¹⁷ America had already made concessions to get France into the war. Spain was the next diplomatic target. Conrad Alexandre Gerard, the French minister to the United States, tried to make American demands acceptable to Spain. The recall of Silas Deane helped further French influence. Gerard personally supported the pro-Deane moderates against the pro-Lee radicals, and used his influence to whittle down American peace demands.¹¹⁸

The United States began with a fairly ambitious list of peace demands. On February 23, 1779, the congressional committee created to draft the peace ultimata recommended that the United States demand absolute independence, control of territory to the Mississippi River, British evacuation of American territory, American rights to the Newfoundland fisheries, free navigation of the Mississippi, free commerce on the Mississippi below the American boundary, and either the cession or independence of Nova Scotia. Gerard tried to moderate these demands to make them more acceptable to Great Britain and less threatening to Spain, which entered the war as a French (but not American)

¹¹⁷Resolution of Congress, January 14, 1779, in Wharton, ed, Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, 3:23.

¹¹⁸Rakove, Beginnings of National Politics, 255-256.

ally on April 12, 1779.¹¹⁹ Gerard used his influence to have Congress drop its demand for the fisheries.¹²⁰ Congress complied. On August 14, 1779, Congress made absolute independence and control of territory west to the Mississippi and south to 31° north latitude its demands. The fisheries were not to hold up peace negotiations.¹²¹

Gerard also pushed for John Jay to be elected peace commissioner and replace Arthur Lee as minister to Spain. Gerard achieved only partial victory. In September of 1779, radicals in Congress led by Samuel Adams and the rest of the Massachusetts delegation, opposed Jay's nomination. The radicals, having lost the fisheries as a peace ultimatum, sought to elect John Adams, who, despite the decision, would seek American rights to the fisheries in any negotiations. Congress was deadlocked until the radicals and moderates agreed to divide the positions of peace commissioner and minister to Spain. Congressional radicals abandoned Arthur Lee, and Congress elected Adams peace commissioner and Jay minister to Spain on September 27.¹²²

¹¹⁹Richard B. Morris. The Peacemakers (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 15-18.

¹²⁰William C. Stinchcombe. The American Revolution and the French Alliance (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1969),

¹²¹Journals of the Continental Congress, 14:956-960.

¹²²Stinchcombe, American Revolution and French Alliance, 66, 73-74.

Adams learned of his appointment, much to his surprise, in October. Elbridge Gerry urged him to accept, and Adams agreed that the commission was too important to turn down. However, Adams believed Franklin would attempt to frustrate his mission, and asked that Congress order Franklin to authorize payments to him. Adams sailed for Europe on November 13, 1779. En route, the ship began leaking and put in at El Ferrol, Spain, on December 8.¹²³

Neither Vergennes nor John Adams looked forward to seeing each other again. In the summer of 1779, Gerard reported to Vergennes that John Adams, Samuel Adams and Richard Henry Lee were part of a pro-British faction. Adams and Vergennes therefore clashed on first contact over whether or not to inform London of Adams's powers to treat for peace. Adams's insistence on telling the British of his commission served to convince Vergennes that Adams was, after all, pro-British.¹²⁴ Adams hoped to determine British intentions and believed that revealing his commission, "would ... draw out from them some proofs of their present designs, and it is always important to discover early the intention of the enemy."¹²⁵ Vergennes believed such a move premature. Great Britain had made no

¹²³Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 51-55.

¹²⁴ibid, 56-59.

¹²⁵John Adams to Vergennes, July 17, 1780, in John Adams, Works, 7:228-229.

peace overtures, and offering peace and commerce would only convince the British that America would cave in to British demands.¹²⁶

Adams differed with Vergennes over military strategy as well as negotiating strategy. Many Americans believed that America needed only French sea power to defeat Great Britain.¹²⁷ Adams tended to agree. "A Navy is our natural, and our only adequate defense," Adams wrote to Samuel Huntington, president of the Continental Congress.¹²⁸ However, Spain and France concentrated on British rather than American waters. A Franco-Spanish fleet attempted to invade Great Britain. The allied fleet did not join until July 22, 1779, and because of further delays and shipboard illness, it allowed the British fleet to escape to Portsmouth on August 31. The Franco-Spanish fleet retreated from the English Channel on September 8.¹²⁹

Adams believed these vast forces might be more profitably deployed in American waters. He reported to Huntington in March 1780 on the strength of the French

¹²⁶Observations on Mr. J. Adams letter of July 17, 1780, in Wharton, ed. Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, 4:3-6.

¹²⁷Stinchcombe, American Revolution and French Alliance, 151.

¹²⁸John Adams to Samuel Huntington, October 14, 1780, Adams Family Papers, Letterbook, reel 101.

¹²⁹Jonathan R. Dull. The French Navy and American Independence (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 154-157.

fleet, writing, "one would think that there was force enough in them to protect Us and quiet all our Fears but the Battle is not always to the strong and we must wait for Time to decide Events."¹³⁰ Adams criticized allied naval action in Europe, especially after he learned of Admiral Rodney's January 16, 1780, victory over the Spanish at Gibraltar.¹³¹ Adams complained that vast fleets were wasted on Gibraltar, "which is but a Trifle," while even a smaller French fleet would triumph off America.¹³² Adams spent much of his time in Paris pelting Vergennes with advice on naval policy. In a letter of July 13, Adams warned that some in the United States were still suspicious of the French. A show of naval force in American waters would reassure the country, and could force the British out of Philadelphia and isolate them in New York City.¹³³ Vergennes, with a smaller fleet than the British and a reluctant ally in Spain, could not accommodate Adams. Adams concluded that Vergennes wanted to see America independent, but not let it grow strong.¹³⁴

Vergennes and Adams already had enough to argue about,

¹³⁰John Adams to Samuel Huntington, March 4, 1780, Adams Family Papers, Letterbook, reel 98.

¹³¹Dull, French Navy and Independence, 178-179.

¹³²John Adams to Samuel Huntington, March 10, 1780, Adams Family Papers, Letterbook, reel 98.

¹³³John Adams to Vergennes, July 13, 1780, Adams Family Papers, Letterbook, reel 99.

¹³⁴Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 68-70.

but Congress added one more issue. On March 18, 1780, Congress devalued its worthless paper currency at the rate of \$40 in paper to one silver dollar. Vergennes asked Adams to intercede on behalf of French merchants. Adams saw no reason for French merchants to be treated differently from anyone else holding Continental paper and refused.

Vergennes had always questioned Adams's loyalty to the alliance, and with Adams's actions in the summer of 1780, he was convinced of Adams's disloyalty. Vergennes had had enough of Adams and asked the Chevalier de la Luzerne, Gerard's replacement in America, to ask Congress to recall Adams.¹³⁵ Both Adams and Vergennes appealed to Franklin for support against the other.¹³⁶ Vergennes leaned on Franklin, asking him to put the matter before Congress and to urge Congress to respond in a manner pleasing to the king.¹³⁷ Franklin dutifully complied, attacking Adams and defending his own policy of strategic flattery. "He [Adams] thinks ... that America has been too free in Expressions of Gratitude to France," Franklin wrote to Huntington, "I apprehend that he mistakes his Ground, and that this Court is to be treated with Decency and Delicacy."¹³⁸

¹³⁵*ibid*, 60-63, 69.

¹³⁶Shaw, Character of John Adams, 139.

¹³⁷Vergennes to Benjamin Franklin, June 30, 1780, in Benjamin Franklin. The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, vols. 7-9. Albert Henry Smyth, ed. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), 8:117.

¹³⁸Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Huntington, August 9, 1780, in *ibid*, 8:127.

Once again, interest- and personality-based diplomacy, represented by Adams and Franklin, clashed. And once again, personality-based diplomacy ruled in Paris. According to Peter Shaw, "Adams relied ... on a straightforward plethora of information, exhortation, and argument."¹³⁹ However, Versailles was no place for straightforwardness. Adams saw little more that he could do in Paris. On July 27, 1780, he left to pursue American interests in The Netherlands.¹⁴⁰

On September 16, 1780, Adams received permission to negotiate with the Dutch until Henry Laurens, the American minister to The Netherlands, arrived. Laurens would never reach The Netherlands, as the British captured him at sea on September 3, leaving Adams as de facto minister.¹⁴¹ While Adams was in The Netherlands, American interests seemed to coincide with Dutch entrance into the Armed Neutrality. The Armed Neutrality had its origins in July of 1778, when an American privateer attacked eight British cargo ships sailing out of Archangel, Russia. Catherine II of Russia proposed a treaty with Denmark in August, calling for mutual protection of neutral ships and British ships trading with neutrals. Catherine II issued the Declaration of Armed Neutrality on February 28, 1780. Of the five

¹³⁹Shaw, Character of John Adams, 137-138, 141-144.

¹⁴⁰Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 71-73.

¹⁴¹ibid, 78-79.

principles of the Armed Neutrality, the first three, freedom of neutrals to trade with belligerents, free ships make free goods, and a limited definition of contraband that did not include naval stores, appeared in the Model Treaty. The fourth principle stated that only an effective blockade was legal, and the fifth set the first four as the basis for determining the legality of prizes.¹⁴²

Adams hoped to link the Armed Neutrality to the American war effort. If France would not send ships to America, perhaps the Northern Powers could tie up the British fleet in Europe. Adams reported the formation of the Armed Neutrality to Huntington, adding that the Dutch were about to join. With a solid bloc of northern neutrals against Great Britain, Adams wrote, "either the War will be pushed this year with more Vivacity than ever, both by Land and by Sea, or that Peace will be made without delay."¹⁴³ Congress shared Adams's enthusiasm, and in the summer of 1780 Congress sent Francis Dana, Adams' secretary, to apply for American membership in the Armed Neutrality.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²Samuel Flagg Bemis. The Diplomacy of the American Revolution (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 150-156.

¹⁴³John Adams to Samuel Huntington, April 1780, Adams Family Papers, Letterbook, reel 98.

¹⁴⁴David M. Griffiths. "American Commercial Diplomacy in Russia 1780 to 1783," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, Vol. XXVII, no. 3 (July, 1970), 282-283.

Events pushed The Netherlands into the Armed Neutrality. When the British captured Henry Laurens, they also captured evidence of Dutch-American cooperation. The Dutch joined the Armed Neutrality for their own protection on November 20, and the British authorized attacks on Dutch shipping on December 20. The Dutch appealed to Russia for help on January 12, 1781. Adams hoped that the Armed Neutrality would join the war, forcing Great Britain to negotiate for peace and lessening American dependence on France. Adams's hopes, along with the Armed Neutrality itself, collapsed when Russia refused to go to war for the Dutch.¹⁴⁵

As Adams tried to expand American contacts, Vergennes moved to cut French losses. By February 1781, Vergennes believed the American war effort was nearly spent. American arms had fared badly in 1780. Charleston fell to the British, and Lord Cornwallis and the turncoat Benedict Arnold cut deeply into the Carolinas and Virginia. In addition, the war put a strain on the French economy. Vergennes believed that the United States should settle on the grounds of territory possessed. Great Britain would give up New York City, but keep Georgia and South Carolina. Russia and Austria, neither of which recognized American

¹⁴⁵Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 79-82, 93.

independence, offered mediation, and Vergennes accepted. On May 21, 1781, the mediators agreed on four preliminary bases for negotiation; 1) all proposals would be heard at Vienna, and mediation would be extended to Great Britain and its American colonies if those parties requested it, 2) Great Britain and the colonies would sign a separate peace concurrent with a general peace settlement, 3) during negotiations, there would be a one-year truce based on territory held, and 4) negotiations would proceed once the preliminaries had been accepted.¹⁴⁶

John Adams was the only American diplomat in Europe accredited to attend such a peace conference, and Adams did not approve of the bases for negotiation. He specifically objected to the idea of a truce without a formal peace. Adams believed such a truce would only cause another war later. Adams also told Vergennes that he could not attend a peace conference that did not recognize American independence. The mediators referred only to American colonies.¹⁴⁷ "There are no 'American colonies' at war with Great Britain," Adams testily reminded Vergennes, "The Power at War is the United States of America."¹⁴⁸ By July of 1781, the mediators themselves had lost interest in

¹⁴⁶ Morris, Peacemakers, 178-184.

¹⁴⁷ ibid, 205-206.

¹⁴⁸ John Adams to Vergennes, July 19, 1781, Adams Family Papers, Letterbook, reel 105.

mediation.¹⁴⁹

Vergennes retained an interest in getting rid of Adams. Vergennes had previously ordered Luzerne to influence Congress to have Adams recalled. By the summer of 1781, Luzerne had his chance. Congress, like Vergennes, was pessimistic about the military effort. Many in Congress believed that Adams was the primary obstacle to peace, and Luzerne encouraged this belief. On June 11, 1781, Congress voted to order its diplomats in Europe to do nothing without the approval of the French. Only Massachusetts and Connecticut opposed the order. Congress expanded the peace commission to five members on June 14, adding Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, Henry Laurens, and Thomas Jefferson. James Madison delivered the final blow on July 11, when at the urging of Luzerne's secretary, Louis Barbe-Marbois, he moved that Congress revoke Adams's commission to negotiate a commercial treaty. Congress passed the motion 7-2, again with only Massachusetts and Connecticut opposed.¹⁵⁰ Adams received his new commission on August 24.¹⁵¹

While waiting to use his peace commission, Adams

¹⁴⁹Jonathan R. Dull. A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 131.

¹⁵⁰Stinchcombe, American Revolution and French Alliance, 153-159, 174.

¹⁵¹Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 97.

tended to American interests in The Netherlands. American arms, rather than Adams' efforts, led to Dutch recognition. The American victory at Yorktown in October 1781 led the British Parliament, on February 27, 1782, to prohibit any further offensive action in America. The removal of an open British threat allowed the Dutch to recognize and sign a commercial treaty with the United States.¹⁵²

In September of 1782 Adams received the call he had been awaiting. John Jay informed him that Great Britain had acknowledged American independence, and peace negotiations could begin.¹⁵³ Adams believed that he had been beset by a multitude of plagues: a weak and unreliable Congress, an untrustworthy colleague in Franklin, and a devious ally in Vergennes. Despite all of these difficulties, Adams left The Hague for Paris to secure peace and American independence.

¹⁵²ibid, 110-114.

¹⁵³ibid, 116.

PART VI

PEACE AND INDEPENDENCE

1782-1783

By 1782, a war that began as a colonial rebellion against British rule had ballooned into a war involving several European powers, all with individual war aims that were not necessarily in the interest of the United States. "The Political Machine that is now in Motion is so vast, and comprehends so many nations, whose Interests are not easy to adjust," Adams reported to Huntington, "that it is perhaps impossible for human understanding to foresee what events might occur to disturb it."¹⁵⁴ That machine began to divide the alliance and make the British more concilliatory. Jay and Franklin met with Vergennes on August 10, 1782. While Jay objected to the fact that British peace commissioner Richard Oswald's commission did not recognize American independence, Vergennes did not.

¹⁵⁴John Adams to Samuel Huntington, December 6, 1780, Adams Family Papers, Letterbook, reel 101.

Joseph-Matthias Gerard de Reyneval, an advisor to Vergennes, added that American claim of the Mississippi as the western boundary was extravagant, and Vergennes agreed. The meeting convinced Jay that the Americans might have to violate their instructions and sign a separate peace.¹⁵⁵ The Earl of Shelburne, the British prime minister, seemed ready to give the Americans what they wanted. Great Britain had enough enemies and needed to split the alliance. Shelburne believed the territory north of the Ohio River was lost. Better to give it to the Americans, who would continue to trade with Great Britain, than to give it to France or Spain.¹⁵⁶

Jay submitted a draft treaty on October 5. It called for recognition of American independence and British evacuation of American territory. It set American boundaries at the Mississippi on the west, 31° north latitude on the south, the St. Lawrence River and 45° north latitude on the northwest, and the St. John's River to the Bay of Fundy on the northeast. The draft gave the United States the right to catch and dry fish off Newfoundland, and granted free navigation of the Mississippi to Great Britain and the United States. Oswald approved of the

¹⁵⁵Morris, Peacemakers, 307-310.

¹⁵⁶Dull, Diplomatic History, 145-147.

treaty, but the cabinet rejected it on October 17. The cabinet wanted to keep the Americans out of the fisheries, establish a Maine boundary more advantageous to Great Britain, and make some provision for American Tories.¹⁵⁷

John Adams arrived in Paris on October 26. He was still suspicious of Vergennes and Franklin, but discovered that Jay, previously connected with the pro-Deane moderates, was now anti-French.¹⁵⁸ "Mr. Jay likes Frenchmen as little as Mr. Lee and Mr. Izard did," Adams noted with some satisfaction in his diary, "Our Allies dont play fair, he told me."¹⁵⁹ Adams joined in the negotiations on October 30, and sessions ran daily until November 4. Great Britain accepted the western and southern boundaries. Both sides agreed on the St. Croix River as the Maine boundary, but could not agree on which of the three St. Croix Rivers that meant. In a partial concession to the British, Adams offered to have Americans pay debts to Britons incurred before 1775.¹⁶⁰ Adams also wrote an article granting the Americans the right to fish off Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.¹⁶¹

Fish and Tories remained sticking points. By November

¹⁵⁷Morris, Peacemakers, 346-350.

¹⁵⁸Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 117-119.

¹⁵⁹diary entry of November 5, 1782, in John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:46-47.

¹⁶⁰Morris, Peacemakers, 361-363.

¹⁶¹John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:45-46.

11, the British accepted the loss of the northwest. The British were willing to exclude the most outspoken American Tories from compensation for lands seized, but did insist on compensation for neutrals. Adams opposed compensation, fearing that it would create British and French parties in the United States. The British watered down the demand for compensation to an official request, which the Americans accepted. ¹⁶²

The final sessions began on November 25. The fisheries, perhaps the main reason John Adams was in Europe, remained the final issue. Adams, of course, was long familiar with the issue. "My Practice as a Barrister in the Counties of Essex Plymouth and Barnstable had introduced me to more Knowledge both of the Cod and whale fisheries and of their importance both to the commerce and Naval Power of this Country than any other man possessed," Adams wrote in his autobiography.¹⁶³ Adams believed that one day the United States would be a great naval power, and access to the fisheries was the beginning of that power. For the next three days, Adams defended American rights to the fisheries by the same method he gave advice to Vergennes -- he buried Oswald in an avalanche of fact and

¹⁶²Morris, Peacemakers, 367-369, 372-373.

¹⁶³John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 4:5.

argument. Adams' main point throughout was that granting American rights to the fisheries was safer than making concessions to France. The fisheries were a training ground for sailors. Was it not safer to allow the Americans to add to their tiny navy than to allow the French to add to theirs? The fisheries were a great source of profit. If the Americans shared in the fisheries, much of their profits would wind up in London in trade. Could the British expect the same from the French? The fisheries were a source of contention. Would it not be better to remove sources of Anglo-American conflict and restore trade than to exclude the Americans and drive them closer to the French?¹⁶⁴

Adams presented a draft article on November 28 that gave the United States the right to take fish on the Grand Bank and all other places where Americans used to fish.

Americans would have the liberty to dry fish on Cape Sable and the unsettled parts of Nova Scotia.¹⁶⁵

On November 29 Adams announced that he could never sign a peace that kept Americans out of the fisheries.¹⁶⁶ The British realized that the negotiations had come too far to let them collapse over the fisheries. The British reduced the "right" to the coastal fisheries to

¹⁶⁴John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:72-74.

¹⁶⁵Morris, Peacemakers, 376.

¹⁶⁶John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:81.

a "liberty," and allowed drying only in uninhabited areas. The Americans agreed to the compromise, and signed the Provisional Treaty on November 30, 1782.¹⁶⁷ Adams was pleased with the treaty, even though the American negotiators had to violate their instructions to obtain it. "The great Interests of our Country in the West and in the East are secured, as well as her independence. St. Croix is the boundary against Nova Scotia. The Fisheries are very safe, the Mississippi and the Western Lands to the middle of the Great Lakes are as well secured to Us as they could be by England," Adams wrote to James Warren, "All of these Advantages we would not have obtained if we had literally pursued our Instructions."¹⁶⁸ Adams also knew that the treaty was mainly the work of John Jay. Although the French had called him the "Washington of Negotiation," Adams wrote in his diary, that title belonged more to Jay.¹⁶⁹

The treaty presented Congress with an embarrassing problem. It could not repudiate a treaty that met, and even exceeded, its demands. Neither could Congress ignore the fact that the commissioners openly violated their instructions. Robert R. Livingston, the secretary of foreign affairs, sent a letter to the commissioners on

¹⁶⁷Morris, Peacemakers, 379-381.

¹⁶⁸John Adams to James Warren, December 12, 1782, in Warren-Adams Letters, 2:186.

¹⁶⁹John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:85.

March 25, 1783, praising the treaty but expressing disappointment that the American had not consulted the French.¹⁷⁰ The commissioners defended their blow for independence against the June 1781 instructions. "Since we have assumed a Place in the Political System of the World," they replied, "let us move like a Primary and not like a Secondary Planet."¹⁷¹ "It is a Glory to have broken such infamous orders," Adams wrote in his diary.¹⁷²

The Americans hoped for better terms, particularly regarding American trade with the British West Indies, in the final treaty. "The commerce of the West Indies is part of the American system of commerce," Adams told Secretary Livingston, "They can neither do without us, nor us without them."¹⁷³ However, the British would make no further concessions to the Americans. The Provisional Treaty brought down the Shelburne ministry. The succeeding government, under Lord North and Charles James Fox, believed that Great Britain had already given away too much, and insisted on excluding the Americans from the West

¹⁷⁰Robert R. Livingston to the Peace Commissioners, March 25, 1783, in Wharton, ed. Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:338-340.

¹⁷¹John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and John Jay to Robert R. Livingston, July 18, 1783, in ibid, 6:556.

¹⁷²diary entry of February 18, 1783, in John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:108.

¹⁷³John Adams to Robert R. Livingston, June 23, 1783, in Wharton, ed. Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:500.

Indian trade. On September 3, 1783, negotiators read the November 30, 1782, agreement into a general peace settlement, ending the war.¹⁷⁴

Having spent five years in Europe, John Adams concluded that America was well rid of any political connection with Europe. "For my own Part I thought America had been long enough involved in the Wars of Europe. She had been a Football from the Beginning, and it was easy to foresee that France and England both would endeavour to involve Us in their future Wars," Adams wrote in his diary, "I thought [it] our interest and Duty to avoid [them] as much as possible and to be compleatly independent and have nothing to do but in Commerce with either of them."¹⁷⁵ Adams was more convinced than ever that only a balance of power could preserve American independence.¹⁷⁶ Adams adapted a European idea to American ends. Adams hoped to tie European nations to American success, making American commerce too valuable a commodity to risk in war. Adams did believe in the rule of law, but the law of diplomacy was often the law of the jungle. Adams believed in the sanctity of treaties, but more so in American survival.

¹⁷⁴Dull, Diplomatic History, 159-160.

¹⁷⁵diary entry, November 11, 1782, in John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 3:52.

¹⁷⁶Hutson, JA and Diplomacy of American Revolution, 142-143.

Adams wrote to Elbridge Gerry the day he signed the final treaty. To maintain its independence, Adams wrote, the United States must be able to defend itself. It must strengthen its union and depend on its own resources rather than the goodwill of Europe. The United States should send ministers that will defend American interest, and support them to the fullest.¹⁷⁷ If the United States did all of this, she would control rather than be controlled by the balance of power. Then she would be independent.

¹⁷⁷John Adams to Elbridge Gerry, September 3, 1783, in Wharton, ed. Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:669-670.

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