

# Chapter 12

## Foreign Affairs in the Young Nation

### Section 1 – Introduction



*The Great Seal of the United States.*

Did you know that you are carrying a history lesson in your pocket or purse? You will find it on any \$1 bill. Look at a dollar and see for yourself.

On one side, you will see two circles showing the Great Seal of the United States. For thousands of years, governments have used seals like this one to mark their approval of important documents. Our nation's founders thought that a national seal was so important that they began work on it the same day they declared independence: July 4, 1776. In 1782, Congress approved the design we see on our currency today.

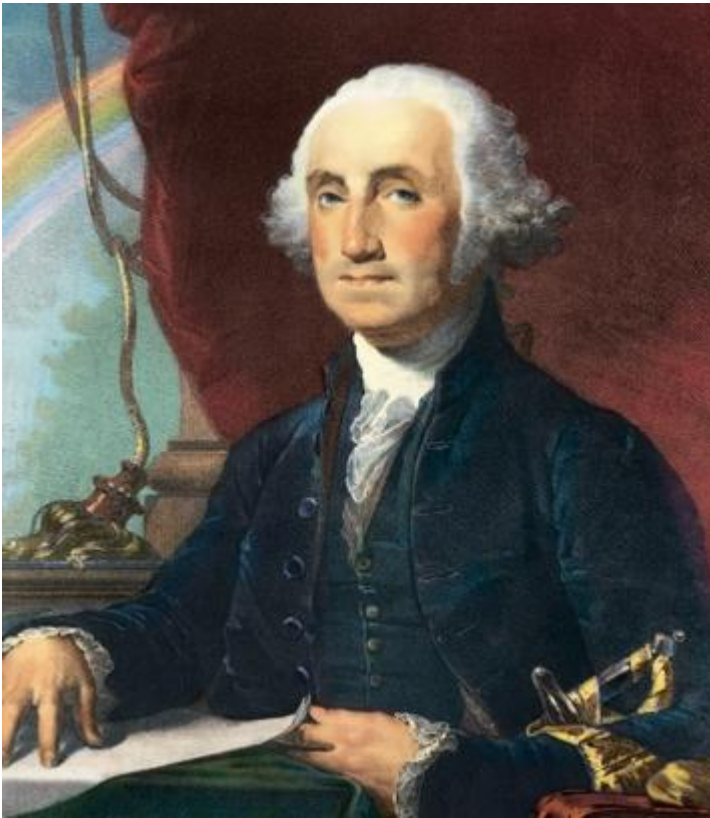
The Great Seal symbolizes the nation's principles. For example, the unfinished pyramid on one side of the seal [signifies](#) strength and endurance. The bald eagle on the other side is a symbol of the United States. In one claw, the eagle holds an olive branch, a symbol of peace. In the other, the eagle holds arrows to symbolize war. The olive branch and arrows of war show that the United States will [pursue](#) peace but will

also protect itself. Notice that the eagle faces peace.

Now turn the dollar bill over. You will see a portrait of George Washington. Americans still honor Washington as the nation's first president. But few remember that Washington defined U.S. foreign policy in the early years of the nation's history.

During his presidency, Washington established policies that would guide the United States in its future dealings with other nations. The United States could be actively involved in world affairs, risking war. Or it could avoid involvement in other nations' conflicts in the hope of staying at peace. Which choice would you have made for the new nation? In this chapter, you will read about four dilemmas that faced early U.S. presidents. Their decisions would shape the foreign policy pursued by later presidents.

## Section 2 – President Washington Creates a Foreign Policy



*George Washington's Farewell Address was published in newspapers in 1796. As part of his advice to the nation, he urged neutrality in foreign relations.*

When George Washington took office as the nation's first president in 1789, the United States appeared to be weak militarily. The army that Washington had commanded during the American Revolution had disbanded. It had not been replaced for two reasons. First, the government did not have the money to keep its army active. Second, Americans had learned that a standing national army could be used to take away their liberty. State militia troops, they believed, could handle any threats the country might face.

And there were indeed threats. The new nation was surrounded by unfriendly powers. To the north, Great Britain still controlled Canada. The British also refused to abandon their forts in the Ohio Valley, even though this region now belonged to the United States.

To the south and west, Spain controlled Florida and Louisiana.

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



*In 1796, the United States was surrounded by colonies that belonged to the European countries of Great Britain, France, and Spain. What problems do you think this fact might have caused for the newly independent United States?*

During its own revolution, the United States had signed a treaty of alliance with France in 1788. Alliances are agreements made with other nations to aid and support each other. In that treaty, the United States had promised to aid France in time of war. Many Americans were eager to honor that pledge, even if it meant going to war with Great Britain.

Washington knew that the United States was not prepared for war. Instead, he announced a policy of **neutrality**. Under this policy, the United States would do nothing to aid either France or Great Britain in their war.

Before leaving office, Washington summed up his foreign policy in a farewell address to the nation. The United States, he said, could gain nothing by becoming involved in other nations' affairs. "It is our true policy," he declared, "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**. For the next century, isolationism would be the foundation of U.S. foreign policy.

[**isolationism**: a policy of avoiding political or military agreements with other countries]

[**neutrality**: a policy of not choosing sides in a dispute or war between other countries]

### ***Section 3 – President Adams's Dilemma: Protecting U.S. Ships***

Isolationism sounded good in theory. But it is often hard to stay out of other countries' conflicts. No one knew this better than John Adams, the nation's second president. Adams tried to follow George Washington's policy of neutrality. With France, however, staying neutral proved to be difficult.

**The Jay Treaty** French leaders hoped that Great Britain's refusal to leave the Ohio Valley would lead to war between Great Britain and the United States. Those hopes were dashed when Washington sent John Jay, chief justice of the Supreme Court, to London to settle things with the British. In the treaty signed in 1794, known as the Jay Treaty, the British finally agreed to pull their troops from the Ohio Valley. France, still at war with Great Britain, viewed the Jay Treaty as a violation of its own treaty with the United States, made back in 1778. In July 1796, the French navy began attacking U.S. merchant ships bound for Great Britain. Over the next year, French warships seized 316 American ships.

**The XYZ Affair** President Adams sent three envoys, or representatives, to France to ask the French to end the attacks. French foreign minister Talleyrand refused to speak to the Americans. Instead, they were met by secret agents, later identified only as X, Y, and Z. The agents said that no peace talks would be held unless Talleyrand received a large sum of money as a tribute. A tribute is money given to someone in exchange for that person's protection. Shocked by the request, the American envoys refused.

The XYZ Affair, as it became known, outraged Americans when the story reached home. At President Adams's request, Congress voted to recruit an army of 10,000 men. It also voted to build 12 new ships for the nation's tiny navy. The slogan "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute!" was heard everywhere as Americans prepared for war.

Meanwhile, Congress authorized U.S. warships and privately owned ships, called privateers, to launch a "half war" on the seas. During this undeclared war, American ships captured more than 80 armed French vessels.

As war fever mounted, President Adams, never a well-loved leader, found himself unexpectedly popular. His Federalist Party gained support in all parts of the country. The question facing Adams was whether the popular thing—waging an undeclared war on France—was also the best thing for the country.

### ***Section 4 – What Happened: Adams Pursues Peace***

President John Adams knew that no matter how good 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. Federalist leaders were furious. They pleaded with the president to change his mind, but Adams would not budge.

By the time the peace mission reached France, a French military leader named Napoleon Bonaparte had taken over the French government. Napoleon was eager to make peace with both Great Britain and the United States. He had already ordered the navy to stop seizing American ships and to release captured American sailors.

In a treaty made between France and the United States in 1800, Napoleon agreed to end France's 1778 alliance with the United States. In exchange, the Americans agreed not to ask France to pay for all the ships it had seized. This meant that the U.S. government would have to pay American ship owners for their lost property. To Adams, this seemed a small price to pay for peace with France.

Choosing the olive branch cost Adams political popularity. His pursuit of peace with France created strong disagreements within the Federalist Party. These disagreements lost Adams and the Federalists votes when he ran for reelection in 1800. Jefferson defeated Adams in the election, and the Federalist Party lost much of its support. Over the next few years, Adams would watch his Federalist Party slowly fade away.

Still, Adams had no regrets. He wrote,

*I will defend my missions to France, as long as I have an eye to direct my hand, or a finger to hold my pen . . . I desire no other inscription over my gravestone than: "Here lies John Adams, who took upon himself the responsibility of the peace with France in the year 1800."*

## Section 5 – President Jefferson's Dilemma: Dealing with Pirates



*In the late 1700s and early 1800s, the Mediterranean Sea was filled with pirates who attacked U.S. merchant ships. The United States paid tribute to leaders of the Barbary States to prevent these attacks.*

The peace that John Adams achieved with France did not last long. In 1803, France and Great Britain were again at war. As the conflict heated up, both nations began seizing American ships that were trading with their enemy. President Thomas Jefferson, who took office in 1801, complained bitterly that “England has become a den of pirates and France has become a den of thieves.” Still, like Washington and Adams before him, Jefferson tried to follow a policy of neutrality.

**Impressment** Remaining neutral when ships were being seized was hard enough. It became even harder when Great Britain began impressing American sailors—kidnapping them and forcing them to serve in the British navy. The British claimed that the men they impressed were British deserters. This may have been true in some cases, as some sailors may well have fled the terrible conditions on British ships. Yet thousands of unlucky Americans were also impressed.

American anger over impressment peaked in 1807 after a British warship, the *Leopard*, stopped a U.S. warship, the *Chesapeake*, to search for deserters. When the *Chesapeake*'s captain refused to allow a search, the *Leopard* opened fire. Twenty-one American sailors were killed or wounded. This attack triggered another case of war fever, this time against Great Britain.

**Piracy** American ships faced a different threat from the Barbary States of North Africa: piracy, or robbery at sea. For years, pirates from Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli had preyed on merchant ships entering the Mediterranean Sea. The pirates seized the ships and held their crews for ransom.

Presidents Washington and Adams both paid tribute to Barbary State rulers in exchange for the safety of American ships. While Americans were shouting “millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute” during the XYZ Affair, the United States was quietly sending money to the Barbary States.

By the time Jefferson became president, the United States had paid the Barbary States almost \$2 million. The ruler of Tripoli, however, demanded still more tribute. To show that he was serious, he declared war on the United States. Jefferson hated war. But he also hated paying tribute. The question was, which was worse?

## ***Section 6 – What Happened: Jefferson Solves the Problem***

As much as Thomas Jefferson hated war, he hated paying tribute more. In 1802, he sent a small fleet of warships to the Mediterranean to protect American shipping interests. The war with Tripoli plodded along until 1804, when American ships began bombarding Tripoli with their cannons.

Then one of the ships, the *Philadelphia*, ran aground on a hidden reef in the harbor. The captain and crew were captured and held for ransom. Rather than let pirates have the *Philadelphia*, a young naval officer named Stephen Decatur led a raiding party into the heavily guarded Tripoli harbor and set the ship afire.

After a year of U.S. attacks and a blockade, Tripoli signed a peace treaty with the United States in 1805. Tripoli agreed to stop demanding tribute payments. In return, the United States paid a \$60,000 ransom for the crew of the *Philadelphia*. This was a bargain compared to the \$3 million first demanded.

Pirates from other Barbary States continued to raid ships in the Mediterranean. In 1815, U.S. and European naval forces finally destroyed the pirate bases.

Meanwhile, Jefferson tried desperately to convince both France and Great Britain to leave American ships alone. All of his diplomatic efforts failed. Between 1803 and 1807, Great Britain seized at least a thousand American ships. France captured about half that many.

When diplomacy failed, Jefferson proposed an [embargo](#)—a complete halt in trade with other nations. Under the Embargo Act passed by Congress in 1807, no foreign ships could enter U.S. ports and no American ships could leave, except to trade at other U.S. ports. Jefferson hoped that stopping trade would prove so painful to France and Great Britain that they would agree to leave American ships alone.

The embargo, however, proved far more painful to Americans than to anyone in Europe. Some 55,000 sailors lost their jobs. In New England, newspapers pointed out that *embargo* spelled backward reads “O grab me,” which made sense to all who were feeling its pinch.

Congress repealed the unpopular Embargo Act in 1809. American ships returned to the seas, and French and British warships continued to attack them.

## Section 7 – President Madison’s Dilemma: Protecting Sailors and Settlers



*Indiana governor William Henry Harrison, on the far left, is shown encouraging his troops during the Battle of Tippecanoe Creek. After the battle, Harrison’s men discovered that the Indians were armed with British guns, which added to Americans’ anger at the British.*

President James Madison took office in 1809. He tried a new approach to protecting Americans at sea. He offered France and Great Britain a deal: if you agree to

cease your attacks on American ships, the United States will stop trading with your enemy.

Napoleon promptly agreed to Madison’s offer. At the same time, Napoleon gave his navy secret orders to continue seizing American ships headed for British ports. Madison, who desperately wanted to believe Napoleon’s false promise, cut off all trade with Great Britain.

Meanwhile, the British continued seizing ships and impressing American sailors. Madison saw only one way to force Great Britain to respect American rights. He began to think about abandoning George Washington’s policy of isolationism and going to war with Great Britain.

New Englanders and Federalists generally opposed going to war. Merchants in New England knew that war would mean a blockade of their ports by the British navy. They preferred to take their chances with the troubles at sea.

Many people in the South and to the west, however, supported going to war. Like all Americans, they resented Great Britain’s policy of impressing U.S. sailors. They also accused the British of stirring up trouble among Indians in the states and territories to the northwest.



*The Shawnee leader Tecumseh united American Indians in an attempt to halt the advance of white settlers onto Indian lands.*

Trouble with the Indians was growing as settlers moved into the Ohio and Mississippi valleys and pushed Indians off their lands. Two Shawnee Indians—a chief named Tecumseh and his brother, the Prophet—tried to fight back by uniting Indians along the Mississippi River into one great Indian nation. On November 7, 1811, Shawnee warriors fought against a militia force led by Indiana governor William Henry Harrison in the Battle of Tippecanoe Creek. Harrison defeated the Indian forces. After the battle, however, Harrison’s men discovered that the Indians were armed with British guns.

Americans were outraged. Several young congressmen from the South and West, including Henry Clay of Kentucky and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, were so eager for war with Great Britain that they were nicknamed “War Hawks.” They argued that to make the northwestern frontier safe for settlers, the United States needed to drive the British out of Canada. Once that was done, Canada could be added to the United States.

Losses at sea, national pride, and a desire to make the frontier safe for settlement all contributed to the reasons for war. Still, Madison hesitated. Was the nation strong enough to launch the arrows of war? Or should he hold tightly to the olive branch of peace?

### Section 8 – What Happened: The War of 1812



This map shows American and British offensives, or attacks, during the War of 1812. Despite victories on both sides, neither country really won the war. Still, the war had important effects in the United States.

James Madison chose to abandon isolationism. At his request, Congress declared war on Great Britain on July 17, 1812. This was a bold step for a nation with an army of 7,000 poorly trained men and a navy of only 16 ships.

**Battles on Land and Sea** War Hawks were overjoyed when the War of 1812 began. They thought that conquering Canada was “a mere matter of marching.” They were wrong. In 1812, 1813, and again in 1814 U.S. forces crossed into Canada, but each time British forces turned them back.

The British, too, found the going much rougher than expected. On September 10, 1813, a U.S. naval force under the command of Oliver Hazard Perry captured a British fleet of six ships on Lake Erie. Perry’s victory enabled William Henry Harrison to push into upper Canada, where he defeated the British in a major battle. Chief Tecumseh, who was fighting on the side of the British, was killed. But in December, the British drove the Americans back across the border.

By 1814, Napoleon had been defeated in Europe, and Great Britain was able to send 15,000 troops to Canada. American plans to conquer Canada came to an end.

Meanwhile, in August 1814, another British army invaded Washington, D.C. The British burned several public buildings, including the Capitol and the White House. President Madison had to flee for his life.

Next the British attacked the port city of Baltimore, Maryland. On September 13, an American lawyer named Francis Scott Key watched as the British bombarded Fort McHenry, which guarded the city’s harbor. The bombardment went on all night. When dawn broke, Key was thrilled to see that the American flag still waved

over the fort, proving that the fort had not been captured. He expressed his feelings in a poem that was later put to music as “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

**The Battle of New Orleans** A British fleet had surrendered to U.S. forces after the Battle of Lake Champlain in New York just two days before the unsuccessful attack on Baltimore. In Great Britain, news of this defeat would greatly weaken the desire to continue the war. But the news took time to travel, and in the meantime British commanders in the United States launched another invasion. This time, their target was New Orleans.

New Orleans was defended by General Andrew Jackson and a ragtag army of 7,000 militia, free African Americans, Indians, and pirates. On January 8, 1815, more than 7,500 British troops marched confidently into battle. Jackson’s troops met them with deadly fire. Some 2,000 British soldiers were killed or wounded, compared with only about 20 Americans.

The Battle of New Orleans was the greatest U.S. victory of the War of 1812. It was also totally unnecessary. Two weeks earlier, American and British diplomats meeting in Ghent (GHENT), Belgium, had signed a peace treaty ending the war. The news did not reach New Orleans until after the battle was fought.

**Results of the War** Although both sides claimed victory, neither Great Britain nor the United States really won the War of 1812. The Treaty of Ghent settled none of the issues that had led to the fighting. Instead, the problems of impressment and ship seizures faded away as peace settled over Europe. Still, the war had important effects.

First, Indian resistance in the Northwest Territory weakened after Tecumseh’s death. Over time, most of the American Indians who fought with Tecumseh would be driven out of the Ohio Valley.

Second, national pride in the United States surged. Many Americans considered the War of 1812 “the second war of independence.” They felt that by standing up to the British, the United States had truly become a sovereign nation.

Third, the war had political effects. The Federalists were badly damaged by their opposition to the war, and their party never recovered. Two of the war’s heroes—William Henry Harrison and Andrew Jackson—would later be elected president.

## ***Section 9 – President Monroe’s Dilemma: A New Foreign Policy Challenge***

James Monroe became president in 1817. After the excitement of the War of 1812, he was relieved to return the nation to its policy of isolationism. Americans began to turn their attention away from Europe, however, and direct it to events happening in Latin America. From Mexico to the tip of South America, Latin Americans were rising up in revolt against Spain.

**Latin America’s Revolutions** In Mexico, the revolt against Spanish rule was inspired by a Catholic priest named Miguel Hidalgo (me-GHELL heh-DAHL-goh). On September 16, 1810, Hidalgo spoke to a crowd of poor Indians in the town of Dolores. “My children,” Hidalgo said, “will you make an effort to recover from the hated Spaniards the lands stolen from your fore-fathers three hundred years ago? Death to bad government!” Hidalgo’s speech, remembered today as the “Cry of Dolores,” inspired a revolution that lasted ten years. In 1821, Mexico finally won its independence from Spain.

Two other leaders **liberated** South America. In 1810, a Venezuelan named Simón Bolívar (see-MOHN buh-LEE-var) launched a revolution in the north with this cry: “Spaniards, you will receive death at our hands! Americans, you will receive life!” José de San Martín (ho-ZAY de SAN mar-TEEN), a revolutionary from



Argentina, led the struggle for independence in the south. By the end of 1825, the last Spanish troops had been driven out of South America.

**New Latin American Nations** Many Americans were excited by independence movements in Latin America. The British also supported the revolutions—for their own reasons. Spain had not allowed other nations to trade with its colonies. Once freed from Spanish rule, the new Latin American nations were able to open their doors to foreign trade, including trade with Great Britain.

Other European leaders were not so pleased. Some even began to talk of helping Spain recover its lost colonies. In 1823, Great Britain asked the United States to join it in sending a message to these leaders, telling them to leave Latin America alone.

President James Monroe asked former presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison for advice. Should the United States do something to support the new Latin American nations? If so, what?

### ***Section 10 – What Happened: The Monroe Doctrine***

Both Thomas Jefferson and James Madison liked the idea of joining with Great Britain to send a warning to the nations of Europe. Jefferson wrote to James Monroe, “Our first and fundamental maxim [principle] should be, never entangle ourselves in the broils [fights] of Europe. Our second, never to suffer Europe to intermeddle [interfere] with . . . America, North and South.”

President Monroe’s secretary of state, John Quincy Adams, agreed with Jefferson. But Adams insisted that “it would be more candid [honest], as well as more dignified,” for the United States to speak boldly for itself. President Monroe agreed.

In 1823, Monroe made a speech to Congress announcing a policy that became known as the [Monroe Doctrine](#). Monroe stated that the nations of North and South America were “free and independent” and were “not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.” The United States, he said, would view efforts by Europeans to take over “any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.”

Europeans denounced Monroe’s message as arrogant. By what right, asked a French newspaper, did the United States presume to tell the other nations of the world what they could do in North and South America?

Americans, however, cheered Monroe’s message. It made them proud to see the United States stand up for the freedom-loving people of Latin America.

In the years ahead, the Monroe Doctrine joined isolationism as a basic principle of U.S. foreign policy. The doctrine asserted that the United States would not accept European interference in American affairs. It also contained another, hidden message. By its very boldness, the Monroe Doctrine told the world that the United States was no longer a weak collection of quarreling states. It had become a strong and confident nation—a nation to be respected by the world.

**[Monroe Doctrine:** President James Monroe’s declaration in 1823 that the Western Hemisphere was no longer open to European colonization]

## ***Summary***

**In this chapter, you learned about the development of foreign policy in the United States under the nation's first five presidents.**

**President Washington Creates a Foreign Policy** The first U.S. president knew that the young nation was unprepared for war. George Washington established a policy of isolationism to avoid alliances with other countries, which could draw the country into wars abroad.

**President Adams's Dilemma** During the presidency of John Adams, France attacked U.S. ships. Adams followed Washington's policy of isolationism and kept the United States at peace by securing a treaty with France.

**President Jefferson's Dilemma** President Thomas Jefferson also faced threats at sea. When peace talks failed, he passed the Embargo Act of 1807. It, too, was unsuccessful.

**President Madison's Dilemma** President James Madison offered a trade deal to both France and Great Britain, but the attacks at sea continued. He finally abandoned isolationism and declared war on Great Britain. The War of 1812 ended in a peace treaty with Great Britain.

**President Monroe's Dilemma** President James Monroe, in support of the new Latin American states, issued a policy called the Monroe Doctrine. In it, he warned European nations to respect the newly independent colonies. The Monroe Doctrine established the United States as a strong nation, willing to stand up for its own freedom and that of its neighbors.