AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS SINCE INDEPENDENCE

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To the memory of Norman A. Graebner

Preface

We have sought in the following pages to write an account at once succinct and accessible of the major events and salient ideas that have shaped the American diplomatic experience since the Revolution—historical factors that very much affect our current debates and commitments in the Middle East, as well as Europe and Asia. Contemporary public debate about the nature of U.S. foreign policy often reveals an inability—or, we believe, even an unwillingness—to remember what has happened in the past. The issues currently faced by the United States, in its attempts to further American national interests and guarantee U.S. security in the twenty-first century, can best be understood, we also believe, as simply the latest manifestation of perennial foreign policy challenges, rather than being unique to the present age. It is this sense, then, that *American Foreign Relations since Independence* explores and examines the complex relationship of American policies to national interests and the limits of the nation's power.

This relatively small one-volume history brings together the collective knowledge of three generations of diplomatic historians to create a readily accessible introduction to the subject. The authors explicitly challenge and reject the perennial debates about isolationism versus internationalism, instead asserting that American foreign relations have been characterized by the permanent tension inherent in America's desire to engage with the world, on the one hand, and the equally powerful determination to avoid undue "entanglement" in the world's troubles, on the other hand, a thread that runs like a straight line through the history of U. S. foreign relations from the Founding Fathers to the present. This work is ideally suited as a resource both for students of politics,

international affairs, and history, as well as for practitioners, policymakers, and informed general interest readers.

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CHAPTER 1

The Diplomacy of the Revolution

> We ought to lay it down as a first principle and a Maxim never to be forgotten, to maintain an entire Neutrality in all future European Wars.
>
> —John Adams in the Continental Congress, September 1775

> As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.
>
> —Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, January 1776

The origins of American independence can best be understood in the context of the long struggle between England and France for both domination of North America and supremacy in Europe. The conclusion in 1763 of the Seven Years' War—or the French and Indian War as it is also known—left Great Britain victorious and at the pinnacle of its power. At the same time, however, the roots of the American Revolution may be traced to this victory and the 1763 Treaty of Paris.[1] The treaty marked the beginning of increasingly divergent attitudes and confrontational policies in London and the colonies. For Britain, victory required reorganizing the vast North American territories acquired from France and Spain. Aimed at preventing frontier Indian warfare, the Proclamation of 1763 closed the trans-Appalachian area to colonial settlement. To defend and police the new territories, the British maintained an unprecedented standing army in mainland America. To meet the costs of this commitment and relieve the massive financial burden left by the war, London sought to impose new taxes and enforce imperial trade laws

that had long been ignored by the colonists, ending the period of so-called salutary neglect.

These measures sought not only to bring peace and stability to North America, but also to require the colonies to share the cost of imperial defense and administration. The colonists, however, had played a vital role in the victory over the French and their Indian allies, a victory that encouraged the colonies to think of themselves as self-governing entities.[2] The removal of the French and Spanish threat to North America reinforced the notion that the colonists no longer required British protection; thus, the colonists refused to have their duties prescribed for them by Parliament and king, while Parliament and king rejected colonial self-government. Britain, consequently, found itself involved in a war not only with its colonies, but eventually most of Europe. The war, though not wholly disastrous to British arms, deprived Great Britain of the most valuable of it colonial possessions.

The initial aim of armed revolt in 1775 was not independence, but rather a recognition of what the colonials held to be their rights as British subjects that they had enjoyed prior to 1763. The colonies turned to independence when the British government adopted severe repressive measures. No one set forth the arguments for independence so persuasively as Thomas Paine, a recent immigrant from England. Paine had arrived in America in late 1774, and less than two years later, in January 1776, he published *Common Sense*. This widely read pamphlet was the single most effective articulation of the case for independence.

An Entangling Alliance with France

In asserting the benefits of independence, Paine argued that it was America's connection to Great Britain that drew it into "European wars and quarrels" and set it "at variance with nations, whom would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom, we have neither anger nor complaint." He continued, "As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions." Such commerce, according to Paine, would also bring security, so far as it would "secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe; because it is in the interest of all Europe to have America a free port."[3] While such ideas would form the foundation of a basic American foreign policy principle, they were neither original nor unique to the American setting. These ideas can be traced back to earlier political debates between the English Whigs and Tories, who divided over whether England should actively participate in

maintaining a continental balance of power or take advantage of its insular position and avoid European conflicts in the pursuit of trade.[4] In 1744, one pamphleteer posited a general rule that anticipated the founding fathers' views of foreign policy: "A Prince or State ought to avoid all Treaties, except such as tend towards promoting Commerce or Manufactures.... All other Alliances may be look'd upon as so many Incumbrances."[5] Such views were tempered by realistic concerns, as an "entangling alliance" with France proved essential to securing independence.

Greatly inferior to Great Britain in numbers, wealth, industry, and military and naval power, the colonies' only hope for military success depended on aid by a major European power. Months before deciding on independence, Congress had set up a secret committee to make contact with friends in Paris. The committee's agent in Paris, Silas Deane, having come to Paris in July 1776 seeking supplies and credit, discovered secret arrangements for aid had been instituted before his arrival. He found the French government's motivation in assisting the rebelling colonies was to weaken England. The celebrated French playwright and amateur diplomat Caron de Beaumarchais and French foreign minister Comte de Vergennes had persuaded King Louis XVI that aid to the colonies was in France's interest.[6] France's material aid to the colonies, managed by Beaumarchais, consisted of gunpowder and other essential supplies from French arsenals. Spain, persuaded by France, also provided aid. All in all, measured in the dollars of that day, France contributed to the American cause nearly $2 million in subsidies and over $6,350,000 in loans; Spain, approximately $400,000 and $250,000 in subsidies and loans respectively.[7]

With the Declaration of Independence, Congress sent to France the most widely admired and persuasive American of his day, Benjamin Franklin. Franklin, a celebrity in France, was regarded as the embodiment of the Enlightenment. Franklin's mission was to secure French recognition of the colonies' independence that could be accomplished by a treaty between France and the new United States. In Paris he joined Deane and Arthur Lee, who had come from London, to form an American commission. Enemy agents, however, severely compromised the commission's work, the most important of them being Deane's secretary, Dr. Edward Bancroft, secretly in the pay of the British.[8] In addition to the presence of enemy agents, Franklin frequently leaked information for political reasons, while Deane used inside information in pursuit of speculative schemes. Franklin brought with him a draft of a proposed treaty of amity and commerce, which embodied the liberal commercial principles that Congress hoped to see adopted not only by France but by the entire

trading world. The Plan of Treaties of 1776, primarily authored by John Adams, was the first major state paper dealing with American foreign policy and would have influence beyond the exigencies of the Revolution.[9] Writing in June 1776, Adams made his feelings regarding the French treaty clear: "I am not for soliciting any political connection, or military assistance, or indeed naval, from France. I wish for nothing but commerce, a mere marine treaty with them."[10]

While supportive of the United States, Vergennes was initially unwilling to risk war with England by granting formal recognition to the Americans. The surrender of General Burgoyne's British army at Saratoga in October 1777 proved the colonists' determination to field a viable military force that, combined with the readiness of the French navy, encouraged a French commitment.[11] At Paris on February 6, 1778, two agreements—a Treaty of Amity and Commerce and a Treaty of Alliance—were signed, the latter to take effect if Great Britain went to war with France. Vergennes's major concern was that Britain might seek reconciliation with its former colonies. Burgoyne's surrender led Parliament in March to pass legislation repealing all bills enacted since 1763, which led to colonial resentment. In April, London dispatched a commission to America, empowered to offer to Congress virtually everything it had desired, independence alone excepted, if Americans would lay down their arms and resume their allegiance to the British Crown. The right to control their own taxation, to elect their governors and other officials formerly appointed, to be represented in Parliament if they so desired, to continue Congress as an American legislature, release from quitrents, assurance that their colonial characters would not be altered without their consent, full pardon for all who had engaged in rebellion—indicate how far Britain was willing to go to save its empire. In effect, London was offering "dominion status" to America.[12] The offer came too late. With France's recognition, the prospect of an alliance, and the promise of substantial aid, independence seemed assured. Congress ratified the treaties with France without even hesitating to parley with London's commission.

The Treaty of Amity and Commerce placed each nation on a most-favored-nation basis with reference to the liberal principles of the "Plan of 1776"—principles that would protect the interest of either signatory should it be neutral when the other was at war. The Treaty of Alliance—to go into effect should France become embroiled in the war against Great Britain—had as its object "to maintain effectually the liberty, Sovereignty, and independence absolute and unlimited" of the United States. Neither party was to make a separate peace with Great Britain nor lay down its arms until American independence was won. Both parties

mutually guaranteed "from the present time and forever against all other powers" the American possessions that they then held and with which they might emerge from the war. France, in addition, undertook to guarantee the liberty, sovereignty, and independence of the United States.[13] (The Franco-American pact constituted the only "entangling alliance" in which the United States participated until the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949.[14]) The treaty proved indispensable to the winning of independence. After the British declared war on France for recognizing U.S. independence, a French army was sent to America, and French fleets operated off the American coast. The importance of French aid was illustrated in the final scene of the Revolution when, at Yorktown, a British army was trapped between a French fleet and an allied army, of which two-thirds were French.

Spain and the Revolution

Spain, though bound to France by a dynastic alliance, the "Family Compact," and though giving secret aid to the United States, refused to enter the war for over a year after France became a belligerent. The Spanish court hoped to recover Gibraltar (lost in 1713) and Florida (lost in 1763) as a reward for mediating between Great Britain and France. When London declined mediation, Spain signed a pact with France—the Convention of Aranjuez in April 1779—and declared war against Great Britain on June 21, 1779.[15] John Jay spent many bitter months in Madrid asking for recognition. Spain declined, however, to join the Franco-American alliance or, as a colonial power, to formally endorse rebellion by any colonies. Even an offer to waive the American claim of right to navigate the Mississippi River could not persuade the Spanish government to recognize the young republic. The Convention of Aranjuez pledged that France and Spain would not make peace until Spain had recovered Gibraltar. Since the United States had promised not to make peace without France, it could not, if all treaty engagements were observed, make peace until Gibraltar was restored to Spain. As Samuel Flagg Bemis put it, America found itself "chained by European diplomacy to the Rock of Gibraltar."[16]

Spanish and American interests clashed over the United States' desire for the Mississippi River as its western boundary and the right of navigation on it to the Gulf of Mexico. Spain, anxious to monopolize the navigation and commerce of both river and Gulf, was unwilling to concede either American use of the river or a foothold on its eastern bank. If the Spanish had their way, the United States' western boundary would be

fixed at the summit of the Appalachians. Spain's bargaining position was strengthened by the daring of Bernardo de Galvez, the young governor of Louisiana and one of the war's most successful generals, who routed the British from West Florida.[17] He established Spain's claim to a cession of Florida at the end of the war and to full control of the lower Mississippi.

A Pawn in the European Chess Game

The young United States necessarily involved itself in the international rivalries of Europe as their politics threatened to terminate hostilities with American independence not yet achieved. Spain, reluctantly entering the war, soon grew tired of it; thus, Madrid received a British mission in 1780 anxious to discuss peace terms. For America, the Spanish ministers proposed a long truce between Great Britain and its "colonies" without specific recognition of independence and with a division of territory on the basis of the areas each party then occupied.[18] This would have left the British in control of Maine, the northern frontier, New York City, Long Island, and the principal seaports south of Virginia. While Vergennes disapproved of the Anglo-Spanish conversations, which violated the Convention of Aranjuez, he listened to a proposal for mediation from Catherine II of Russia and Austrian Emperor Joseph II, which would have had much the same effect in America. John Adams, an American peace commissioner and minister at The Hague, rejected the proposal out of hand when Vergennes laid it before him. No truce, he said, until all British troops were withdrawn from the United States; no negotiation with England without guarantees that American sovereignty and independence would be respected. But back home, Congress was more easily persuaded than was Adams. Under pressure (and in some instances monetary persuasion) from the French minister to the United States, Congress on June 15, 1781, directed its commissioners in Europe to accept the mediation of Russia and Austria and to place themselves in the hands of the French ministers, "to undertake nothing in the negotiations for peace or truce without their knowledge and concurrence," and to be governed "by their advice and opinion." Fortunately, the British government rejected the proposal for mediation.

Britain, meanwhile, was at war or on the verge of war with most of the Western world. In 1780, the Baltic countries, Russia, Denmark, and Sweden had organized a League of Armed Neutrality to protect their commerce from British naval practices. Prussia, the emperor (of the Holy Roman Empire), the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and even Portugal, Britain's traditional ally, had joined the league. In February 1782, following

receipt of the news of the disaster at Yorktown, the British House of Commons resolved that the war ought to be terminated. In March, a new ministry headed by the Marquis of Rockingham took office and initiated peace talks by sending Richard Oswald to confer with the American representatives in Paris. After Rockingham's death in July 1782, Lord Shelburne became prime minister. He was an advocate of a generous peace, which might result in recapturing for Great Britain the bulk of American trade and at some future date, perhaps, tempt the United States back into some sort of imperial federation.[19]

The Stakes of Diplomacy

The American Congress named five peace commissioners, three of whom actually handled the negotiations. Franklin was in Paris when the talks began. John Jay, who had been in Madrid, arrived in June 1782. John Adams, who had secured recognition and a loan from the Netherlands, reached Paris in October. Franklin and Jay handled most of the discussions, with Adams providing valuable aid toward the close of the negotiations.

The American commissioners had three principal objectives: (1) recognition of independence, now assured; (2) the widest boundaries obtainable; and (3) retention of the inshore fishing privileges on the coasts of British North America the colonials had previously enjoyed. London was prepared to recognize American independence and respond generously to the other American demands. In return, it hoped to secure from the United States: (1) payment of the pre-Revolutionary debts of American planters and others to British creditors, and (2) compensation for the Loyalists (Americans who had sided with Great Britain) for the lands and other property that had been seized by the states. The most controversial American demands concerned boundaries, for their claims involved adjustments with Great Britain and Spain. Congress claimed the entire area between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River based chiefly on the sea-to-sea clauses in certain colonial charters. The British government in the years since 1763 acted as though the western lands belonged to the Crown. South of the Ohio River, American settlements in central Kentucky and eastern and central Tennessee gave the United States a solid basis for claiming those areas, but farther south the Spanish held the east bank of the Mississippi as far north as Natchez. They still hoped to deny the Americans access to the Mississippi and to draw the boundary near to the Appalachian watershed. In this endeavor they had French support.

In the summer of 1779, Congress's first step toward peace negotiations was naming John Adams a commissioner and on August 14 setting proposed boundaries that included the area claimed by the states from the mountains to the Mississippi. It added that although it was "of the utmost importance to the peace and Commerce of the United States that Canada and Nova Scotia should be ceded" and that equal rights in the fisheries should be guaranteed, a desire to terminate the war led Congress to refrain from making these objects an ultimatum. Military necessity and pressure from the French minister prompted Congress to issue new instructions on June 15, 1781, that insisted only on independence and the preservation of the treaties with France as indispensable conditions. With regard to boundaries, the commissioners were to regard the earlier instructions as indicating "the desires and expectations of Congress," but were not to adhere to them if they presented an obstacle to peace.

The Peace Negotiations

The Spanish and French erected the first obstacles encountered by the Americans. John Jay arrived in Paris suspicious of both countries after his futile mission in Madrid. The Spanish ambassador in Paris and a spokesman for Vergennes indicated to him that the Spanish, with French support, were bent on excluding the United States from the Mississippi Valley. Vergennes agreed that the American and French negotiations with the British should proceed separately, but with the understanding that neither settlement should become effective without the other. Franklin and Jay proceeded to negotiate their own preliminary terms with the British, neglecting, with considerable justification, to make those "most candid and confidential communications" to the French ministers. In their negotiations with Great Britain, they simply disregarded Spanish claims in the western country north of the 31st parallel, assuming (as did London) that that country still belonged to Great Britain.

Franklin had already informally sketched out to Oswald what, as an American, he considered the "necessary" and the "advisable" terms of a lasting settlement. Among "necessary" terms he included, after independence and withdrawal of troops, "a confinement of the boundaries of Canada" to what they had been before the Quebec Act (that is, the St. Lawrence-Nipissing line), "if not to a still more contracted state," and the retention of fishing privileges. Among "advisable" terms that might be expected to contribute to a permanent reconciliation, he mentioned indemnification by Great Britain of those persons who had been ruined through the devastations of war, admission of American ships and trade to British