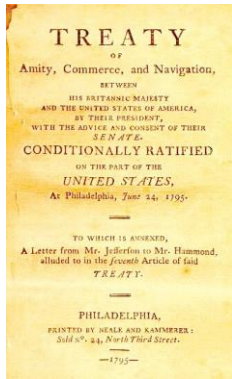


Adams Foreign Affairs

President Adams attempted to follow Washington's isolationist example of staying out of world affairs. Unfortunately, France and Great Britain were about to make it difficult to stay neutral.



The Jay Treaty: With the French helping the U.S. in the American revolution, the two countries were now allies. So when France went to war with Britain, they had hoped that the U.S. would join in as France's ally. The British had been attacking U.S. merchant ships that were trading with France, so the U.S. had good reason to join the fight, but they didn't. Instead, Washington sent John Jay to London to settle things with the British. Jay was successful in getting a treaty signed, and the British stopped attacking U.S. ships. France saw this as a violation of the U.S./French alliance, and over the next year, French warships seized several American ships. With Washington stepping down, this foreign affair was now President Adam's problem.

1. How did France view the Jay Treaty, and why?

2. Should the U.S. have honored their alliance with France? Why or why not?

The XYZ Affair: President Adams sent three representatives to France to ask the French to end the attacks, but were met by secret agents who demanded a bribe before talks could begin. In the U.S., these secret agents became known as X, Y and Z. Shocked and offended, the U.S. representatives refused the demand, and left having accomplished nothing.

The XYZ Affair, as it became known, outraged Americans. At President Adams's request, Congress voted to recruit an army and to build 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. Up until this point, Adams was not very popular President, but with war fever mounting, he began to gain popularity. The question facing Adams was whether the popular thing—waging an undeclared war on France—was also the best thing for the country.

3. How did the French treat the U.S. diplomats?

4. If you were President Adams, how would you have responded to the XYZ Affair and why?

Though war might have been good for Adam's popularity, he knew it would be bad for the country. He decided to try for peace again, and sent a group of men to France to work for a treaty. Federalist leaders 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 wanted to make peace with both Great Britain and the United States and ordered the navy to stop seizing American ships and to release captured American sailors. A treaty was signed, bringing peace between France and the U.S.

Unfortunately this treaty cost Adams his political popularity. His pursuit of peace with France created strong disagreements within the Federalist Party, ultimately losing 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.

5. How did President Adams "olive branch" hurt him politically?

6. Do you think Adams made the right choice? Why?