

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

## Introduction

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.

## **Section 2 -President Washington Creates a Foreign Policy**

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.

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.



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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.

## Section 3 -President Adams Dilemma: Protection 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.



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**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.