

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

*At Any and All Hazards: Manifest Destiny, the Monroe Doctrine, and  
the Balance of Power in North America*

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## Introduction

This dissertation will demonstrate that Manifest Destiny should be viewed as a deliberate, if not primitive, American national security strategy alongside the more well-understood policy of the Monroe Doctrine. Contrary to prevalent historiography, Manifest Destiny was not primarily driven by a desire to expand the boundaries of the United States for the benefit of the institution of slavery. Although the prevailing historiography of Manifest Destiny attempts to resurrect the once defunct Neo-Abolitionist belief that slaveholders' desire to expand the geographical scope of slavery was one of the chief causes behind the United States' War with Mexico, access to the historical record has never been more open for scholars to discern the truth of this claim. The availability of contrary facts makes the conclusions of those who subscribe to the "slave power" or "aggressive slavocracy" conspiracy untenable because it is quite clear that Neo-Abolitionist's preferred historical interpretation has been ahistorical for quite some time.

An examination of the relevant sources will show that there is more evidence to suggest that the debate over slavery served to inhibit or restrain Manifest Destiny and American expansionism in the antebellum United States, especially as it relates to the fifteen years before the Civil War. Neo-Abolitionist historians also fail to understand the difference between the Southern Democrats represented by John C. Calhoun and the more numerous and influential Jacksonian Democrats represented by Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk. To Southern Democrats, what was best for the South and the slaveholding interests may have been their key motivating factor, but the Southern Democrats most supportive of the institution of slavery were often the ones most opposed to the maximalist expansionists of the Jacksonian era. On the other hand, one indisputable fact is that Jacksonian Democrats were clearly motivated by other factors, mainly, for example, by what they perceived was in the national interest.

In 1966, historian William Goetzmann wrote, “Most serious histories of the Mexican War are clouded by the overtones of guilt and moral justification implanted by several generations of Whig and Neo-Whig historians who somehow, and quite falsely, have connected its campaigns with the question of slavery and the ‘aggressive slavocracy.’ With the exception of the works of Justin Smith and K. Jack Bauer, the most thorough to date, the majority of American histories of the war have been Whig-inspired apologetics indicating little concern for world strategy and a disregard for the actual facts of the coming of the war.”<sup>1</sup> Goetzmann’s analysis is largely drawn from Peter T. Harstad’s and Richard W. Resh’s 1964 article, “The Causes of the Mexican War: A Note on Changing Interpretations,” which is one of the first modern examinations of the historiography of the Mexican War.<sup>2</sup> The aforementioned article provided a brief historiographical survey up to the 1960s, while Thomas Benjamin’s “Recent Historiography of the Origins of the Mexican War” provided an overview of Mexican War historiography forward to the end of the 1970s. Since the 1970s, the historiography of the conflict between the United States and Mexico has echoed either the racially motivated narrative of Reginald Horsman’s *Race and Manifest Destiny* (1981) or the slave power perspective of Amy Greenberg’s *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (2005), respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Harstad and Resh noted, “Even before the fighting ceased, students of the Mexican War began speculating as to the causes. The first commentaries appeared immediately following the war, during a period when feelings of repression and gloom, generated largely by abolitionists, enshrouded the conflict. The abolitionists advanced the view that the war was precipitated by

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<sup>1</sup> William H. Goetzmann, *When the Eagle Screamed: The Romantic Horizon in American Diplomacy, 1800-1860* (New York: Wiley, 1966), 55. Note: See also the relevant works of Smith and Bauer.

<sup>2</sup> Peter T. Harstad and Richard W. Resh, “The Causes of the Mexican War: A Note on Changing Interpretations,” *Arizona and the West* 6, no. 4 (1964): 289-302.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Benjamin, “Recent Historiography of the Origins of the Mexican War,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 54, no. 3 (1979).

Southern slaveholders conspiring to acquire lands for the creation of new slave states.”<sup>4</sup> This belief that a vast “slave power” conspiracy of Southern planters pushed for a war with Mexico to acquire more territory for the institution of slavery has also been called the “slavocracy” or “plantocracy” by Neo-Abolitionist historians and advocates of the theory, such as Russel B. Nye (*Fettered Freedom*) and Lee Benson (“Explanation of American Civil War Causation”), as well as by its critics like Chauncey Boucher (*In Re That Aggressive Slavocracy*), even though Boucher dismissed even legitimate evidence of Southern slaveholder influence over national policy during the Tyler Administration. Shaped by the events of the Civil War, the “slave power” conspiracy view dominated the early historiography of the Mexican War, only abating around the turn of the nineteenth century. As Harstad and Resh pointed out, “Not until the first decades of the twentieth century did a vast majority of historians present the war as one waged for the extension of the national boundaries – a cause quite divorced from the slavery issue.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the first authors to write in support of the “slave power” conspiracy was abolitionist and Unitarian clergyman Abiel A. Livermore,<sup>6</sup> who wrote, “Had the idea of extending the ‘peculiar’ institution of the South, and the political power resulting therefrom, been entirely excluded from the question, not a shot would ever have been fired.”<sup>7</sup> However, no one did more to advance the “slave power” view in post-Mexican War America than William Jay, who believed that “by blustering about our claims, swelling them to the greatest possible point of inflation, and then kindly offering to waive them all in consideration of a cession of California ... Mr. Polk was determined to have Mexican territory, peaceably if he could— forcibly if he must.”<sup>8</sup> Jay implied

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<sup>4</sup> Harstad and Resh, “The Causes of,” 290.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 290.

<sup>6</sup> Abiel Abbot Livermore, *The War with Mexico Reviewed* (Boston: American Peace Society, 1850).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> William Jay, *A Review of the Causes and Consequences of the Mexican War* (Boston: Fourteenth Thousand, 1849), 109.

that it was this territory that Polk intended for slavery. Jay's conclusions were so widely respected that his interpretation of the Mexican War remained largely unchallenged until the 1890s, with prominent historians continually referencing Jay with reverence.<sup>9</sup> With this historiography of the war prevailing at the time, it is no wonder that former President Ulysses S. Grant, a veteran of the Mexican War himself, would declare in 1885 that he still "to this day regard[ed] the war, ... as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation."<sup>10</sup>

However, due to greater archival access in the United States and Mexico, as well as the subsequent publication of the works of Cadmus M. Wilcox, George P. Garrison, Jesse S. Reeves, George L. Rives, and, perhaps most influentially, Justin Harvey Smith, a notable shift in the historiography of the causes of the Mexican War occurred in the late 1800s and early 1900s.<sup>11</sup> To one degree or another, these historians treated the war with Mexico as an inevitability.<sup>12</sup> Reeves argued that California was the prize without regard to the slavery issue and believed that "war would have been declared against Mexico had the Mexicans not crossed the Rio Grande or come into conflict with Taylor."<sup>13</sup> Smith added that the Mexicans "were unlikely to handle in the best manner a grave and complicated question requiring all possible sanity of judgement and perfect self-control. ... misunderstandings between them and a nation like the United States were not only sure to arise but sure to prove troublesome."<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, Harstad and Resh noted, "Since 1920, American historians have not departed radically from the views advanced during the preceding

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<sup>9</sup> Harstad and Resh, "The Causes of," 293, 295. Note: Historians Hermann von Holst, James Schouler, and James Ford Rhodes all cited William Jay's work as authoritative.

<sup>10</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* (United States: Cosimo, Incorporated, 2006), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Justin Harvey Smith, *The War with Mexico* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919).

<sup>12</sup> Cadmus M. Wilcox and Mary Rachel Wilcox, *History of the Mexican War* (Washington, D.C.: The Church News Publishing Company, 1892). George Pierce Garrison, *Westward Extension, 1841-1850* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1970). Jesse Siddall Reeves, *American Diplomacy Under Tyler and Polk* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1907). George L. Rives, *The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913).

<sup>13</sup> Harstad and Resh, "The Causes of," 297.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 298.

two decades.”<sup>15</sup> Harstad and Resh continued, “As it stands, until a comprehensive, up-to-date study is done, historians must still rely upon Justin Smith’s account published over forty years ago.”<sup>16</sup> The work of these historians was critical in dispelling the dated and ideologically driven conspiratorial “slave power” historiography of abolitionist minded historians, indirectly bringing into focus the very real threat posed by European powers’ influence in territories peripheral to the United States. Although these historians came closer to the truth than previous generations, their information was limited, especially in respect to some of the peripheral territories like California.

However, beginning in the 1960s, historian Frederick Merk began to re-examine certain aspects of the “slave power” thesis.<sup>17</sup> Despite stressing the importance of expanding slavery as motivating Southern demands for Texas, Merk departed from the old Whig thesis in acknowledging that the slaveholding influence cleverly sold the Annexation of Texas to fellow Southerners as necessary for maintaining the power of the South in the federal government while, at the same time, selling it to Northerners based on a pre-empting of British designs on the Republic of Texas. Benjamin called this approach an “intriguing interpretation” that “raises the possibility of intelligent public relations, not conspiracy, aiding and even guiding public policy” while leaving the question of their true intentions shrouded in mystery, one the present dissertation seeks to reveal.<sup>18</sup> Despite his focus on the importance of slavery as it related to Texas in bringing the United States and Mexico to the point of war, Merk’s hypothesis did not substantially depart from the accepted historiography enshrined by Smith in his *The War With Mexico* (1919), for as Merk

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 299-300.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Frederick Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1849* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966). Frederick Merk, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972).

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Benjamin, “Recent Historiography of the Origins of the Mexican War,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 54, no. 3 (1979): 174.



acknowledged, concerns over British intentions toward California made it a flashpoint for an eventual conflict, whether or not Mexico let Texas go in peace. Therefore, Merk played an invaluable role in updating Smith's historiography, here without Smith's racial and nationalistic affirmation bias, but in doing so, he unintentionally revived the "slavery as motivation" idea regarding the United States' Annexation of Texas.

Then, during the 1980s, a new generation of historians emerged who saw race, class, and gender as the prime movers of conflict in world history. Amy Greenberg, for instance, went on to carve a niche in the field of Manifest Destiny historiography with such books as *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (2005)<sup>19</sup> and *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (2013).<sup>20</sup> Writing in a polemical style popular among "new left" historians, Greenberg's analysis of the causes of the Mexican War and the relevant historiography were laden with vitriol and *ad hominem* attacks, saying of Polk, "No Democrat would say it out loud, not yet anyhow, but the new president was a liar."<sup>21</sup> One historian who openly attempted to advance the old "slave power" conspiracy as articulated in its day was Leonard L. Richards. Louisiana State University Press, the publisher of Richards' book, *The Slave Power* (2009), described his work as an effort to reopen "a discussion effectively closed by historians since the 1920s—when the slave power theory was dismissed first as a distortion of reality and later a manifestation of the 'paranoid style' in the early Republic."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Destiny and American Territorial Expansion: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 US Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>22</sup> Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), Back Matter.

However, most scholars did not go as far as Richards in arguing that an actual cabal of powerful slaveholders secretly conspired to spread slavery, but many still believed that racism and capitalistic greed helped to motivate Manifest Destiny and, in so doing, channeled the moralistic outrage of the old “slave power” view of the abolitionists. For example, historians such as Patricia Limerick referred to the era of the Mexican War by stating, “In those years, nationalism was certainly in full force on the American side. Desire for more territory, especially for the acquisition of a Pacific port, coincided with racism and condescension to produce a belief that Mexico could be easily persuaded to surrender territory to its clearly more powerful neighbor.”<sup>23</sup> Racism also remained a prominent feature in Reginald Horsman’s *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Horsman wrote, “By the 1850s the American sense of idealistic mission had been corrupted, and most of the world’s peoples were condemned to permanent inferiority or even to extinction ... A traditional colonial empire had been rejected, but it was believed that the expansion of a federal system might ultimately prove possible as American Anglo-Saxons outbred, overwhelmed and replaced ‘inferior’ races.”<sup>24</sup>

Other historians such as Thomas Hietala in his book *Manifest Design* have been notable. For example, Hietala proposed that the “foreign policy in the 1840s was primarily a response to internal concerns and that Democrats (and Tyler Whigs) preferred new land and markets over extensive federal regulation and reform.”<sup>25</sup> Another view from historian Anders Stephanson in *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* was that “Manifest destiny did not ‘cause’ President Polk to go to war against Mexico ... it was not a strategic doctrine ... In no way do I argue that manifest destiny exhausts or defines the ‘meaning of America,’ ... What I do

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<sup>23</sup> Pamela Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest* (New York: Norton, 1987), 231.

<sup>24</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 297.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Hietala, *Manifest Design* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), xiii.

argue, however, is that manifest destiny is of signal importance in the way the United States came to understand itself in the world and still does ... Manifest Destiny, like all ideological power, worked in practical ways and was always institutionally embedded. Historically, it could become a force only in combination with other forces and in changing ways. Not a mere rationalization, it appeared in the guise of common sense.”<sup>26</sup> The popular historiography of Manifest Destiny and the Mexican War since Greenberg have often focused on racial and economic factors and, in the case of Stephanson, openly questioned national security concerns as a reason for the conflict.

However, those modern scholars who have argued in favor of the “slave power” historiography of Manifest Destiny need only make a cursory examination of U.S. history to see that the slavery controversy and sectional jealousies it inflamed actually served to inhibit, not encourage, American expansion. In fact, the restraining effect that the debate over slavery had on Manifest Destiny stretched back to the War of 1812. In the debate over the potential annexation of Canada, U.S. representative from Virginia John Randolph warned, “You are laying the foundation for a secession from the Union—on the north, by the possession of Canada, and on the borders of the Ohio, for another division. The Ohio has been made the line between the slaveholding States and those which hold no slaves.”<sup>27</sup> In 1837–1838, during the Upper and Lower Canadian Rebellions, Northern and Southern newspapers duelled over Southern support for Texas and Northern support for an independent Canada. As *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* wrote, “President Van Buren has issued his proclamation in reference to the existing state of things in Canada, forbidding all interference on the part of the citizens of the United States. But how come it that in the case of Mexico and Texas, that a different course is pursued? ... Why this difference?

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<sup>26</sup> Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), xiv.

<sup>27</sup> Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (Gloucester MA: Peter Smith) 143.

It is the dark spirit of slavery ... all our sympathies, at the beck and nod of the South, are to be made to flow, and we are required to do their bidding—admit Texas into the Union, and thereby perpetuate slavery in this land, which has been styled the home of the free.”<sup>28</sup>

Even during the Mexican War, historian John Douglas Pitts Fuller wrote that those individuals most often opposed to the annexation of more Mexican territory were men from the slaveholding South. As the March 13, 1847, edition of the *Boston Post* reported, “Mr. Berrien, senator from a slave state, offered a resolution in the U.S. Senate against the acquisition of any territory from Mexico, because he was satisfied slavery never could exist in any such territory. Mr. Johnson, another senator from a slave state, sustained Mr. Berrien’s proposition because he said, every foot of territory acquired from Mexico must INEVITABLY be free territory.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, at the time, John C. Calhoun was the leading Southern voice opposed to the annexation of more Mexican territory.<sup>30</sup> In addition, when the United States Congress attempted a last-ditch effort to stave off a Civil War with the Crittenden Compromise in early 1861, a compromise resolution that would have allowed slavery to exist in any future territory acquired by the United States to the south of the Missouri Compromise line, many free-soil Republicans responded with outrage. For example, a U.S. Representative from the State of New York, Roscoe Conkling, argued that the so-called “hereafter clause” would lead to a permanent war of conquest in the tropics or, as he said, it would “amount to a perpetual covenant of war against every people, tribe, and State owning a foot of land between here and Terra del Fuego.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Maxime Dagenais, “The Canadian Rebellion, the American South, and Slavery,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 49, no. 4 (2019): 563-572.

<sup>29</sup> John Douglas Pitts Fuller, *The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico, 1846-1848*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1936) 75.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>31</sup> Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 221.

Still, despite all the evidence that the institution of slavery realistically served to inhibit American expansion, “slave power” conspiracy historians have continued to promote the idea that the desire to expand slavery spurred the movement behind Manifest Destiny. However, these historians would do well to consider the words of the most influential decision-maker behind the expansion of the United States during the Mexican War and the high watermark of Manifest Destiny: U.S. President James K. Polk. In his private correspondence, Polk frequently expressed frustration that the slavery question often hampered progress concerning badly needed legislation to establish administrative governments in the newly conquered territories from Mexico. For example, on January 30, 1847, Polk wrote to George Bancroft, “The vexed question of Slavery as connected with it, has again been thrust before Congress, as you will have seen. You will be surprised I know, to see that this agitating subject, which can result in no good ... It has distracted the Democratic party in Congress, producing sectional excitement & destroying all harmony in their action ... The factions in Congress ... are shaping their course, with a view, to advance the interests of their respective favourites in the next Presidential Election, have had much agency in producing the present unfortunate state of things.”<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, Polk wrote to former U.S. Senator from Michigan and Democratic Presidential nominee Lewis Cass on August 24, 1848, “I rejoice that a Territorial Government, has at length been provided for Oregon, but deeply regret that the delicate and agitating question concerning slavery, could not have been settled by Congress, upon principles of conciliation and compromise, and Territorial Governments have been established also, over New Mexico and California. In view of the excitement which existed, threatening to array the country into geographical parties, which

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<sup>32</sup> “James K. Polk to George Bancroft, January 30, 1847,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XII, January-July 1847*, eds. Tom Chaffin and Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 65.

could not fail to destroy the harmony, and might prove dangerous to the existence of the Union.”<sup>33</sup>

In addition, on September 15, 1848, Polk confessed to George Bancroft:

The only remaining subject giving rise to any considerable excitement and division of opinion ... relates to the organization of Governments, in the territories recently acquired from Mexico, and this would be readily settled ... were it not for the agitation, of the delicate and distracting question of slavery ... I deeply regret that Governments, based on principles of concession and compromise on the slavery question, had not also been established over New Mexico and California. Had this been done the agitation of the slavery question, so far as practical measures are concerned would have ceased. In view of the excitement which existed, threatening to array the country into geographical parties, which could not fail to destroy the harmony, and might endanger the existence of the Union itself.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, Polk wrote Bancroft again on January 5, 1849, “There is but one open question which gives me any serious concern and which I am anxious to settle before I retire, and that is the question of providing Governments, for the inhabitants of the immense territories, acquired by the Treaty with Mexico. In the present temper of Congress, and in view of the great diversity of opinion which prevails, I fear this cannot be done at the present Session. The slavery question constitutes the sole and great obstacle, to an adjustment.”<sup>35</sup> Once again, Polk’s diary around this time even reveals his surprise at the inclusion of slavery in the debate over the acquisition of territory from Mexico in the first place. In his diary entry from August 10, 1846, Polk recalled hearing about the Wilmot Proviso submitted by Pennsylvania Democrat David Wilmot in the House of Representatives, a measure that would have excluded slavery from any territory acquired by treaty from Mexico. Polk wrote, “I learned that after an exciting debate in the House a bill passed that body, but with a mischievous and foolish amendment to the effect that no territory

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<sup>33</sup> “James K. Polk to Lewis Cass, August 24, 1848,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XIII, April 1848-June 1849*, ed. Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2019), 214.

<sup>34</sup> “James K. Polk to George Bancroft, September 15, 1848,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XIII, April 1848-June 1849*, ed. Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2019), 249-250.

<sup>35</sup> “James K. Polk to George Bancroft, January 5, 1849,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XIII, April 1848-June 1849*, ed. Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2019), 425-426.

which might be acquired by treaty from Mexico should ever be a slaveholding country. What connection slavery had with making peace with Mexico is difficult to conceive.”<sup>36</sup> The slavery question once again appeared in Polk’s diary entry from January 5, 1847, which mentioned a resolution to advance the Wilmot Proviso. Polk recorded a discussion in his cabinet, writing:

The slavery question has been introduced in the House of Representatives ... There is no probability that any territory will ever be acquired from Mexico in which slavery could ever exist. New Mexico and California is all that can ever probably be acquired by treaty, and indeed all that I think it important to acquire. In these provinces slavery would probably never exist, and therefore the question would never arise. The dangers of the introduction of the subject were fully considered by the Cabinet. Mr. Buchanan urged the importance and necessity of Congress declaring that we would hold these provinces as indemnity, and establish governments there, subject to the provisions of a treaty of peace. He further expressed his willingness to extend the Missouri Compromise west to the Pacific. All the members of the Cabinet agreed with him in these views. The Postmaster-General was willing to acquire these provinces and agreed that slavery should never exist in them. I suspended any decision on the subject, though it was earnestly urged by Mr. Buchanan and Mr. Walker. Though willing to assent to the proposition, I was not ready, until I saw further developments, to recommend it to Congress as the policy of the administration.<sup>37</sup>

A few weeks later, Polk recorded a separate conversation that he had had with Senator Crittenden of Kentucky on January 23, 1847, in which they discussed the slavery question. As Polk recalled, “Mr. Crittenden, though differing with me in politics, is an honorable gentleman, and in the confidence that ought to exist between a Senator and the President, I was unreserved in my conversation. It was in substance what I had said to other Senators and a few others. I informed him that I was sincerely desirous for peace, but that I believed the most effective mode of obtaining it was by a bold and vigorous prosecution of the war. ...” Polk then outlined his strategy to end the war and then frankly expressed his overall objectives to Crittenden; in concluding, he wrote, “I told him I did not prosecute the war for conquest, that I hoped by a treaty of peace to obtain a

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<sup>36</sup> James K. Polk and Allan Nevins, *Polk: The Diary of a President, 1845-1849*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), 138.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

cession of territory which by a definitive treaty of peace she might make to the United States ... to obtain a cession of the Californias and New Mexico, and to pay for them a reasonable equivalent. That equivalent would probably be the assumption of the debt due by Mexico to our citizens, to bear the expenses of the war, and to pay Mexico some millions of dollars besides. He expressed his concurrence in these general views and his gratification at hearing them.”<sup>38</sup> Having informed Crittenden of his desire for a just and fair peace, Polk then brought up the issue of slavery:

I told him I deprecated the agitation of the slavery question in Congress, and though a southwestern man and from a slaveholding State as well as himself, I did not desire to acquire a more southern territory than that which I had indicated, because I did not desire by so doing to give occasion for the agitation of a question which might sever and endanger the Union itself. I told him the question of slavery would probably never be a practical one if we acquired New Mexico and California, because there would be but a narrow ribbon of territory south of the Missouri Compromise line of 36°30’, and in it slavery would probably never exist. He expressed himself highly gratified with these views. He expressed an opinion that he would be satisfied with the Rio Grande as a boundary, and with a smaller country including the Bay of San Francisco on the Pacific, than that which I had indicated. I urged him to have speedy action in the Senate upon the war measures which I had recommended. My interview with Mr. Crittenden was a gratifying one.<sup>39</sup>

As demonstrated by Polk’s conversation with Crittenden, slavery was more of a nuisance than a motivating factor for the president. Meanwhile, in his prior dealings with South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun, Polk had always maintained a manner of decorum. However, as his administration progressed, Polk grew frustrated by Calhoun’s agitation over the slavery issue.

Recalling an episode in his April 6, 1847, diary entry, Polk noted:

Mr. Mason, the Secretary of the Navy, mentioned to me that he had been informed by the Hon[orable] John S. Barbour of Virginia that he had recently received a letter from Senator Calhoun of South Carolina, the object of which was to obtain his signature to an address to the people of the United States on the subject of slavery, thus making and endeavouring to make the question a test in the next Presidential election. Mr. Barbour informed Mr. Mason, as Mr. Mason told me, that he had refused to sign the address; but that he learned that Mr. Calhoun desired that it should be signed by leading men in all the Southern States, and the Hon[orable].

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 189-190.



Mr. Seddon among others was named by Mr. Barbour as one of those who expected to sign it. I remarked to Mr. Mason that Mr. Calhoun had become perfectly desperate in his aspirations to the Presidency, and had seized upon this sectional question as the only means of sustaining himself in his present fallen condition, and that such an agitation of the slavery question was not only unpatriotic and mischievous, but wicked.<sup>40</sup>

Polk not only blasted Calhoun, but also Northern Democrats like New York Governor Silas Wright Jr., who, in the president's opinion, took an opposing view to the aforementioned South Carolinian for political gain. For example, Polk wrote:

The truth is that there is no patriotism in either faction of the party. Both desire to mount slavery as a hobby, and hope to secure the election of their favourite upon it. They will both fail and ought to fail. The people of the United States, I hope, will cast off all such intriguers, and make their own selection for the Presidency, and this if they are wise they will do. I now entertain a worse opinion of Mr. Calhoun than I have ever done before. He is wholly selfish, and I am satisfied has no patriotism. A few years ago he was the author of Nullification and threatened to dissolve the Union on account of the tariff. During my administration the reduction of duties which he desired has been obtained, and he can no longer complain. No sooner is this done than he selects slavery upon which to agitate the country, and blindly mounts that topic as a hobby ... They both forget that the Constitution settles these questions which were the subjects to mutual concessions between the North and the South. I am utterly disgusted at such intriguing of men in high place, and hope they will be rebuked by the people.<sup>41</sup>

Polk also recalled another controversy related to the slavery issue in the District of Columbia in his December 23, 1848, diary entry:

Senator Foote of Mississippi called and enquired of me if I had heard what had occurred at the meeting of the Southern members of Congress held at the Senate chamber last night on the subject of the slavery question ... He said there was no violence, but a calm and firm purpose on the part of those present to assert and maintain constitutional rights of the Southern States if the majority in Congress should attempt to carry out the purpose indicated by the late votes in the House of Representatives on the subject of slavery in this District. He said that the committee appointed would prepare an address to the State governments of the slaveholding States on the subject, if the measures threatened in Congress assailing the constitutional rights of the South were pressed. I said but little in reply, but said generally that my position as President of the United States made it my duty to represent all the States and to preserve the harmony of the Union as far as I

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 209-210.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 210-211.

possessed the power to do so. I expressed the hope to him that the threatened interference from the North with the delicate subject of slavery would not be pressed to extremities.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, in every significant interaction with men holding a sectional bias, Polk attempted to strike a neutral and conciliatory tone. Again, on January 14, 1849, Polk recalled a meeting that he had had with several mostly Southern gentlemen, who:

called to consult me about an adjourned meeting of the Southern members of Congress on the subject of slavery which was to take place on tomorrow night. I have heretofore carefully avoided having anything to do with this movement. It was gotten up originally without consulting me. I have feared from the time I heard of the first meeting of the Southern members of Congress on the slavery question that there might be a design on the part of one or two leading men to agitate the slavery question for selfish purposes and that it might end in no good. These gentlemen informed me tonight that Mr. Calhoun had drawn up an address to the Southern States to be signed by all the Senators and Representatives from the slave-holding states, and that from what they had heard of its import they could not sign it. They informed me further that from what they had heard, the Whig Senators and Representatives from the South would decline in a body to sign it. They asked my opinion on the subject.<sup>43</sup>

According to his diary, Polk gave his response, stating:

I replied that if there was anything in the proceedings or the address that looked like or might tend to disunion I was opposed to it ... I think the movement of the Southern members was originally ill-advised. The Whigs, I learn, at first went zealously into it, but upon consultation have concluded to leave consummation of the proceedings exclusively to the Democratic members, alleging that they have confidence in General Taylor, who is a large slave-holder, that he will protect the rights of the South. If they take this course it will produce a division in the South upon the slave question and encourage, rather than discourage, the aggression of the Northern Abolitionists and Whigs upon the rights of the South. Should this be the result great mischief will be produced by the proceedings of the portion of the Southern members who may attend the meeting and send forth an address. My advice to the gentlemen who called this evening was to attend the meeting tomorrow night and endeavour to prevent anything from being done; but not themselves to sign any address.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 360.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 364-365.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 365.

In the following days, the inevitable confrontation finally came with Senator John C. Calhoun who came to call on President Polk in person. The meeting occurred on January 16, 1849, and Polk described it as follows:

Between ten and eleven o'clock Senator Calhoun of South Carolina called. He has not been to see me since his arrival in Washington shortly after the meeting of Congress, when he called to pay his respects. I anticipated his business the moment he entered my office, and I was not mistaken. He very soon introduced the subject of the slavery question and the meeting of the Southern members of Congress at the Capitol last night. He was very earnest in the expression of his opinion that the South should no longer delay resisting the aggressions of the North upon their rights. As soon as I had an opportunity I expressed my strong attachment to the Union of the States, the great importance of preserving it, and my hope that governments might be provided for California and New Mexico, and especially the former, by admitting into the Union as a State without having the bill for that purpose embarrassed by the Wilmot Proviso. I found he was opposed to an adjustment in this mode.<sup>45</sup>

With Calhoun already agitated, Polk added, "I urged the importance of the measure, and expressed the opinion that the admission of California into the Union as a State was the only practical mode of settling the slave question. In this form the question of slavery would be left to the people of the new States when they came to form a State constitution for themselves. I told him that I deemed it of the greatest importance that the agitation of the delicate and dangerous question of slavery should be arrested, as I thought it would be by the organization of governments for the territories acquired by the treaty with Mexico. ..." Polk further noted "that if California, bounded by the California mountains, was admitted as a State, the whole difficulty would be settled, and that the Free-Soil agitators or Abolitionists of the North would be prostrate and powerless, that the country would be quieted, and the Union preserved. He was opposed to all this; spoke in excited terms of the Texas members and said they had betrayed the South; that he had

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 365-366.

heard of this proposition about New Mexico [to remain under the administration of Texas for the foreseeable future] ten days ago, and that it was a bid for the Texas men.”<sup>46</sup>

Polk concluded his recollection by stating that:

[Senator Calhoun] was opposed to the admission of California as a State, because slaveholders had been prevented from emigrating with their property to it and it would be a free state. I replied that whether admitted now or hereafter the people inhabiting the country would have a right when they came to form a State constitution to regulate their own domestic institutions, and that Congress could not prevent this. He proposed no plan of adjusting the difficulty but insisted that the aggressions of the North upon the South should be resisted and that the time had come for action. I became perfectly satisfied that he did not desire that Congress should settle the question at the present session, and that he desired to influence the South upon that subject, whether from personal or patriotic views it is not difficult to determine. I was firm and decided in my conversation with him, intending to let him understand distinctly that I gave no countenance to any movement which tended to violence or the disunion of the States.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, when face to face with the arch-apologist for slavery and the American South, John C. Calhoun, Polk stood his ground and opposed anything that might lead to disunion or a possible civil war. Thus, a major problem “slave power” conspiracy historians face in their explanations of the root causes of the Mexican War is that they fail to distinguish between Southern Democrats, as represented by Calhoun, and Jacksonian Democrats, as represented by Polk. To Southern Democrats, what was best for the South and the slaveholding interests may have been their supreme motivating factor, but Jacksonian Democrats were clearly motivated by other factors: namely by what they perceived to be in the national interest, such as traditional fears of encirclement, disunion, and a “balance of power” being established on the North American continent. Moreover, the Jacksonian branch of the Democrat Party was in control of the federal government after 1844, and Southern Democrats like Calhoun had little influence over official national policy during the Mexican War, sometimes even acting against the wishes of the Polk

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 366-367.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 367.

Administration. However, if not a desire to expand slavery or general land hunger by Americans, the question remains: What motivated U.S. actions regarding expansion during the Polk Administration and the age of Manifest Destiny?

On this point, it is the contention of this author of this dissertation that contrary to the beliefs of New Left historians seeking to revive the once discredited theory that American territorial expansion was driven by a motivation to expand the institution of slavery, a position that I have dubbed the Neo-Abolitionist view, rather that Manifest Destiny developed as an early national security strategy and primitive strategic doctrine, what might be termed in today's vernacular as a kind of preemptive threat displacement theory. That is, early on in the history of the Republic, many American statesmen believed that the most effective means of preventing a "balance of power" geopolitical system from being established in North America was to reduce the number of independent sovereignties on the frontiers of the United States through the annexation and incorporation of such territories into the Union. Also, how Americans dealt with apprehensions of encirclement and the "problem of neighborhood" in connection with the "balance of power" concept as well as how these concerns related to ongoing fears of domestic insurrections, Indian uprisings, and Slave rebellions is the focus of this dissertation. Personally speaking, it is hoped that the subjects addressed in this dissertation might open up to future researchers other potential avenues of academic inquiry such as a "common man" approach or "bottom up" sources cultural history of Manifest Destiny, or perhaps a focus on the utopian "safety-valve" diffusion theory of slavery articulated by Robert Walker and mentioned in Chapter 4: Texas, Insurrections, Indian Uprisings and Slave Rebellions.

## Chapter 1: Manifest Destiny and the Problem of Neighborhood

To determine the correct driving impetus behind the movement for Manifest Destiny, it is necessary to understand how it became such an article of faith among both major American political parties. Even the Republican party, the ideological inheritors of the American Whig political tradition in the 1892 platform of the Grand Old Party, proudly proclaimed, “We reaffirm our approval of the Monroe doctrine and believe in the achievement of the manifest destiny of the Republic in its broadest sense.”<sup>1</sup> In his monumental work, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, America’s foremost historian of foreign relations at the time, Samuel Flagg Bemis, provided a list of key tenets of traditional American foreign policy. Bemis’ list included freedom of the seas, freedom of commerce and navigation (by which he meant trade reciprocity, not free trade), abstention from European wars under ordinary circumstances (derisively called isolation today, but notably enshrined in Washington’s Farewell Address), self-determination of all peoples, nonintervention in the internal affairs of foreign nations, the right of expatriation and the wrongness of impressment, suppression of the African slave trade, Pan-Americanism and a “Good Neighbor” policy, and international arbitration by voluntary agreement.<sup>2</sup>

Also on the list, Bemis included the connected principles of the No-Transfer resolution of 1811 (made part of the Monroe Doctrine in 1869 by President Ulysses S. Grant), the Monroe Doctrine, and the idea of “Continental expansion: the Manifest Destiny—a feeling of deep inner reality—of the United States to become a Continental Republic in dimension and significance.”<sup>3</sup>

A strongly held belief “in the achievement of the manifest destiny of the Republic in its broadest

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere Since 1776* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 162.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 963-964.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 963.

sense” and “a feeling of deep inner reality—of the United States to become a Continental Republic in dimension and significance” do not in themselves explain the necessity of Manifest Destiny or United States continental expansionism. Some historians have attempted to address this question but only in passing. For example, in his book *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776*, historian Walter McDougal wrote, “Keeping the imperial powers out, preventing them from extending their balance-of-power system to North America’s waters and rimlands, was a vital U.S. interest *whether or not* it also led to U.S. expansion. And expansionism, when it did occur, was not identical to the policy of the Monroe Doctrine but a corollary of it.”<sup>4</sup> However, preventing a “balance of power” system from being established on the North American continent was indeed directly connected to Manifest Destiny and, more often than not, led to U.S. expansion.

Important for understanding the concerns of many early U.S. statesmen (excluding, perhaps, sectionalist partisans such as the New England Federalists) toward European powers having territories bordering on the American frontier and the potential encirclement of the United States by a powerful adversary was their apprehension about the establishment of a “balance of power” system of diplomacy on the North American continent. Since the early days of the Republic, generations of U.S. leaders had been schooled in the law profession, hence becoming familiar with the revered work of the authors of *The Federalist Papers*.<sup>5</sup> One aspect of the

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<sup>4</sup> Walter A. McDougal, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 74.

<sup>5</sup> Explanatory Note: The concept of a “balance of power” had been a dominant theme in European foreign policy since at least the Peace of Westphalia (1648). The basic premise is that no single European power ought to become powerful enough to dominate the Continent of Europe. However, as the Founding Fathers observed, this policy inadvertently led to the creation of bloated military establishments in Continental Europe, where each power became an armed camp. Generations of American statesmen were taught that, should a “balance of power” system be established on the North American Continent through the creation of a multiplicity of states or separate confederacies, the resulting military buildup in each state would potentially lead to war or military despotism. See Federalist #8.

Founder's concern over a "balance of power" system in the New World was related to the "problem of neighborhood" and the potential for the creation of several separate confederacies in lieu of one, inseparable union. The immediate history of the United States prior to the writing of *The Federalist Papers* provided a ready and quite clear illustrative example of the threat of dissolution and creation of several, separate confederacies. In the 1780s, there was a growing concern that the United States' European rivals were stirring discontent among western settlers, and it was widely suspected that the British and Spanish were sending out emissaries into the territories to exploit local grievances with East Coast politicians to foment a dissolution of the Union and precipitate the establishment of a separate Western Confederacy.<sup>6</sup>

For example, U.S. Secretary of Foreign Affairs and prominent New Yorker John Jay wrote of his fear that "a considerable number of persons" had already been lured away from their allegiance to the Union.<sup>7</sup> Acting Secretary of State John Jay wrote to his successor, the incoming Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, "An idea that may do mischief, has been very incautiously dropped where it never should have entered – that the interests of the Atlantic and Western parts of the United States are distinct, and that the latter, tending to diminish that of the former, the western people have reason to be jealous of the northern. If Britain really means to do us harm, she will adopt and impress this idea."<sup>8</sup> On February 23, 1789, *The New York Daily Advertiser* confirmed Jay's fears, writing, "By information received from Kentucky, we learn that many of the principal people of that district are warmly in favor of a separation from the Union and contend

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<sup>6</sup> See Samuel Flagg Bemis' books *Pinckney's Treaty: America's advantage from Europe's distress, 1783-1800* and *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* for a detailed account of these activities.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick W. Marks, *Independence on Trial: Foreign Affairs and the Making of the Constitution* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1997), 35.

<sup>8</sup> United States, printed by F.P. Blair, *The Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States of America: From the Signing of the Definitive Treaty of Peace, 10 September 1783 to the Adoption of the U.S. Constitution, March 4, 1789, Vol. I* (Washington, DC: Printed by Blair & Rives, 1837), 809.



that it is injurious to the interest of that country, to be connected with the Atlantic states. This idea [is] pregnant with so much mischief to America.”<sup>9</sup> Western settler leader James Robertson affirmed the attitude of frontiersmen when he said, “In all probability we can not long remain in our present state, and if the British, or any commercial nation which may be in possession of the Mississippi, would furnish us with trade and receive our produce, there cannot be a doubt but the people on the west side of the Appalachian mountains will open their eyes to their real interests.”<sup>10</sup>

A letter from an anonymous westerner from the Falls of the Ohio River wrote to Congress that “preparations are now making here (if necessary) to drive the Spaniards from their settlements at the mouth of the Mississippi. In case we are not countenanced and succored by the United States (if we need it) our allegiance will be thrown off and some other power applied to. Great Britain stands ready with open arms to receive and support us ... You are as ignorant of this country as great Britain was of America.”<sup>11</sup> Speaking of the District of Kentucky and the western part of the Commonwealth of Virginia, retired General George Washington wrote to the Secretary of War Henry Knox in late December 1786, noting the widespread discontent in the United States that lay behind movements such as Shay’s Rebellion, warning, “There are combustibles in every State, which a spark may set fire to. In this state [Virginia], a perfect calm prevails at present, and a prompt disposition to support, and give energy to the federal system is discovered, if the unlucky stirring of the dispute respecting the navigation of the Mississippi does not become a leaven that will ferment and sour the mind of it. ...”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Marshall Green, *The Spanish Conspiracy: A Review of Early Spanish Movements in the South-West* (Cincinnati: Robert, Clarke and Co., 1891), 239. See also Frederick D. Williams, *The Northwest Ordinance: Essays on Its Formulation, Provisions, and Legacy* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1989), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West: The Founding of the Trans-Alleghany Commonwealths, 1784-1790* (United States: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), 128.

<sup>11</sup> Marks, *Independence on Trial*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> “George Washington to Henry Knox, 26 December 1786,” in *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series, Vol. 4, 2 April 1786-31 January 1787*, 481-484.

Historian Frederick W. Marks III believed that Spain may have been leveraging the navigation of the Mississippi to divide the Southern States from the Northern, as well as Eastern Americans from the people of the western territories of the United States to bring about a dissolution of the Union.<sup>13</sup> If this was indeed Spain's policy, this apparent strategy seemed to be bearing fruit in the late 1780s. When Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Jay addressed Congress in 1786 in an attempt to come to terms with Spanish envoy to the United States Don Diego de Gardoqui's proposals for a U.S. treaty with Spain that would have agreed to exclusive Spanish control of the Mississippi for 25 years, the seven Northern States approved of Gardoqui's terms while all the Southern States opposed them.<sup>14</sup> Southerners such as former Continental Army officer and future Democratic Republican leader James Monroe from Virginia suspected that the terms negotiated by Jay were part of a Northern or New England plot to dismember the Union. James Monroe described John Jay's negotiations with Gardoqui, writing that:

The object in the occlusion of the Mississippi on the part of these people so far as it is extended to the to the interest of their States ... is to break up so far as this will do it, the settlements on the western waters, prevent any in future, and thereby keep the States southward as they now are— or if settlements will take place, that they shall be on such principles as to make it the interest of the people to separate from the Confederacy, so as effectually to exclude any new State from it. To throw the weight of population eastward and keep it there, to appreciate the vacant lands of New York and Massachusetts. In short, it is a system of policy which has for its object the keeping the weight of gov[ernmen]t. and population in this quarter ... they have extended their views to the dismemberment of the gov[ernmen]t ... or being only desirous of that event [dismemberment] have adopted this [the occlusion of the Mississippi] as the necessary means of effecting it.<sup>15</sup>

Addressing the mainly Northern support for the Jay–Gardoqui Treaty, Monroe wrote to fellow Virginian James Madison on August 14, 1786, that “it is manifest here that Jay and his party

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<sup>13</sup> Marks, *Independence on Trial*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>15</sup> James Monroe, “James Monroe to Patrick Henry, August 12, 1786,” in *The Writings of James Monroe: 1778-1794* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), 150.

in Congress are determined to pursue this business as far as possible, either as the means of throwing the western people and territory without the Gov[ernmen]t. of the U[nited] States. and keeping the weight of population and gov[ernmen]t. here, or of dismembering the gov[ernmen]t. itself, for the purpose of a separate confederacy. There can be no other object than one of these, and I am from such evidence as I have, doubtful which hath the influence.”<sup>16</sup> On August 19, 1786, Monroe also wrote to his mentor, Thomas Jefferson, “I am sorry to inform you that our affairs are daily falling into a worse situation, arising more from the intrigues of designing men than any real defect in our system or distress of our affairs. The same party who advocate this business have certainly held in this city Committees for dismembering the Confederacy and throwing the States eastward the Hudson into one government.”<sup>17</sup>

Sharing his concerns with fellow Southerners, Monroe wrote Patrick Henry on August 12, 1786, “Certain it is that Committees are held, in this town, of Eastern men and others of this State [of New York] upon the subject of a dismemberment of the States East of the Hudson from the Union and the erection of them into a separate government. To what lengths they have gone I know not, but have assurances as to the truth of the above position, with this addition to it that the measure is talked of in Mass[achusetts]. familiarity, and is supposed to have originated there.”<sup>18</sup>

Monroe would elsewhere affirm:

in conversations at which I have been present, the Eastern people talk of a dismemberment so as to include Pena. [Pennsylvania] ... and sometimes all the states south to the Potomack—Altho[ugh] a dismemberment should be avoided by all the states ... I do consider it as necessary on our part to contemplate it as an event which may possibly happen and for which we should be guarded—a dismemberment which would throw too much strength into the Eastern Division should be prevented. It should be so managed ... either that it should be formed into three divisions, or if into two, that Pena [Pennsylvania] if not [New] Jersey

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Warren, *The Making of the Constitution* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937), 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> William Wirt Henry, “James Monroe to Patrick Henry, August 12, 1786,” in *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches* (United States: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 295.

should be included in ours ... I trust these intrigues are confined to a few only, but by these men I am assured are not.<sup>19</sup>

Still, Monroe attempted to raise alarm with anyone who would listen to his idea that certain Northern, mostly New England delegates, were attempting to break up the Union and replace it with several confederacies. In fact, Monroe was so concerned over Pennsylvania aligning with a potential Northern Confederacy that he wrote to Madison again on September 3, 1786:

They must either carry the measure or be disgraced ... and sooner than suffer this they will labor to break the Union. I therefore suspect they have been already ... intriguing with the principal men in these States to effect that end in the last resort. They have even sought a dismemberment to the Potomac and those of the party here have been sounding those in office thus far. To defeat the measure therefore completely we must follow their movements and counteract them everywhere, advise the leading men of their designs, the purposes they are meant to serve and c. and in event of the worst extremity prepare them for an union with the southern States. I fear some of those in Pena. [Pennsylvania] will have a contrary affection—but it must be removed if possible. A knowledge that she was on our side would blow this whole intrigue in the air. To bring this about therefore is an important object to the Southern interest. If a dismemberment takes place that State must not be added to the eastern scale. It were as well to use force to prevent it as to defend ourselves afterwards. I consider the convention of Annapolis as a most important area in our affairs. The Eastern men be assured mean it as leading further than the object originally comprehended. If they do not obtain that things shall be arranged to suit them in every respect, their intrigues will extend to the objects I have suggested above. Pena. [Pennsylvania] is their object. Upon succeeding or failing with her will they gain or lose confidence. I doubt not the emissaries of foreign countries will be on the ground.<sup>20</sup>

The possibility that Pennsylvania joining a Northern Confederacy was an outcome that Monroe previously said should be avoided at all costs because Pennsylvania in hostile or unfriendly hands would leave the South vulnerable with a long frontier with no clearly defined geographical features. Monroe also warned Jefferson that those individuals supporting Jay's treaty with the Spanish Minister, Gardoqui, in which Jay agreed to the exclusion of the United States

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<sup>19</sup> Warren, *The Making of the Constitution*, 25-26.

<sup>20</sup> "To James Madison from James Monroe, 3 September 1786," in *The Papers of James Madison*, Vol. 9, 9 April 1786–24 May 1787 and Supplement 1781–1784, eds. Robert A. Rutland and William M. E. Rachal (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 112-115.

from access to the mouth of the Mississippi for 25 years and who wanted to put unnecessary requirements on the western territories to become states, were attempting to throw westerners into the arms of Great Britain or Spain, writing on July 16, 1786, of their demand:

to increase the number of Inhabitants which should entitle such States to admission into the confederacy, and to make it depend on their having one 13th. part of the free inhabitants of the U.S. This with some other restrictions they wish to impose on them evinces plainly the policy of these men to be to keep them out of the confederacy altogether. I consider this as a dangerous and very mischievous kind of policy and *calculated to throw them into the hands of Britain ...* In my last I advised you of an intrigue on foot under the *management of Jay to occlude the Mississippi supported by the delegation of Massachusetts.* Since my last [communication], no further measures have been openly taken in the business, yet it is not relinquished. As yet there hath not been a fair trial of the sense of Congress on the subject. I have a conviction in my own mind that *Jay has managed this negotiation dishonestly.* On the other hand I am persuaded that the *minister here* [Gardoqui] has no *power* on the subject, yet I am firmly persuaded that he has conducted himself in such manner in this business as to give him and *his court hopes* which *the sense of Congress nor his instructions authorize.*<sup>21</sup>

In this letter to Jefferson, Monroe speculated that not only were Northern politicians attempting to keep the western areas out of the Union, but they might actually be trying to drive the western territories into a closer connection with Great Britain. In addition to New Yorker John Jay, Monroe named influential New Englanders Rufus King, Nathan Dane, Theodore Sedgwick, and Nathaniel Gorham as members of this supposed conspiracy. However, despite Monroe's suspicions, Jay was innocent of any involvement in such an intrigue, as Jay's own correspondence with Jefferson made clear. Still, there is some evidence linking Rufus King and Theodore Sedgwick, if not to a deliberate conspiracy, then to at least to sentiments in favor of the separation of the west from the Union and the idea of separate confederacies. Rufus King stated his opinion:

If, therefore, our disputes with Spain are not settled, we shall be obliged wholly to give up the Western Settlers ..." but warned that openly abandoning westerners "would be impolitic for many reasons, and cannot with safety be now admitted, although very few men who have examined the subject will refuse their assent to

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<sup>21</sup> "To Thomas Jefferson from James Monroe, 16 July 1786," in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 10, 22 June–31 December 1786*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 142-144.

the opinion that every citizen of the Atlantic States, who emigrates to the westward by the Allegheny is a total loss to our Confederacy ... Nature has separated the two countries by a vast and extensive chain of mountains, interest and convenience will keep them separate, and the feeble policy of our disjointed Government will not be able to unite them. For this reason I have ever been opposed to encouragements of western immigrants.<sup>22</sup>

Theodore Sedgwick was indeed one of those New Englanders who questioned the utility of a continued union with the Southern States. Of the Annapolis Convention, Sedgwick declared:

No reasonable expectations of advantage can be formed from the Commercial Convention. The first proposers designed none. The measure was originally brought forward with an intention of defeating the enlargement of the powers of Congress. Of this, I have the most decisive evidence. It well becomes the eastern and middle States, who are in interest one, seriously to consider what advantages result to them from their connection with the Southern States. They can give us nothing, as an equivalent for the protection which they derive from us but a participation in their commerce ... Should their conduct continue the same ... an attempt to perpetuate our connection with them, which at last too will be found ineffectual, will sacrifice everything to a mere chimera. Even the appearance of a union cannot in the way we now are long be preserved. It becomes us seriously to contemplate a substitute; for if we do not controul events we shall be miserably controuled by them. No other substitute can be devised than that of contracting the limits of the Confederacy to such as are natural and reasonable, and within those limits instead of a nominal to institute a real, and an efficient Government.<sup>23</sup>

The idea of separate confederacies in the place of a single national union had been discussed in the correspondence of several Americans since before the Treaty of Paris recognized the United States as one country. In 1783, former diplomat and influential New Englander Edward Bancroft, also a former double agent for the British Empire during the Revolutionary War, wrote a friend that “should the Confederation be dissolved, it is a question whether we shall have thirteen separate States in alliance, or whether the New England, the Middle, and the Southern States will form three new Confederacies.”<sup>24</sup> Madison alluded to the aftermath of a dissolution of the Union

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<sup>22</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty: A Study of America's Advantage from Europe's Distress, 1783-1800* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1926), 96.

<sup>23</sup> Warren, *The Making of the Constitution*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

by pointing out that, in such a circumstance, the weaker confederacies created out of the wreckage of the former United States would seek formal alliances with the various powers of Europe, which consequently would embroil the new states of America in the geopolitical “balance of power” of Europe. For example, Madison wrote to Virginian and Constitutional Convention delegate Edmund Randolph the following observation, stating that:

prosperity and tranquility, or *confusion and disunion* are to be the fruits of the Revolution. The seeds of the latter are so thickly sown that nothing but the most enlightened and liberal policy will be able to stifle them ... A respectable *delegate from Massachussetts* ... said that if *justice* was not to be *obtained thro[ugh]* the *general confederacy, the sooner it was known the better* [so] that some *states* might be *forming other confederacys adequate to the purpose*[,] adding that *some had suffered immensely from the want of a proportional compliance with deman[ds] for men and mon[ey] by others* ... Unless some amicable and adequate arrangements be speedily taken for adjusting all the subsisting accounts and discharging the public engagements, *a dissolution of the union* will be *inevitable* Will not in that event the *S[outhern] S[tates]* which at sea will be *opulent and weak*, be an *easey prey to the easetern* which will be *powerful and rapacious?* and particularly if supposed *c[l]aims of justice* are *on the side of the latter* will they not be a *ready prete[x]t for reprisals?* The consequence of such a situation would probably be that *at alliances* would be *soug[h]t first by the weaker and then by the stronger party and this country be made subservi[ent] to the wars and politics of Europe.*<sup>25</sup>

In warning of this outcome, Madison established a clear link between the ensnarement of the remaining American states with the established European “balance of power” system, alongside the long observed and well-understood “problem of neighborhood.” In addition to the navigation of the Mississippi, another issue that divided the Northern and Southern States was the problem of British discrimination against American commerce and the unbearable economic conditions which followed in the wake of that policy. In 1785, Massachusetts delegate to the Congress of the Confederation, Rufus King, wrote to fellow Massachusetts Patriot and Founding Father John Adams of the various states, that:

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<sup>25</sup> “From James Madison to Edmund Randolph, 25 February 1783,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Vol. 6, 1 January 1783–30 April 1783*, eds. William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 285-288.

They have common objects, are under similar embarrassments, would vest adequate powers in Congress to regulate external and internal commerce; and in case the Southern States *decline*, to vest similar powers in Congress, or to agree in some uniform system; the former by confederation are competent to form, and in the event must form, a sub-confederation remedied of all their present embarrassment. This is a matter that will be touched with great delicacy; the subject is better and better understood every day in America, for it is the general conversation and examination ... It still exists, and though it may have slept for a time, it can again be roused; and if once more it becomes vigilant, and can be made active by the Pride of independence and the idea of national honor and Glory, the present embarrassments of Trade, and the vain sophisms of Europeans relative thereto, will not only direct but drive America into a system more advantageous than treaties and alliances with all the world—a system which shall cause her to rely on her own ships and her own marines, and to exclude those of all other nations.<sup>26</sup>

King's comments to John Adams illustrate just how perilously close the United States came to breaking up if a revision of its government had not been achieved in the late 1780s. However, whereas King's idea of a "sub-confederation" was meant as an attempt at salvaging the Union, its practical application would have made compromise among the states even harder and would tend to an eventual dissolution of the Union. Relatedly, Southern delegates to the Constitutional Convention, such as North Carolinian Richard D. Spaight, believed that some New Englanders were unintentionally forcing the attempted revision of the government to the point of a dissolution of the Union. Speaking of the New England states, Spaight wrote to North Carolina Governor Alexander Martin:

Since I have had the honor of a Seat in Congress their uniform conduct has been to weaken the power of the union as much as possible, and sacrifice our national strength and dignity in hopes of rendering themselves more conspicuous as individual states. They have even attempted, to answer their particular purposes, to call in question and dispute those powers which are expressly granted to Congress by the Confederation. I do not think they wish for a dissolution of the Confederacy, but they press so extremely hard on the chain that unites us, that I imagine it will break before they are well aware of it. A Separation would not be to their advantage. The produce of the Southern and Middle States will ever command the friendship of the maritime powers, while the New England States depending totally on their

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<sup>26</sup> Rufus King and Charles R. King, *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King: Comprising His Letters, Private and Official, His Public Documents, and His Speeches* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), 113.



industry and the carrying trade, in the last of which they are rivals to the British and Dutch, must ever depend upon the friendship of the Southern and Middle States for their employment and support. This event may by many be thought to be distant, but it is my opinion that unless those states lay aside their present policy, and adopt one more liberal, and which shall have for its basis the general good of the whole, uncramped by the policy and interest of particular States, that it will happen in a very short period. The disputes between Pennsylvania and Connecticut for the Wyoming Lands, And New York and the Vermonters with the support and promises which the New England States have given the Latter, have sown the seeds of dissension which I think will not end without a Civil War.<sup>27</sup>

The condition of the United States continued to decline throughout the year 1786 as the Treasury of the Confederation reported on June 27 that only stronger measures could “preserve the Union of the several states from dissolution.”<sup>28</sup> Earlier in the year, General Benjamin Lincoln wrote Rufus King on February 11, 1786, that “I do not see how we shall surmount the evils under which we now labor, and prevent our falling into the utmost confusion, disgrace, and ruin, but by a division, which might be formed upon such principles as would secure our public creditors. ...”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Benjamin Rush wrote to his British friend Richard Price on October 27, 1786, noting:

Some of our enlightened men who begin to despair of a more complete union of the States in Congress have secretly proposed an Eastern, Middle, and Southern Confederacy, to be united by an alliance offensive and defensive. These Confederacies, they say, will be united by nature, by interest, and by manners, and consequently they will be agreeable, and durable. The first will include the four New England States and New York. The second will include New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland; and the last Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia .... This plan of a new Continental Government is at present a mere speculation.<sup>30</sup>

Responding to Rush, a sympathetic Price provided his outside observation:

Your Federal Government is a point of great difficulty and importance which I find still remains unsettled. I dread the thoughts of such a division of the States into three Confederacies, as you say had been talked of. It is a pity that some general controuling [controlling] power cannot be established, of sufficient vigour to decide

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<sup>27</sup> North Carolina, William L. Saunders, Walter Clark, and Stephen B. Weeks, *The State Records of North Carolina (v. 11-26) Volume 17* (Goldsboro: Nash Bros., Printers, 1907), 174.

<sup>28</sup> Marks, *Independence on Trial*, 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> Warren, *The Making of the Constitution*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 27-28.

disputes, to regulate commerce, to prevent wars, and to constitute a Union that shall have weight and credit. At present, the power of Congress, in Europe, is an object of derision rather than respect. The tumults in New England, the weakness of Congress, and the knavery of the Rhode Island Legislature form subjects of triumph in this country. The conclusion is that you are falling to pieces and will soon repent of your independence.<sup>31</sup>

This prediction seemed to be coming to fruition in early 1787 when a dispatch from Massachusetts demanded, “Let the General Court recall its delegates from the Convention, send its neighbors proposals for a new Congress speaking for New England, and leave the rest of the Continent to pursue their own imbecile and disjointed plans.”<sup>32</sup> However, on February 15, 1787, Alexander Hamilton cautioned his fellow New Yorkers of the dire consequences if this occurred, declaring the following to his state assembly:

If these states are not united under a federal government, they will infallibly have wars with each other; and their divisions will subject them to all the mischiefs of foreign influence and intrigue ... The western territory is an obvious and fruitful source of contest. Let us also cast our eye upon the mass of this state [New York], intersected from one extremity to the other by a large navigable river. In the event of a rupture with them, what is to hinder our metropolis from becoming a prey to our neighbors? Is it even supposable that they would suffer it to remain the nursery of wealth to a distinct community? ... Wars with each other would beget standing armies—a source of more real danger to our liberties than all the power that could be conferred upon the representatives of the union. And wars with each other would lead to opposite alliances with foreign powers, and plunge us into all the labyrinths of European politics ... The application is easy; if there are any foreign enemies, if there are any domestic foes to this country, all their arts and artifices will be employed to effect a dissolution of the union. This cannot be better done than by sowing jealousies of the federal head and cultivating in each state an undue attachment to its own power.<sup>33</sup>

Citing many historical examples, Hamilton also warned of the dangers of entangling alliances and the division of America into geographical camps that might rely upon large standing armies. South Carolinian statesman David Ramsay also realized what was at stake at the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 27-28.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Hamilton and Harold C. Syrett, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton. Vol. IV* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 91-92.

Constitutional Convention, writing to Thomas Jefferson on April 7, 1787, “Our eyes now are all fixed on the continental convention to be held in Philad[elphi]a. in May next. Unless they make an efficient federal government I fear that the end of the matter will be an American monarch or rather three or more confederacies.”<sup>34</sup> To Ramsay, this had to be avoided at all costs, for he predicted that, if the Union remained under the Articles of Confederation, “the remissness of the States in keeping up a representation in Congress naturally tends to annihilate our Confederation. That once dissolved our States would be of short duration. Anarchy, or intestine wars would follow till some future Caesar seized our Liberties, or we would be the sport of European politics, and perhaps parceled out as appendages to their several Governments.”<sup>35</sup> Around this time, former aide de camp to George Washington, David Humphreys, urged his onetime commander to attend the Constitutional Convention to prevent such an outcome:

I expect a serious proposal will be made for dividing the Continent into two or three separate Governments. Local politics and diversity of interests will undoubtedly find their way into the Convention. Nor need it be a matter of surprize to find there, as subjects of disagreement the whole western Country, as well as the navigation of the Mississippi. Should you think proper to attend, you will indisputably be elected President. This would give the measures a degree of national consequence in Europe and with Posterity.<sup>36</sup>

James Madison was so concerned that support for the idea of separate confederacies was gaining strength that he wrote in his diary on February 21, 1787:

All [Members of Congress] agreed and owned that the Federal Government in its existing shape was inefficient and could not last. The members from the Southern and Middle States seemed generally anxious for some republican organization of the system which should preserve the Union and give due energy to the Government of it. Mr. Bingham (of Pennsylvania) alone avowed his wishes that the Confederacy might be divided into several distinct Confederacies, its great extent and various

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<sup>34</sup> “To Thomas Jefferson from David Ramsay, 7 April 1787,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 11, 1 January–6 August 1787*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 279-280.

<sup>35</sup> Edmund Cody Burnett, *The Continental Congress* (New York: Norton, 1964), 641.

<sup>36</sup> “To George Washington from David Humphreys, 9 April 1787,” in *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series, Vol. 5, 1 February 1787–31 December 1787*, ed. W. W. Abbott (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 131-133.

interests being incompatible with a single government. The Eastern Members were suspected by some of leaning towards some anti-republican establishment ... or of being less desirous or hopeful of preserving the unity of the empire. For the first time, the idea of separate Confederacies had got into the newspapers. It appeared today under a Boston head. Whatever the vies of the leading mean in the Eastern States may be, it would seem that the great body of the people, particularly in Connecticut, are equally indisposed either to dissolve or divide the Confederacy, or to submit to any anti-republican innovations.<sup>37</sup>

In the Spring of 1787, the idea of separate confederacies began appearing in the Philadelphia newspapers. A letter was widely distributed in the *Independent Gazetteer* on March 30, the *Freeman's Journal* on April 11, and the *Pennsylvania Journal* on April 16 promoting a breakup of the Union. The letter rhetorically asked its readers:

Instead of attempting to amend the present Articles of Confederation with a view to retain them as the form of Government, or instead of attempting on General Government for the whole community of the United States, would it not be preferable to distribute the United States into three Republics, who should enter into a perpetual league and alliance for mutual defence? ... Reflections on the subject in the abstract would have suggested to us, and our experience has fully convinced us, that there can be only one sovereignty in a government; the notion therefore of a government by confederation between several independent States, each State still retaining its sovereignty, must be abandoned, and with it every attempt to amend the present Articles of Confederation ... The National concerns of a people so numerous with a territory so extensive will be proportionally difficult and important. This will require proportionate powers in the administration, especially in the Chief Executive; greater, perhaps, than will consist with the democratic form. Our fate, as far as it can depend on human means, is committed to the Convention; as they decide, so will our lot be. It must be the wish of the delegates, and it is certainly both our duty and interest to aid them in the arduous business intrusted to them.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, this widely circulated letter advocating for the idea of multiple confederacies in league or alliance with one another and its broad geographical distribution demonstrates the popularity of the idea at the time. The same letter was reprinted on April 18, 1787, in the *Massachusetts Centinel*, which earlier in the month had reported:

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<sup>37</sup> Warren, *The Making of the Constitution*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

A hint has, in the Southern papers, been suggested to the Deputies of the Federal Convention, on the propriety of recommending a dissolution of the Confederation and a division of the States into four Republicks— The first, to contain the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, to which Vermont might be added. The second to contain New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Maryland— the third, Virginia, the two Carolinas, and Georgia. And the fourth to contain the state of Franklin, Kentucky and the lands lying on the Ohio. This division seems to be pointed out by climates whose effect no positive law can surpass. The religion, manners, customs, exports, imports, and general interest of each being then the same, no opposition arising from difference ... would any longer divide their councils— unanimity would render it secure at home and respectable abroad and promote agriculture, manufactures and commerce.<sup>39</sup>

Warning of the dangers of multiple confederacies, Madison wrote to his friend, Virginian physician James McClurg, on August 5, 1787, that “the doctrine of three Confederacies, or great Republics, has it’s advocates here ... I hope that our representative, Marshall, will be a powerful aid to Mason in the next Assembly. He has observ[e]d the continual depravation of Mens manners, under the corrupting Influence of our Legislature; and is convince’d that nothing but the adoption of some efficient plan from the Convention can prevent Anarchy first, and civil Convulsions afterwards.”<sup>40</sup> Whereas James Monroe accused John Jay of being the ringleader of a Northern plot to break up the Union, James Madison believed that fellow Virginian Patrick Henry was behind a Southern conspiracy to do the same. On December 9, 1787, Madison wrote to Jefferson, claiming that a Southern plot “at the head of which is Mr. Henry ... will probably contend for such as strike at the essence of the System, and must lead to an adherence to the principle of the existing Confederation, which most thinking men are convinced is a visionary one, or to a partition of the Union into several Confederacies.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>40</sup> “To James Madison from James McClurg, 5 August 1787,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Vol. 10, 27 May 1787–3 March 1788*, eds. Robert A. Rutland, Charles F. Hobson, William M. E. Rachal, and Frederika J. Teute (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 134-136.

<sup>41</sup> “To Thomas Jefferson from James Madison, 9 December 1787,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 12, 7 August 1787–31 March 1788*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 408-413.

Madison again wrote Edmund Randolph on January 10, 1788, chastising him for his opposition to the Constitution, a decision that Madison felt was responsible for helping tilt the scales in Virginia toward Henry's position against ratification and for the calling of a second Constitutional Convention:

In this State [Virginia] the party adverse to the Constitution, notoriously meditate either a dissolution of the Union, or protracting it by patching up the Articles of Confederation ... You are better acquainted with Mr. Henry's politics than I can be, but I have for some time considered him as driving at a Southern Confederacy and as not farther concurring in the plan of amendments than as he hopes to render it subservient to his real designs ... Should N[orth]. Carolina fall into Mr. H[enr]y's politics which does not appear to me improbable, it will endanger the Union more than any other circumstance that could happen. My apprehensions of this danger increase every day. The multiplied inducements at this moment to the local sacrifices necessary to keep the States together, can never be expected to co-incide again, and they are counteracted by so many unpropitious circumstances, that their efficacy can with difficulty be confided in.<sup>42</sup>

As Madison displayed great concern in his letter over the potential failure of the Constitutional Convention, Hampton-Sydney College President John Blair Smith expressed his disappointment with Patrick Henry, writing the following to Madison on June 12, 1788:

That gentleman [Henry] has descended to lower artifice and management upon the occasion than I thought him capable of. His gross, and scandalous misrepresentations of the New-Constitution ... The idea of Virginia standing independent of the other states, or forming a partial confederacy or a foreign alliance is more openly avowed by some people in this quarter, than any where else, and I am certain the sentiment originated with the old Gov[ernor]. It grieves me to see such great natural talents abused to guilty purposes. He has written letters repeatedly to Kentuckey and as the people there are alarmed with an apprehension of their interests being about to be sacrificed by the Northern States ... respecting the measure proposed in Congress for a perpetual relinquishment of the Navigation of the Mississippi to the Spaniards.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> "From James Madison to Edmund Randolph, 10 January 1788," in *The Papers of James Madison, Vol. 10, 27 May 1787–3 March 1788*, eds. Robert A. Rutland, Charles F. Hobson, William M. E. Rachal, and Frederika J. Teute (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 354-357.

<sup>43</sup> "To James Madison from John Blair Smith, 12 June 1788," in *The Papers of James Madison, Vol. 11, 7 March 1788–1 March 1789*, ed. Robert A. Rutland and Charles F. Hobson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 119-121.

Eminently aware of this prospect and how the United States' European rivals were eagerly anticipating the end of the Union and how they might exploit such a turn of events, Virginians of a nationalist orientation like George Washington wrote to Madison on the need for a stronger Constitution, rhetorically asking:

How melancholy is the reflection that in so short a space, we should have made such large strides towards fulfilling the prediction of our transatlantic foes!—'leave them to themselves, and their government will soon dissolve.' ... To you, I am sure I need not add aught on this subject, the consequences of a lax, or inefficient government, are too obvious to be dwelt on. Thirteen Sovereignties pulling against each other, and all tugging at the federal head, will soon bring ruin on the whole; whereas a liberal, and energetic Constitution, well guarded and closely watched, to prevent incroachments, might restore us to that degree of respectability and consequence, to which we had a fair claim, and the brightest prospect of attaining.<sup>44</sup>

With George Washington's apprehensions and the concerns of many Americans on his mind, James Madison took on the task of becoming the primary architect of a new Constitution of the United States. After the Constitutional Convention of 1787 concluded, Washington wrote:

If there are characters who prefer disunion, or separate Confederacies to the general Government which is offered to them, their opposition may, for ought I know, proceed from principle; but as nothing in my conception is more to be deprecated than a disunion, or these separate Confederacies, my voice, as far as it will extend, shall be offered in favor of the latter [General Government]. That there are some writers (and others perhaps who may not have written) who wish to see these States divided into several confederacies is pretty evident. As an antidote to these opinions, and in order to investigate the ground of objections to the Constitution which is submitted to the People, the *Federalist*, under the signature of Publius, is written.<sup>45</sup>

As Washington offered his voice in favor of one, indissoluble Union, the work was left to Madison, Jay, and Hamilton to make the case for a new government under the Constitution, here

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<sup>44</sup> "To James Madison from George Washington, 5 November 1786," in *The Papers of James Madison, Vol. 9, 9 April 1786–24 May 1787 and Supplement 1781–1784*, eds. Robert A. Rutland and William M. E. Rachal (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 161-162.

<sup>45</sup> "From George Washington to David Stuart, 30 November 1787," in *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series, Vol. 5, 1 February 1787–31 December 1787*, ed. W. W. Abbott (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 466-468.

under the pen name of Publius in *The Federalist Papers*. Not surprisingly, one of the main goals of the papers was to illustrate the dangers of establishing separate confederacies in the place of the one Union. For example, in Federalist 1, Alexander Hamilton addressed the ideas of those Americans advocating the idea of separate confederacies:

Among the most formidable of the obstacles which the new Constitution will have to encounter may readily be distinguished the obvious interest of a certain class of men in every State to resist all changes which may hazard a diminution of the power, emolument, and consequence of the offices they hold under the State establishments ... or will flatter themselves with fairer prospects of elevation from the subdivision of the empire into several partial confederacies than from its union under one government ... we already hear it whispered in the private circles of those who oppose the new Constitution, that the thirteen States are of too great extent for any general system, and that we must of necessity resort to separate confederacies of distinct portions of the whole ... For nothing can be more evident ... than the alternative of an adoption of the new Constitution or a dismemberment of the Union.<sup>46</sup>

In Federalist 2, John Jay continued Hamilton's arguments under the same pen name, warning the people of America of the folly of those individuals advocating for disunion, stating:

It is well worthy of consideration therefore, whether it would conduce more to the interest of the people of America that they should, to all general purposes, be one nation, under one federal government, or that they should divide themselves into separate confederacies, and give to the head of each the same kind of powers which they are advised to place in one national government ... But politicians now appear, who ... instead of looking for safety and happiness in union, we ought to seek it in a division of the States into distinct confederacies or sovereignties. However extraordinary this new doctrine may appear, it nevertheless has its advocates; and certain characters who were much opposed to it formerly, are at present of the number ... why is it suggested that three or four confederacies would be better than one? ... They who promote the idea of substituting a number of distinct confederacies in the room of the plan of the convention, seem clearly to foresee that the rejection of it would put the continuance of the Union in the utmost jeopardy.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "The Federalist No. 1, [27 October 1787]," in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 301-306.

<sup>47</sup> "The Federalist No. 2, Independent Journal (New York), 31 October 1787," in *The Selected Papers of John Jay, Vol. 4, 1785–1788*, ed. Elizabeth M. Nuxoll (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 585-589.



Continuing Hamilton's arguments, John Jay wrote in Federalist 3, "It is of high importance to the peace of America that she observe the laws of nations towards all these powers ... that this will be more perfectly and punctually done by one national government than it could be either by thirteen separate States or by three or four distinct confederacies."<sup>48</sup> Jay then turned to the "problem of neighborhood" and the potential existence of multiple, separate confederacies, noting:

The neighborhood of Spanish and British territories, bordering on some States and not on others, naturally confines the causes of quarrel more immediately to the borderers. The bordering States ... will be those who, under the impulse of sudden irritation, and a quick sense of apparent interest or injury, will be most likely, by direct violence, to excite war with these nations; and nothing can so effectually obviate that danger as a national government ... Besides, it is well known that acknowledgments, explanations, and compensations are often accepted as satisfactory from a strong united nation, which would be rejected as unsatisfactory if offered by a State or confederacy of little consideration or power.<sup>49</sup>

Jay also argued in Federalist 4 that a single, general government for the whole Union was preferable to several governments from separate, multiple confederacies, writing, "The safety of the people would be best secured by union against the danger it may be exposed to by just causes of war given to other nations; and ... by a national government than either by the State governments or the proposed little confederacies. ..."<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Jay added:

The safety of the people of America against dangers from foreign force depends not only on their forbearing to give just causes of war to other nations, but also on their placing and continuing themselves in such a situation as not to invite hostility or insult ... One government can collect and avail itself of the talents and experience of the ablest men, in whatever part of the Union they may be found. It can move on uniform principles of policy. It can harmonize, assimilate, and protect the several parts and members, and extend the benefit of its foresight and precautions to each. In the formation of treaties, it will regard the interest of the whole, and the particular interests of the parts as connected with that of the whole. It can apply the resources and power of the whole to the defense of any particular

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<sup>48</sup> "The Federalist No. 3, New York Independent Journal, 3 November 1787," in *The Selected Papers of John Jay*, Vol. 4, 1785–1788, ed. Elizabeth M. Nuxoll (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 593-596.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 593-596.

<sup>50</sup> "The Federalist No. 4, Independent Journal (New York), 7 November 1787," in *The Selected Papers of John Jay*, Vol. 4, 1785–1788, ed. Elizabeth M. Nuxoll (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 608-612.

part, and that more easily and expeditiously than State governments or separate confederacies can possibly do, for want of concert and unity of system.<sup>51</sup>

However, Jay realized that the European rivals of the United States would lobby against the new Constitution and a strong union because “with them and with most other European nations we are rivals in navigation and the carrying trade; and we shall deceive ourselves if we suppose that any of them will rejoice to see it flourish; for, as our carrying trade cannot increase without in some degree diminishing theirs, it is more their interest, and will be more their policy, to restrain than to promote it.”<sup>52</sup> Jay then proposed several hypothetical situations in which separate, multiple confederacies might be exploited by America’s European rivals:

Spain thinks it convenient to shut the Mississippi against us on the one side, and Britain excludes us from the Saint Lawrence on the other ... it is easy to see that jealousies and uneasinesses may gradually slide into the minds and cabinets of other nations, and that we are not to expect that they should regard our advancement in union, in power and consequence by land and by sea, with an eye of indifference and composure ... But whatever may be our situation, whether firmly united under one national government, or split into a number of confederacies, certain it is, that foreign nations will know and view it exactly as it is; and they will act toward us accordingly. If they ... find us either destitute of an effectual government ... or split into three or four independent and probably discordant republics or confederacies, one inclining to Britain, another to France, and a third to Spain, and perhaps played off against each other by the three, what a poor, pitiful figure will America make in their eyes! How liable would she become not only to their contempt but to their outrage, and how soon would dear-bought experience proclaim that when a people or family so divided, it never fails to be against themselves.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, Jay suggested the possibility that a Northern Confederacy might incline toward Great Britain because of its control of the St. Lawrence River, a Western Confederacy might incline toward Spain because of that nation’s control of the Mississippi River and New Orleans, while a possible Southern Confederacy might incline toward France because of French dependence on foodstuffs for its Caribbean colonies such as Haiti. If this scenario became a reality, North

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 608-612.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

America could potentially become a battleground in a conflict between the various European powers with their associated American confederate allies acting as proxy states. Also, in Federalist 5, Jay warned of what was most likely to follow a division of the Union:

Should the people of America divide themselves into three or four nations ... Would not similar jealousies arise, and be in like manner cherished? Instead of their being “joined in affection” and free from all apprehension of different “interests,” envy and jealousy would soon extinguish confidence and affection, and the partial interests of each confederacy, instead of the general interests of all America, would be the only objects of their policy and pursuits. Hence, like most other bordering nations, they would always be either involved in disputes and war, or live in the constant apprehension of them. The most sanguine advocates for three or four confederacies cannot reasonably suppose that they would long remain exactly on an equal footing in point of strength ... Whenever ... any one of these nations or confederacies should rise on the scale of political importance much above the degree of her neighbors, that moment would those neighbors behold her with envy and with fear ...<sup>54</sup>

After describing a potential disunion, Jay turned to the “problem of neighborhood”:

They who well consider the history of similar divisions and confederacies will find abundant reason to apprehend that those in contemplation would in no other sense be neighbors than as they would be borderers; that they would neither love nor trust one another, but on the contrary would be a prey to discord, jealousy, and mutual injuries; in short, that they would place us exactly in the situations in which some nations doubtless wish to see us, viz., *formidable only to each other* ... The proposed confederacies will be *distinct nations* ... Different commercial concerns must create different interests, and of course different degrees of political attachment to and connection with different foreign nations ... it is far more probable that in America, as in Europe, neighboring nations, acting under the impulse of opposite interests and unfriendly passions, would frequently be found taking different sides. Considering our distance from Europe, it would be more natural for these confederacies to apprehend danger from one another than from distant nations, and therefore that each of them should be more desirous to guard against the others by the aid of foreign alliances, than to guard against foreign dangers by alliances between themselves. ... Let candid men judge ... whether the division of America into ... independent sovereignties would tend to secure us against the hostilities and improper interference of foreign nations.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> “The Federalist No. 5, Independent Journal (New York), 10 November 1787,” in *The Selected Papers of John Jay, Vol. 4, 1785–1788*, ed. Elizabeth M. Nuxoll (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 618-621.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 618-621.

Hamilton carried Jay's logic forward in Federalist 6 by arguing that it was absurd to expect peaceful relations to emerge from a shattered Union, writing, "A man must be far gone in Utopian speculations who can seriously doubt that, if these States should either be wholly disunited, or only united in partial confederacies, the subdivisions into which they might be thrown would have frequent and violent contests with each other ... To look for a continuation of harmony between a number of independent, unconnected sovereignties in the same neighborhood, would be to disregard the uniform course of human events, and to set at defiance the accumulated experience of ages."<sup>56</sup> Hamilton also declared, "In the event of disunion, that it has from long observation of the progress of society become a sort of axiom in politics, that vicinity or nearness of situation, constitutes nations natural enemies. An intelligent writer expresses himself on this subject ... 'NEIGHBORING NATIONS ... are naturally enemies of each other unless their common weakness forces them to league in a CONFEDERATE REPUBLIC, and their constitution prevents the differences that neighborhood occasions, extinguishing that secret jealousy which disposes all states to aggrandize themselves at the expense of their neighbors.'"<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, in Federalist 7, Hamilton submitted several potential causes for a future conflict between the various states or proposed regional confederacies. For example, if the Union were dissolved, the western territories ceded by the states to the federal government would, in theory, revert to the precession claimants or, as Hamilton asserted:

as to all that part of the Western territory which, either by actual possession, or through the submission of the Indian proprietors, was subjected to the jurisdiction of the king of Great Britain, till it was relinquished in the treaty of peace. This, it has been said, was at all events an acquisition to the Confederacy by compact with a foreign power. It has been the prudent policy of Congress to appease this controversy, by prevailing upon the States to make cessions to the United States for the benefit of the whole. This has been so far accomplished as, under a continuation

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<sup>56</sup> "The Federalist No. 6, [14 November 1787]," in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 309-317.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 309-317.

of the Union, to afford a decided prospect of an amicable termination of the dispute. A dismemberment of the Confederacy, however, would revive this dispute, and would create others on the same subject ... In the wide field of Western territory, therefore, we perceive an ample theatre for hostile pretensions, without any umpire or common judge to interpose between the contending parties. To reason from the past to the future, we shall have good ground to apprehend, that the sword would sometimes be appealed to as the arbiter of their differences.<sup>58</sup>

Hamilton also suggested that even states that did not have pre-existing claims before the western cessions would inevitably take sides in the disputes between states that did, with the smaller states allying against the larger ones to prevent the rise of any one hegemonic power. Hamilton also noted other potential causes of war between the states, such as the differing commercial policies of the states or regional confederacies, as well as the outstanding debts that the states owed relating to expenses incurred during the Revolutionary War, as Hamilton noted:

Each State, or separate confederacy, would pursue a system of commercial policy peculiar to itself. This would occasion distinctions, preferences, and exclusions, which would beget discontent ... *We should be ready to denominate injuries those things which were in reality the justifiable acts of independent sovereignties consulting a distinct interest* ... The public debt of the Union would be a further cause of collision between the separate States or confederacies ... The citizens of the States interested would clamour; foreign powers would urge for the satisfaction of their just demands, and the peace of the States would be hazarded to the double contingency of external invasion and internal contention ... the probability of incompatible alliances between different States, or confederacies, and different foreign nations ... America, if not connected at all, or only by the feeble tie of a simple league, offensive and defensive, would, by the operation of such jarring alliances, be gradually entangled in all the pernicious labyrinths of European politics and wars; and by the destructive contentions of the parts into which she was divided, would be likely to become prey to the artifices and machinations of powers equally the enemies of the all. Divide et impera [divide and rule] must be the motto of every nation that hates or fears us. ...<sup>59</sup>

Like Jay, Hamilton addressed the “problem of neighborhood” in Federalist 8:

Assuming it therefore as an established truth that the several States, in case of disunion, or such combinations of them as might happen to be formed out of the wreck of the general Confederacy, would be subject to those vicissitudes of peace

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<sup>58</sup> “The Federalist No. 7, [17 November 1787],” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 319-326.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 319-326.

and war, of friendship and enmity, with each other, which have fallen to the lot of all neighboring nations not united under one government ... The nations of Europe are encircled with chains of fortified places, which mutually obstruct invasion ... The history of war, in that quarter of the globe, is no longer a history of nations subdued and empires overturned, but of towns taken and retaken; of battles that decide nothing; of retreats more beneficial than victories; of much effort and little acquisition. In this country the scene would be altogether reversed. The jealousy of military establishments would postpone them as long as possible. The want of fortifications, leaving the frontiers of one state open to another, would facilitate inroads. The populous States would, with little difficulty, overrun their less populous neighbors ... standing armies, it may be replied, must inevitably result from a dissolution of the Confederacy ... Thus, we should, in a little time, see established in every part of this country the same engines of despotism which have been the scourge of the Old World.<sup>60</sup>

Still, Hamilton optimistically prophesied:

If we are wise enough to preserve the Union we may for ages enjoy an advantage similar to that of an insulated situation. Europe is at a great distance from us. Her colonies in our vicinity will be likely to continue too much disproportioned in strength to be able to give us any dangerous annoyance ... But if we should be disunited, and the integral parts should either remain separated, or, which is most probable, should be thrown together into two or three confederacies, we should be, in a short course of time, in the predicament of the continental powers of Europe - our liberties would be a prey to the means of defending ourselves against the ambition and jealousy of each other.<sup>61</sup>

However, in Federalist 11, Hamilton suggested that the European powers, wary of America's rising greatness, would seek to divide the Union:

the commercial character of America, has already excited uneasy sensations in several of the maritime powers of Europe ... They foresee the dangers that may threaten their American dominions from the neighborhood of States, which have all the dispositions, and would possess all the means, requisite to the creation of a powerful marine. Impressions of this kind will naturally indicate the policy of fostering divisions among us ... By a steady adherence to the Union we may hope, ere long, to become the arbiter of Europe in America, and to be able to incline the balance of European competitions in this part of the world as our interest may dictate. But in the reverse of this eligible situation, we shall discover that the rivalships of the parts would make them checks upon each other, and would frustrate all the tempting advantages which nature has kindly placed within our reach ... A nation, despicable by its weakness, forfeits even the privilege of being

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<sup>60</sup> "The Federalist No. 8, [20 November 1787]," in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 326-332.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 326-332.

neutral. Under a vigorous national government, the natural strength and resources of the country, directed to a common interest, would baffle all the combinations of European jealousy to restrain our growth. This situation would even take away the motive to such combinations, by inducing an impracticability of success ... But in a state of disunion, these combinations might exist and might operate with success ...<sup>62</sup>

Hamilton also warned that the various mercantilist powers of Europe would no doubt attempt to exploit the differing commercial regimes of the several states or regional confederacies in Federalist 12, noting:

The separate States or confederacies would be necessitated by mutual jealousy to avoid the temptations to that kind of trade by the lowness of their duties. The temper of our governments, for a long time to come, would not permit those rigorous precautions by which the European nations guard the avenues into their respective countries, as well by land as by water; and which, even there, are found insufficient obstacles to the adventurous stratagems of avarice ... one national government would be able, at much less expense, to extend the duties on imports, beyond comparison, further than would be practicable to the States separately, or to any partial confederacies.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, Hamilton illustrated how beggar-thy-neighbor economic policies and conflicts could eventually lead to armed military conflicts between the separate confederacies. Furthermore, in Federalist 13, Hamilton even sketched out what a possible division of the Union might look like:

The ideas of men who speculate upon the dismemberment of the empire seem generally turned toward three confederacies—one consisting of the four Northern, another of the four Middle, and a third of the five Southern States. There is little probability that there would be a greater number ... If we attend carefully to geographical and commercial considerations, in conjunction with the habits and prejudices of the different States, we shall be led to conclude that in case of disunion they will most naturally league themselves under two governments. The four Eastern States, from all the causes that form the links of national sympathy and connection, may with certainty be expected to unite. New York, situated as she is, would never be unwise enough to oppose a feeble and unsupported flank to the weight of that confederacy. There are other obvious reasons that would facilitate her accession to it. New Jersey is too small a State to think of being a frontier, in opposition to this still more powerful combination; nor do there appear to be any

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<sup>62</sup> “The Federalist No. 11, [24 November 1787],” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 339-346.

<sup>63</sup> “The Federalist No. 12, [27 November 1787],” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 346-352.

obstacles to her admission into it. Even Pennsylvania would have strong inducements to join the Northern league ... As she must at all events be a frontier, she may deem it most consistent with her safety to have her exposed side turned towards the weaker power of the Southern, rather than towards the stronger power of the Northern Confederacy ...<sup>64</sup>

At this point, it is worth noting that the scenario that Hamilton foresaw, that of Pennsylvania aligning itself with a potential Northern Confederacy, is exactly the scenario that James Monroe feared and even advocated for the use of force to prevent. Taken together, all these statements clearly reveal that a failure to ratify the Constitution and replace the Articles of Confederation would not only mean disunion, but disunion would most certainly mean civil war. Even so, the continuance of a weak Confederation, such as the one constituted under the Articles of Confederation, would continue to invite the dangers of foreign intrigue. To find an example in history of a Confederacy that was too weak, in Federalist 19, Madison and Hamilton looked to the loose-knit political entity known as the Holy Roman Empire. In observing the structure of the government of the Holy Roman Empire, Madison and Hamilton found that:

The fundamental principle on which it rests, that the empire is a community of sovereigns, that the diet is a representation of sovereigns and that the laws are addressed to sovereigns, renders the empire a nerveless body, incapable of regulating its own members, insecure against external dangers, and agitated with unceasing fermentations in its own bowels ... The history of Germany is a history of wars between the emperor and the princes and states; of wars among the princes and states themselves; of the licentiousness of the strong, and the oppression of the weak; of foreign intrusions, and foreign intrigues; of requisitions of men and money disregarded, or partially complied with; of attempts to enforce them, altogether abortive, or attended with slaughter and desolation, involving the innocent with the guilty; of general inbecility, confusion, and misery ... Controversies and wars among the members themselves have been so common, that the German annals are crowded with the bloody pages which describe them. Previous to the peace of Westphalia, Germany was desolated by a war of thirty years ... Peace was at length

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<sup>64</sup> "The Federalist No. 13, [28 November 1787]," in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 353-355.



negotiated, and dictated by foreign powers; and the articles of it, to which foreign powers are parties, made a fundamental part of the Germanic constitution.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, the Founding Fathers who wrote *The Federalist Papers* feared that if a stronger federal government were not adopted by the United States, one that retained the perpetuity of the Union as stated in the Articles of Confederation, but also a Union capable of handling the exigencies of a national government, a fate similar to that of the Holy Roman Empire might be in store for Americans, meaning that the continent of North America might become a geopolitical chessboard, or worse, a battlefield for the European powers to contend over through their various proxy state, confederate allies. Also, in addition to concerns over a “balance of power” geopolitical system being established on the North American continent, the authors of *The Federalist Papers* also addressed concerns over the possible encirclement of the United States by European powers in the New World, thus adding another element to the age-old “problem of neighborhood” or, as Hamilton wrote in Federalist 24:

Though a wide ocean separates the United States from Europe, yet there are various considerations that warn us against an excess of confidence or security. On one side of us, and stretching far into our rear, are growing settlements subject to the dominion of Britain. On the other side, and extending to meet the British settlements, are colonies and establishments subject to the dominion of Spain ... The savage tribes on our Western frontier ought to be regarded as our natural enemies, [and] their natural allies, because they have most to fear from us, and most to hope from them. The improvements in the art of navigation have, as to the facility of communication, rendered distant nations, in a great measure, neighbors. Britain and Spain are among the principal maritime powers of Europe. A future concert of views between these nations ought not to be regarded as improbable ... These circumstances combined, admonish us not to be too sanguine in considering ourselves as entirely out of the reach of danger ... In proportion to our increase in strength, it is probable, nay, it may be said certain, that Britain and Spain would augment their military establishments in our neighborhood ... There are, and will be, particular posts, the possession of which will include the command of large districts of territory, and facilitate future invasions of the remainder ... Can any

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<sup>65</sup> “The Federalist No. 19, [8 December 1787],” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 384-390.

man think it would be wise to leave such posts in a situation to be at any instant seized by one or the other of two neighboring and formidable powers?<sup>66</sup>

Hamilton put this even more plainly in Federalist 25 when he wrote, “The territories of Britain, Spain, and of the Indian nations in our neighborhood do not border on particular States, but encircle the Union from Maine to Georgia. The danger, though in different degrees, is therefore common. And the means of guarding against it ought, in like manner, to be the objects of common councils and of a common treasury.”<sup>67</sup> The proximity of potentially hostile European powers’ territories on the periphery of the Union only served to acerbate the strategic position of the United States, and as these essays demonstrate, the fear of encirclement was palpable among early American statesmen. Therefore, a Constitution establishing a stronger federal government for the Union was needed to counteract the schemes and intrigues of the European monarchs. Also, there was a concern over a potential arms race among the shattered pieces of the former United States. In Federalist 41, Madison addressed the issue of multiple confederacies and the “problem of neighborhood” regarding the danger of peacetime military establishments and the possibility of an arms race between the different confederacies, writing that:

The moment of its [the Union’s] dissolution will be the date of a new order of things. The fears of the weaker, or the ambition of the stronger States, or Confederacies, will set the same example in the New, as Charles VII. did in the Old World ... Instead of deriving from our situation the precious advantage which Great Britain has derived from hers, the face of America will be but a copy of that of the continent of Europe ... The fortunes of disunited America will be even more disastrous than those of Europe. The sources of evil in the latter are confined to her own limits. No superior powers of another quarter of the globe intrigue among her rival nations, inflame their mutual animosities, and render them the instruments of foreign ambition, jealousy, and revenge. In America the miseries springing from her internal jealousies, contentions, and wars, would form a part only of her lot. A plentiful addition of evils would have their source in that relation in which Europe stands to this quarter of the earth, and which no other quarter of the earth bears to

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<sup>66</sup> “The Federalist No. 24, [19 December 1787],” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 417-422.

<sup>67</sup> “The Federalist No. 25, [21 December 1787],” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 422-427.

Europe. This picture of the consequences of disunion cannot be too highly colored, or too often exhibited ... nothing short of a Constitution fully adequate to the national defense and the preservation of the Union, can save America from as many standing armies as it may be split into States or Confederacies.<sup>68</sup>

Adding another element to his concern over separate confederacies, in Federalist 59, Hamilton warned of local politicians becoming unscrupulous intriguers who might seek to make a name for themselves at the expense of the Union in their promotion of its division, stating, “The scheme of separate confederacies, which will always multiply the chances of ambition, will be a never failing bait to all such influential characters in the State administrations as are capable of preferring their own emolument and advancement to the public weal [welfare].”<sup>69</sup> Adding to the likelihood of these opportunistic, local politicians taking advantage of a division of the Union, Hamilton coupled this threat with the readiness of European powers to utilize such individuals as useful idiots or fellow travelers, adding, “It ought never to be forgotten, that a firm union of this country, under an efficient government, will probably be an increasing object of jealousy to more than one nation of Europe; and that enterprises to subvert it will sometimes originate in the intrigues of foreign powers, and will seldom fail to be patronized and abetted by some of them. Its preservation, therefore ought in no case that can be avoided, to be committed to the guardianship of any but those whose situation will uniformly beget an immediate interest in the faithful and vigilant performance of the trust.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “The Federalist Number 41, [19 January 1788],” in *The Papers of James Madison, Vol. 10, 27 May 1787–3 March 1788*, eds. Robert A. Rutland, Charles F. Hobson, William M. E. Rachal, and Frederika J. Teute (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 390-398.

<sup>69</sup> “The Federalist No. 59, [22 February 1788],” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 539-544.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 539-544.

Finally, Hamilton summarized the advantages of a stronger Union under a new government and Constitution juxtaposed against the alternative of disunion and multiple confederacies in Federalist 85, writing:

The additional securities to republican government, to liberty and to property, to be derived from the adoption of the plan under consideration, consist chiefly in the restraints which the preservation of the Union will impose on local factions and insurrections, and on the ambition of powerful individuals in single States, who may acquire credit and influence enough, from leaders and favorites, to become the despots of the people; in the diminution of the opportunities to foreign intrigue, which the dissolution of the Confederacy would invite and facilitate; in the prevention of extensive military establishments, which could not fail to grow out of wars between the States in a disunited situation; in the express guaranty of a republican form of government to each ... These judicious reflections contain a lesson of moderation to all the sincere lovers of the Union, and ought to put them upon their guard against hazarding anarchy, civil war, a perpetual alienation of the States from each other, and perhaps the military despotism of a victorious demagoguery, in the pursuit of what they are not likely to obtain, but from time and experience ... a nation, without a national government, is ... an awful spectacle.<sup>71</sup>

Relatedly, the prospect of the possible encirclement of the United States by potentially hostile European powers, as well as a “balance of power” system emerging in North America, was a constant concern not only among the authors of *The Federalist Papers*, but also of the Founding Fathers in general. For example, in his 1783 *Circular to the States*, George Washington alluded to the possibility that the Union might be divided into multiple confederacies and that the disputes of its successor states might become the sport of European politics and statecraft:

The Citizens of America, placed in the most enviable condition, as the sole Lords and Proprietors of a vast tract of Continent ... They are from this period to be considered as the Actors, on a most conspicuous Theatre, which seems to be peculiarly designated by Providence for the display of human greatness and felicity, here they are not only surrounded with every thing which can contribute to the completion of private and domestic enjoyment, but Heaven has crowned all its other blessings by giving a fairer opportunity for political happiness, than any other Nation has ever been favored with ... yet it appears to me there is an option still left to the United States of America; that it is in their choice and depends upon their conduct, whether they will be respectable and prosperous or contemptible and

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<sup>71</sup> “The Federalist No. 85, [28 May 1788],” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 4, January 1787–May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 714-721.

Miserable as a Nation. This is the time of their political probation: this is the moment when the eyes of the whole World are turned upon them—This is the moment to establish or ruin their National Character for ever ... this may be the ill fated moment for relaxing the powers of the Union, annihilating the cement of the Confederation and exposing us to become the sport of European Politicks, which may play one State against another, to prevent their growing importance and to serve their own interested purposes; for according to the System of Policy the States shall adopt at this moment, they will stand or fall ... It is only in our United Character, as an Empire, that our Independance is acknowledged, that our power can be regarded or our Credit supported among foreign Nations—the Treaties of the European Powers with the United States of America will have no validity on a dissolution of the Union.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, around this time, on the theme of encirclement, Washington wrote to Virginia Governor Benjamin Harrison warning:

I need not remark to you Sir, that the flanks & rear of the United States are possessed by other powers—& formidable ones, too; nor, how necessary it is to apply the cement of interest, to bind all parts of the Union together by indissoluble bonds—especially that part of it, which lies immediately west of us ... How entirely unconnected with them shall we be, and what troubles may we not apprehend, if the Spaniards on their right, & G[rea]t Britain on their left, instead of throwing stumbling blocks in their way as they now do, should hold out lures for their trade and alliance. What, when they get strength, which will be sooner than most people conceive (from the emigration of foreigners who will have no particular predilection towards us, as well as from the removal of our own Citizens) will be the consequence of their having formed close connexions with both, or either of those powers in a commercial way? It needs not, in my opinion, the gift of prophecy to foretell. The Western settlers, (I speak now from my own observation) stand as it were upon a pivot—the touch of a feather, would turn them any way ... The jealous & untoward disposition of the Spaniards on one hand, & the private views of some individuals, coinciding with the general policy of the Court of Great Britain, on the other, to retain as long as possible the Posts of Detroit, Niagara, Oswego &c. (which, tho' they are done under the letter of the Treaty, is certainly an infraction of the spirit of it, & injurious to the union) ... eventually, either bring on a separation of them [the Western territories] from us, or a War between the United States & one or the other of those powers—most probably with the Spaniards. ...<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> "From George Washington to The States, 8 June 1783," in *The Writings of Washington, Vol. 26*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931-1944), 483-496.

<sup>73</sup> "From George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, 10 October 1784," in *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series, Vol. 2, 18 July 1784–18 May 1785*, ed. W. W. Abbott (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 86-98.

In truth, Washington was frequently disquieted by rumors of British intrigues in the West and even confessed that such news “led strongly to the conjecture that the British had some design on the Spanish settlements on the Missouri and of course to surround these United States.”<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, during the Nootka Sound Crisis (1789–1794) between Spain and Great Britain over their respective claims to the Pacific Northwest of North America, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson wrote to influential New Yorker and former Constitutional Convention delegate Gouverneur Morris about the possibility of war between Britain and Spain and the prospect of the British Empire dislodging Spain from the territory of Louisiana, cautioning:

These tamperings prove they [the British] view a war as very possible; and some symptoms indicate designs against the Spanish possessions adjoining us. The consequences of their [the British] ac[q]uirring all the country on our frontier from the St. Croix [Florida] to the St. Mary’s [Great Lakes] are too obvious to you to need developement. You will readily see the dangers which would then environ us. We wish you therefore to intimate to them that we cannot be indifferent to enterprizes of this kind, that we should contemplate a change of neighbours with extreme uneasiness; and that a due balance on our borders is not less desirable to us, than a balance of power in Europe has always appeared to them. We wish to be neutral, and we will be so, if they will execute the treaty fairly, and attempt no conquests adjoining us.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, in his diplomatic correspondence around this time, Thomas Jefferson asserted that the people of the United States would “view with extreme uneasiness any attempt of either power to seize the possessions of the other on our frontier, as we consider our own safety interested in a due balance between our neighbors.”<sup>76</sup> Jefferson also wrote:

The danger to us should G[reat]B[ritain] possess herself of Louisiana and the Floridas. Beyond the Miss[issippi]. A territory equal to half ours. She would seduce

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<sup>74</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (Charleston, SC: BiblioLife Network, 2013), 70.

<sup>75</sup> “VIII. Secretary of State [Thomas Jefferson] to Gouverneur Morris, [12 August 1790],” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 17, 6 July–3 November 1790*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 127-128.

<sup>76</sup> “Enclosure: Jefferson’s Opinion of American Conduct in an Anglo-Spanish War, 12 July 1790,” in *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series, Vol. 6, 1 July 1790–30 November 1790*, ed. Mark A. Mastromarino (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 59-61.

our Cis-Miss. Possessions [Kentucky and Tennessee] ... She would then have a territory the double of ours. She would take away the markets of the Atlantic States ... She would encircle us completely, her possessions forming a line on our land board, her fleets on our sea-board. Instead of two neighbors balancing each other, we should have one with the strength of both. Would the prevention of this be worth a War? ... Weigh the evil of this new accumulation of debt [from a potential war]. Against the loss of market and eternal danger and expence of such a neighbor ...<sup>77</sup>

However, Jefferson again emphasized his opinion that although the United States “are truly disposed to remain neutral... we must confess that we should view in a very serious light [British] attempts to extend themselves along our frontier, and destroy all balance in our neighborhood.”<sup>78</sup> Still, despite these challenges, the Washington Administration was able to successfully navigate the turbulent international crisis brought on by the French Revolution and the wars that followed through a necessary revision of the American understanding of the 1778 Franco-American Treaty of Alliance. Also, through the skillful diplomatic negotiation of the critically important Jay Treaty with Great Britain and Pinckney Treaty with Spain, the U.S. maintained a precious neutrality during the 1790s.<sup>79</sup> However, looking to the future, Alexander Hamilton optimistically wrote, “It is not for young and weak nations to attempt to enforce novelties or pretensions of equivocal validity ... [We should] exert all our prudence and address to keep out of war as long as it shall be possible; to defer, to a state of manhood, a struggle to which infancy is ill adapted.”<sup>80</sup>

George Washington’s thoughts echoed those of Hamilton when he predicted that with “twenty years peace, with such an increase of population and resources as we have a right to expect; added to our remote situation from the jarring powers, will in all probability enable us, in

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<sup>77</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford, *The United States and Spain in 1790 An Episode in Diplomacy Described from Hitherto Unpublished Sources* (Brooklyn, NY: Historical Printing Club, 1890), 65-67.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, 101-104.

<sup>80</sup> “The Defence No. II, [25 July 1795],” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 18, January 1795–July 1795*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 493-501.

a just cause to bid defiance to any power on earth.”<sup>81</sup> Also, John Quincy Adams, who served in the diplomatic corps of the Washington Administration as a young man, wrote, “I freely confess that the neutrality of the United States throughout the present War until its final termination is in my mind an object of such inestimable value, and involves so deeply the welfare not of the present age only, but of all posterity, that I may perhaps be inclined to see through a magnifying medium every thing that can have a tendency to defeat it ... The longer the war continues the more that interest will encrease, from the double cause of their constant weakening, and our continually growing strength.”<sup>82</sup> Regarding the geopolitical concept of a “balance of power,” Adams also stated, “There is no one article of my political creed more clearly demonstrated to my mind than this, that we shall proceed with gigantic strides to honor and consideration, and national greatness, if the union is preserved; but that if [it] is once broken, we shall soon divide into a parcel of petty tribes at perpetual war with one another, swayed by rival European powers, whose policy will agree perfectly in the system of keeping us at variance with one another.”<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, most of the Founding Fathers viewed the potential of different confederacies being formed out of the remains of a dissolved Union with great apprehension. Founders such as Jay, Madison, and Hamilton were all well read in World and European history, and as such, they feared the establishment of a “balance of power” geopolitical system becoming a reality on the North American continent, one similar to that which existed in Europe since at least the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), if not the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Therefore, the arguments of certain Anti-

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<sup>81</sup> “From George Washington to Charles Carroll of Carrollton, [1 May 1796],” in *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series, Vol. 20, 1 April–21 September 1796*, eds. David R. Hoth and William M. Ferraro (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 86-88.

<sup>82</sup> “John Adams to John Quincy Adams, [5 December 1796],” in *The Adams Papers, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 11, July 1795–February 1797*, eds. Margaret A. Hogan, C. James Taylor, Sara Martin, Neal E. Millikan, Hobson Woodward, Sara B. Sikes, and Gregg L. Lint (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 432-434.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-314.



Federalists in favor of dividing the United States into multiple confederacies, which had been circulating around the time of the Constitutional Convention and the Ratification Debates that followed, were serious enough to warrant an educated response from the defenders of the Union. The authors of *The Federalist Papers* boldly met this task, successfully convincing most of the American public of the utility and benefit of having one Union of the States, rather than dividing into multiple confederacies and becoming the playthings of the European powers, through which they might fight proxy wars with one another.<sup>84</sup>

The legacy of the Founding Fathers, including the authors of *The Federalist Papers*, upon succeeding generations of Americans concerning the nature of the Union, the fear of encirclement, the “problem of neighborhood,” and “balance of power” geopolitics cannot be overstated. Though not of the generation of the American Founders, James K. Polk was very well versed in the arguments of *The Federalist Papers*, as he was a law student of Felix Grundy, perhaps the most famous lawyer of the Old Southwest and one of the Democrat Party’s leading legal theorists. In his training to become a lawyer, Polk studied the great legal documents and court opinions of the United States’ young history, among which *The Federalist Papers* was required reading. The influence of Grundy upon Polk was no doubt formative and can be seen with one of the most pressing issues for U.S. politicians in the early 1830s, one related to the “problem of neighborhood” and brought on by the Nullification Crisis, in which the State of South Carolina, led by John C. Calhoun and Robert Y. Hayne, threatened to “nullify” or refuse to allow the collection of the so-called “Tariff of Abominations.” With this threat came another implied one: that if the tariff were not repealed, South Carolina might attempt to secede from the Union.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Clinton Lawrence Rossiter and Charles R. Kesler, *The Federalist Papers Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay* (New York: Signet Classic, 2003).

<sup>85</sup> J. Roderick Heller, *Democracy's Lawyer: Felix Grundy of the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 130.

Interestingly, during the Nullification Crisis, President Andrew Jackson tasked then Senator Felix Grundy with writing the Revenue Collection, or “Force Bill,” and collaborated closely with Grundy on the language of the legislation. Wanting to put every senator on the record, Jackson told Grundy, “Lay *all* delicacy on this subject aside and compell every mans name to appear upon the journals that the nullifiers may *all* be distinguished from those who are in support of the laws, and the union ... I have confidence you will push the bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill.”<sup>86</sup> Even after the Nullification Crisis subsided, Jackson wrote to Polk on May 3, 1835, that “there is one use that the nullifiers, I mean Calhoun and Co[mpany], mean to make ... if they can. That is to build up a Southern confederacy, and divide the union.” Jackson also blasted “the odious attitude these intriguing apostates” and urged Polk, “You and Grundy, (by the true Republicans in Congress) are looked to, to take a firm and open stand in favour of the republican principles, *a national convention by the people*, and in toto against nullification and disunion.”<sup>87</sup>

Still more notable, one author of *The Federalist Papers*, James Madison, who was still alive when the Nullification Crisis occurred, personally took up his pen against nullification and secession. Madison wrote pamphleteer Matthew Carey that the “withdrawal of a Single State from the Union ... thrown apart by the intervention of a foreign nation; to expose the obvious, inevitable and disastrous consequences of a separation of the States, whether into Alien confederacies or individual nations.”<sup>88</sup> Similarly, in a separate letter to influential Democrat leader Andrew Stevenson, Madison again brought up the threat of multiple confederacies, writing, “If South Carolina secedes ... the prospect before us would be a rupture of the Union—a Southern

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>87</sup> James K. Polk, *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume III, 1835-1836*, eds. Herbert Weaver and Kermit L. Hall (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1975), 184.

<sup>88</sup> “James Madison to Mathew Carey, 27 July 1831,” in *Madison, James. Letters and Other Writings of James Madison: Volume 4: 1829-1836* (United States: J.B. Lippincott & Company, 1865), 191-192.

Confederacy, mutual enmity with the Northern—the most dreadful animosities and border wars springing from the case of Slaves—rival alliances abroad, standing armies at home to be supported by internal taxes ...”<sup>89</sup> Therefore, even many years later, James Madison continued to warn his countrymen of the dangers of separate confederacies, a “balance of power,” and all of the evils that would follow should the Union be divided and exploited by foreign powers, including standing armies and heavy taxes to pay for their support.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 272-273.

## Chapter 2: The Beginnings of the Anglo-American Antagonism

In later generations, the American people, but especially U.S. Democrat leaders, associated encirclement and the “balance of power” with colonial times and, like their ancestors, sought to break encirclement through western expansion. Encirclement and “balance of power” fears were originally focused on France but then came to focus on Great Britain during the Revolution era and beyond. As this chapter will demonstrate, these fears were quite rational because the British were indeed trying to “encircle” the colonies or states to create a favorable “balance of power” in North America. In addition, the origins of the Anglo-American antagonism as it relates to the geopolitical contest for supremacy in North America arguably preceded even the existence of the Union itself. With the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the concept of great power containment or the “balance of power” as a system of diplomacy was introduced into the international diplomacy of Europe alongside the concept of *Raison D’Etat*, or the “National Interest.” As a result, the traditionally Roman Catholic power of France sided with the mostly Protestant nations of Europe against the historically Roman Catholic Habsburg powers of Spain and Austria.

However, after the War of the Spanish Succession (1700–1714), French and Spanish policy in North America aligned to a great degree with the formation of the “Pacte de Famille,” as the line of Catholic French kings became a potential dynastic contender to inherit the vast domains of New Spain. Thereafter, France sought to strengthen its position in North America by building forts throughout the Mississippi River Valley and establishing a settlement at a point of the river’s issuance into the Gulf of Mexico, either to protect New Spain should it become a Bourbon inheritance or to conquer it should it fall to the Hapsburgs or others. In doing so, the concept of “balance of power” diplomacy was introduced into North American colonial policy by attempting to incline it in favor of the Bourbon powers. To maximize the extent of this potential empire,

French policy also sought to bar English settlement beyond the Allegheny Mountains.<sup>1</sup> As

Historian Richard W. Van Alstyne wrote in his book *The Rising American Empire*:

Whereas the Anglo-Americans ... claimed a pre-emptive right to the continent based upon an ultimate movement of population westward from the seaboard, the French ... envisaged a permanent partition of the continent according to the principles of geography. The Mississippi basin was a naturally tributary to the St. Lawrence, and the Allegheny Mountains at the eastern edge of the basin constituted a natural barrier to the Anglo-American advance from the seaboard. Just as Cardinal Richelieu conceived of France in Europe as entitled to expand to her natural frontiers – the Rhine, the Alps and the Pyrenees – so the intendant of New France, Jean Talon, thought of a North American empire that would expand south, north and west from the Great Lakes until it reached its natural limits.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the first intendant of New France, Jean Talon, envisioned a French Empire that reached from north of the St. Lawrence River Valley, south to Florida and Mexico, in what historians have referred to as the French Crescent.<sup>3</sup> Also, Francis Parkman wrote in his voluminous history of New France that:

under the title of Roman politique ... an author faithful to the traditions of European diplomacy, and inspired at the same time by the new philosophy of the school of Rousseau ... insists that the balance of power must be preserved in America as well as in Europe, because 'Nature,' 'the aggrandizement of the human soul,' and the 'felicity of man' are unanimous in demanding it. The English colonies are more populous and wealthy than the French; therefore the French should have more land, to keep the balance. Nature, the human soul, and the felicity of man require that France should own all the country beyond the Alleghanies and all Acadia but a strip of the south coast, according to the 'sublime negotiations' of the French commissioners, of which the writer declares himself a 'religious admirer.'<sup>4</sup>

If this was truly the thinking of the French commissioners, a natural question might follow such as, What would happen to this precarious "balance of power" as the colonial American population increased, with land in North America being finite and the growing population of the

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier 1534-1760 Revised Edition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Richard W. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier*, 104-107, 141-143.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Parkman, *France and England in North America Volume II* (New York: Library of America Edition, 1983), 931.

British North American colonies being potentially infinite? Would the French resort to a war of extermination against American colonists through the depredations of their Indian allies? With this in mind, it is not surprisingly then, that such an event almost occurred during the French and Indian War (1754-1763) and Pontiac's Rebellion (1763-1766) which followed that conflict.

After a brief, yet costly participation by Spain in the French and Indian War, which also spanned the globe much like the Seven Years War, the loss of the Floridas by Spain and the loss of New France by the French altered the "balance of power" in North America. After the Treaty of Paris in 1763, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River, the flag of Great Britain flew over a vast tract of North America. For the loss of Florida, Spain was compensated with the Louisiana Territory, or the lands west of the Mississippi and east of the Rocky Mountains. Also by this treaty, the British government redefined the boundaries of its American colonies and, despite promises of land grants to colonial veterans of the French and Indian War and the former "sea-to-sea" charters granted to Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, the British government designated the vast majority of those lands recently conquered beyond the Eastern Continental Divide as an "Indian Reserve," thereby prohibiting any settlement by colonists from the Atlantic colonies under the Royal Proclamation of 1763. Despite the proclamation and attempt to draw a line in the mountains along the crest of the Appalachians, American settlers continued to pour in through the Cumberland Gap and settle in lands set aside as part of the so-called Indian Reserve.<sup>5</sup>

In 1775, one of those settlers, Richard Henderson, attempted to found a colony on lands claimed by him as part of the "Transylvania Purchase." The boldness of settlers like Henderson raised the ire of the American Indians, who viewed these lands as part of their historical hunting

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Steele Commager, *Documents of American History* (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co, 1988), 11, 17.

grounds. Cherokee chiefs complained to the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs Captain John Stuart, writing, “The White People pay no regard to all our talks that we have had. They are in Bodies in the middle of our Hunting Grounds some of our people were as far as the Long Island on Holston River but they were obliged to come home for the whole Nation is full of Hunters, & the Guns rattling every way and Horse Paths on the River both up and down we are sure they settled the Land a great Way on this Side of the Line.”<sup>6</sup> Stuart then wrote in frustration to the Secretary of the Colonies and First Lord of Trade, Lord Dartmouth, acknowledging the chiefs’ complaints. Dartmouth later affirmed Stuart, responding, “I am free to confess that I very much doubt whether the dangerous spirit of unlicensed emigration into the Interior parts of America can be effectually restrained by any authority whatever.”<sup>7</sup>

Even Virginia’s royal governor, Lord Dunmore admitted, “I have learnt from experience that the established Authority of any government in America, and the policy of Government at home, are both insufficient to restrain the Americans and they do and will remove as their avidity and restlessness incite them.”<sup>8</sup> In response to the colonists’ resistance to the Acts of Parliament prior to the American Revolution, Parliament passed the Quebec Act in 1774, which moved the boundary of the territory of Quebec south to the Ohio River, thus handing over the territory of the future states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota to the former French colony in violation of the promises made in the colonial charters of the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia,

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<sup>6</sup> British Public Record Office, C.O., 5:70, 595.

<sup>7</sup> “Dartmouth to Stuart, March 3, 1773.” British Public Record Office, C.O., 5:74, 63-66.

<sup>8</sup> Louise Phelps Kellogg, John Murray, and Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Documentary History of Dunmore's War, 1774*, eds. Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1905), 371.

which entitled them to western lands and in which many colonial frontiersmen already settled.<sup>9</sup>

On October 20, 1774, the First Continental Congress responded to the Quebec Act by declaring:

having taken under our most serious deliberation the state of the whole Continent, find that the present unhappy situation of our affairs is occasioned by a ruinous system of Colony Administration, adopted by the British Ministry about the year 1763, evidently calculated for enslaving these Colonies, and, with them, the British Empire ... In prosecution of which system, various Acts of Parliament have been passed ... an Act for extending the Province of Quebec, so as to border on the Western Frontiers of these Colonies, establishing an arbitrary Government therein, and discouraging the settlement of British subjects in that wide extended country; thus, by the influence of civil principles and ancient prejudices, to dispose the inhabitants to act with hostility against the free Protestant Colonies, whenever a wicked Ministry shall choose so to direct them.<sup>10</sup>

The claim that the Quebec Act was designed to limit American expansion was not entirely unfounded as regarding the law, British Solicitor General Alexander Wedderburn confessed in the House of Commons that “we ought to confine the inhabitants ... to keep them according to the ancient policy of this country, along the line of the sea and rivers.”<sup>11</sup> With the colonists’ protests leading to the American Revolution, a brutal conflict between Patriots and Loyalists followed, with each side developing strategies to achieve total victory for their respective sides. To oppose the Americans, the British recruited loyalists, American Indians, and even the slaves of the Southern colonists. Lord Dunmore, the former leader of colonial forces during Lord Dunmore’s War (1774), conspired with the commander of British loyalist forces in the West, John Connolly, who was to act under orders from General Gage to raise a regiment called the Queen’s Royal Rangers and outfit an expedition including Indians at Detroit, conquer Pittsburgh, and march through Virginia onto Alexandria where he was to link up with British forces gathered there by

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<sup>9</sup> Paul W. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development: Written for the Public Land Law Review Commission* (United States Public Land Law Review Commission, 1970), 49.

<sup>10</sup> “The Articles of Association, October 20, 1774” found in the *Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1779*, edited from the original records in the Library of Congress by Worthington Chauncey Ford; Chief, Division of Manuscripts (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905).

<sup>11</sup> Nick Bunker. *Empire on the Edge: How Britain Came to Fight America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 276.



Lord Dunmore. Alexandria would then be fortified to cut the Northern and Southern colonies off from one another. These plans, which were never executed, were similar to British attempts to cut New England off from the other colonies in the Saratoga Campaign by controlling the Hudson River, as well as the related effort to capture West Point through the recruitment and treason of Benedict Arnold to encircle the Northern colonies.

In addition to these military plans, Lord Dunmore issued his proclamation to “declare all indentured servants, Negroes, or others (appertaining to rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining his Majesty’s troops as soon as may be.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, through this proclamation, Lord Dunmore and British Loyalists were indirectly encouraging slave insurrections against the Southern colonies. Also, around the same time as the proclamation, a group led by John Connolly ventured out west to enlist the forces of the Northwest Indians, whom Connolly told Gage were ready to act in concert with loyalist forces against the colonists.<sup>13</sup> Examples such as this and the use of the war-like tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy during the Saratoga Campaign, with the much-publicized murder of Jane McCrea, served to validate the worst fears of the American colonists in the Declaration of Independence, which argued that the King of Great Britain “has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.”<sup>14</sup>

After independence was declared, an alliance with France was sought after by the Continental Congress, and despite the hoped-for French assistance, there was one point upon which the Americans would not yield to France. According to the diplomatic instructions of

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<sup>12</sup> Alan Rogers, *From Revolution to Republic: A Documentary Reader* (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1976), 88.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Van Doren, *Secret History of the American Revolution* (New York: Popular Library: 1941), 23-24.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence* (Jackson: Applewood Books, 1997).

September 1776, France had to forswear the conquest of “the islands of Bermudas [Bahamas?], as well as any part of the Continent of North America, which before the treaty of Paris 1763, or in virtue of that treaty, were acknowledged to belong to the Crown of Great Britain, or to the United States, heretofore called British Colonies.”<sup>15</sup> In fact, one reason that the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Comte de Vergennes, did not pursue the conquest of Canada was out of fear that such a move would embolden Loyalist forces and jeopardize the American war effort. In secret, Vergennes also preferred the British to retain the colony after the conclusion of the war to balance the United States and render the Americans dependent upon France.<sup>16</sup> As Vergennes wrote, “The delegates to Congress have proposed that the King engage to assist in the conquest of Canada, Nova Scotia, and the Floridas which the Americans would undertake ... But the King considers that the possession of these countries, or at least of Canada by England, would be a useful source of anxiety and vigilance for the Americans, which would make them feel in the future a need of the friendship and alliance of the King, which it is not in his interest to destroy.”<sup>17</sup>

Exemplifying the truly Continental ambitions of the young United States, the Continental Army made one ill-fated attempt under the leadership of Major Generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold to conquer Canada during the Revolutionary War in the winter of 1775–1776. Several diplomatic overtures were made to persuade the Catholic French-Canadian inhabitants of Canada to join in the American Revolution against Great Britain, most notably through the mission of Founding Fathers Benjamin Franklin and Samuel P. Chase, alongside Catholic Founding Fathers Charles and John Carroll.<sup>18</sup> However, the mostly French Catholic inhabitants of Canada

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 197.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 198, 242.

<sup>17</sup> John A. Logan, *No Transfer: An American Security Principal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 23.

<sup>18</sup> Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, 197.

were unmoved, perhaps mindful of the hostility of their Protestant neighbors in the Thirteen Colonies to the liberal tolerance afforded to Catholics in the Quebec Act. Writing of its disposition after the war, George Washington wrote of “[Canada’s] importance to our political union ... If that country is not with us, it will, from its proximity to the Eastern States, its intercourse and connexion with the numerous tribes of western Indians ... be at least a troublesome if not dangerous neighbor to us; and ought, at all events, to be in the same interests and politics, of the other states.”<sup>19</sup>

However, another later attempt to conquer Canada was proposed by the French volunteer Marquis de Lafayette to French Admiral Comte d’Estaing, which was serious enough to be referred to the Continental Congress, who thereafter consulted Washington about the plan.<sup>20</sup> However, Washington responded that the proposal “alarms all my feelings for the true and permanent interests of my country ... the introduction of a large body of French troops into Canada, and putting them in possession of the capital of that province, attached to them by all the ties of blood, habits, manners, religion, and former connexion of government. I fear this would be too great a temptation to be resisted by any power ...” and that it would give to France:

the facility of awing and controlling these States, the natural and most formidable rival of every maritime power in Europe. Canada would be a solid acquisition to France on all these accounts, and because of the numerous inhabitants, subjects to her by inclination, who would aid in preserving it under her power against the attempt of every other. France, acknowledged for some time past the most powerful monarchy in Europe by land, able now to dispute the empire of the sea with Great Britain, and if joined with Spain, I may say, certainly superior, possessed of New Orleans on our right, Canada on our left, and seconded by the numerous tribes of Indians in our rear from one extremity to the other, a people so generally friendly to her, and whom she knows so well how to conciliate, would, it is much to be apprehended, have it in her power to give law to these States.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Logan, *No Transfer*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, 199.

<sup>21</sup> “George Washington to Henry Laurens, November 14, 1778,” *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 18, ed. Edward G. Lengel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 149–152.

After Yorktown, the end of the American Revolution reopened the question of the “balance of power” in North America going forward. Upon entering the Paris peace negotiations, John Adams expressed his concerns to the British negotiator, Richard Oswald. As Adams recalled the conversation, “‘You are afraid,’ says Mr. Oswald today, ‘of being made the tools of the powers of Europe.’ ‘Indeed I am,’ says I. ‘It is obvious that all the powers of Europe will be continually manoeuvring with us, to work us into their real or imaginary balances of power. They will all wish to make us a makeweight candle, while they are weighing out their pounds ... But I think it ought to be our rule not to meddle; and that of all the powers of Europe, not to desire us, or perhaps, even to permit us, to interfere, if they can help it.’”<sup>22</sup> However, during the negotiation process, the American minister John Jay began to suspect the United States’ French ally of duplicity and even started to believe reports that were circulating that French representatives were secretly encouraging their British counterparts to push back against U.S. claims to western territories. As it turns out, these concerns were not without merit because the French diplomat Conrad Alexandre Gérard de Rayneval proposed just such a thing to the British Prime Minister, Lord Shelburne, in a secret trip to London in September 1782 during the Paris peace negotiations.<sup>23</sup>

Rayneval seemed to confirm this to the U.S. delegates when he inquired how things were progressing with British negotiators. When U.S. negotiators told Rayneval that they were currently hung up on boundaries because the U.S. delegation insisted that the British return Canada to its ancient limits, that is, before the Quebec Act of 1774, Rayneval seemed to know this information already.<sup>24</sup> Jay’s fears concerning the nature of Rayneval’s secret trip to London were confirmed when British negotiator Oswald told him that the British Undersecretary of State in the Colonial

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<sup>22</sup> Dexter Perkins, *A History of the Monroe Doctrine* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1963), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, 220-222.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

Office, Henry Strachey, “spoke of limiting our [American] western extent by a longitudinal line on the East of the Mississippi [River]” that was almost identical to Rayneval’s own preferences. Strachey was also instructed by Shelburne to “urge the French boundary of Canada” or “urge the boundary established by the Quebec Act [the Ohio River], which was acquiesced in.”<sup>25</sup> According to historian Samuel Flagg Bemis, these were ideas that Rayneval hinted at to British officials during his secret trip to London.<sup>26</sup> Taken in context with Rayneval’s objections to U.S. claims to the lands north of the Ohio River while he was inquiring about U.S. negotiations with the British, Jay was clearly justified in his suspicions of French intentions.

Also during the negotiations, another idea was planted with Shelburne concerning the disposition of the lands north of the Ohio River, and it came from a memorial written by Loyalist Lt. Colonel John Connolly, the same man who was recruited to lead an allied force of British loyalists and Indians by Lord Dunmore earlier in the war. In London, after a prisoner exchange, Connolly pleaded for the retention of the Ohio River as the southern boundary of Quebec to ensure British domination of the fur trade and to provide land for exiled loyalists from the former colonies and other British immigrants. Connolly argued that this Loyalist colony in the West could provide a buffer or barrier state to protect British Canada from future U.S. expansion.<sup>27</sup> When Strachey proposed the idea of giving the lands north of the Ohio River to exiled Loyalists, the suggestion took U.S. negotiators by surprise because it had not been mentioned in previous negotiations. This late proposal was only included in Strachey’s instructions from Shelburne after Connolly’s memorial. In the face of these counterdemands, negotiator Benjamin Franklin abandoned his idea of acquiring Canada as reparations for damages and the removal of a future obstacle to lasting

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 233.

peace. The U.S. delegation no longer pressed the British to cede Canada, as long as it was restored to its pre-Quebec Act borders.<sup>28</sup> Fortunately for the Americans, the British delegation finally consented to the Mississippi boundary in the West.<sup>29</sup>

The dispute over the lands between the Mississippi River and the Appalachian Mountains that had formed the basis of the “Indian Reserve” by the demarcation line of the Proclamation of 1763, illustrates the kind of “balance of power” maneuvering which the Founding Fathers feared. Still, even as seven of the Thirteen Colonies reasserted their western land claims after the American Revolution, the practical acquisition of those lands was only achieved on the battlefield by a Brigadier General in the Virginia Militia, George Rogers Clark, and his Northwestern expedition, as well as by the skillful negotiations of U.S. diplomats during the Paris peace negotiations. Also, because the Treaty of Paris recognized the 45th parallel west of the Connecticut River as the permanent border between British North America and the United States, it effectually ended Continental Army Colonel Ethan Allen’s unsuccessful attempt to align Vermont with the British Empire near the close of the Revolutionary War. Indeed, after the war, Allen reflected on his failed negotiations with the British, recalling that “in the time of [British Governor of Quebec] General Haldimand’s command, could Great Britain have afforded Vermont protection, they would have yielded up their independence and have become a Province of Great Britain,” but Allen continued to believe that a future connection between Vermont and Great Britain might still be possible, optimistically adding that “should the United States attempt a conquest of them [Vermont], they would, I presume, do the same, should the British policy harmonize with it.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Chrisler Phillips, *The West in the Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1913), 216-218, 222.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Fleming, *The Perils of Peace: America’s Struggle for Survival After Yorktown* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2007), 220-221, 233, 294-295.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Relations between the Vermont Separatists and Great Britain, 1789-1791* (New York: American Historical Review, 1916), 550.

Another former Continental Army Colonel and rising New York public figure, Alexander Hamilton, warned that the unsettled nature of Vermont's relationship with the United States and its resistance to claims by the states of New York and New Hampshire to its territory could invite future foreign intrigues. As early as March 1787, Hamilton urged the State of New York to allow Vermont to become an independent state. Hamilton wrote:

Some time in the year 1781, *Fay*, and *Ira Allen*, two of the most influential individuals in that country [Vermont], went into Canada, and we were well informed, had repeated interviews with General Haldimand ... From that period a free intercourse subsisted between Canada and Vermont. This is one proof and a pretty decisive one to shew that a connection was formed during the war ... Since the peace, this intercourse has been cultivated with reciprocal zeal, and there are circumstances related ... that look strongly to a continuance of the connection. If this connection ever existed, what reason have we to believe that it has been since dissolved? To me, I confess, there appears none. On the contrary, the situation of the parties in my opinion forbid the supposition of its dissolution.<sup>31</sup>

Also, in a rhetorical reply to the question of why the British might entertain such a connection with Vermont, Hamilton stated the following:

It is asked, in substance, what object Great Britain can have in cultivating such a connection; this admits of several answers. Great Britain cannot but perceive that our governments are feeble and distracted; that the union wants energy; the nation concert ... The government lately established in Canada—the splendid title of viceroy—seem to look beyond the dreary regions of Canada and Nova Scotia. In this view she would naturally lay hold of Vermont as a link in the chain of events ... there are motives of immoderate interest which would dispose the British government to cultivate Vermont. A connection with Vermont will hereafter conduce to the security of Canada and to the preservation of the western posts. That Great-Britain means to retain these posts may be inferred from the interest she has in doing it ... the monopoly of the furr trade affords to the commerce of the English nation. If Great-Britain has formed the design of finally retaining those posts she must look forward sooner or later to a rupture with this country [the United States] ... And in such a case Vermont would be no despicable auxiliary.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander Hamilton, Harold Coffin Syrett, and Jacob Ernest Cooke, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton. Volume IV* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 134-135.

<sup>32</sup> Syrett, *Papers of Hamilton, IV*, 135-137.

Fearing that the example of a prosperous Vermont in league with British Canada might provide a powerful incentive to lure other states out of the Union, Hamilton saw the danger of the British government exploiting the weakness of the U.S government under the Articles of Confederation to potentially unravel the Union. These observations of Vermont's political leanings were prescient, at least as far as they divined the true intentions of Ethan Allen and his brother Ira Allen. Ethan Allen wrote to the Governor General of British North America, Lord Dorchester, in 1787, that "the leading men in Vermont are not sentimentally attached to a republican form of government, yet from political principles are determined to maintain their present mode of it, till they can have a better ... or until they can on principles of mutual interest and advantage return to the British government, without war or annoyance from the United States."<sup>33</sup>

After Ethan Allen died in 1789, his brothers took over negotiations with the British. Speaking of the Revolutionary War, Levi Allen wrote to the British Home Secretary, Lord Sydney, "During the late unhappy Troubles in America, great numbers of His Majesty's faithful subjects from the provinces of New England, New York and New Jersey retired into the District of Vermont. ..." Allen also argued that Vermont's "connection with Canada" was "the most natural as well as the most advantageous" because of its reliance on Lake Champlain and the St. Lawrence River, as well as his belief that Vermonters had "earnestly hoped to have been incorporated as an appendage to the Province of Quebec, but these hopes were defeated by the boundary line of the United States as settles [settled] by the late Peace."<sup>34</sup> In a later letter, Levi Allen wanted "to assure the British Court that Vermont was ... firmly attached to them, and that whenever Vermont should find it necessary to join Britain or join Congress, they would positively join the former."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bemis, *Relations Between the Vermont Separatists and Great Britain*, 550.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 553-554.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 555.



Levi Allen also declared, “I shall always be doubly happy to serve this country [Great Britain], for in doing so I shall serve Vermont ...” and that “the rulers and inhabitants of Canada and Vermont ought to keep up a friendly connection. ...”<sup>36</sup> The Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada John Graves Simcoe, a British soldier during the Revolutionary War, now urged support for the Vermonters, recalling that British General Henry Clinton had once entrusted him, “with his plan of operations which were prevented by the Death of Major Andre ...” referring to the execution of Benedict Arnold’s British handler by a military tribunal conducted by Washington. Simcoe continued “From that moment to the present Hour ...” he had “been convinced of the importance of Vermont,” as “they may be of the utmost utility in the present critical moment.”<sup>37</sup> However, after Vermont’s ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1791, Allen wrote to his “great mortification” that “Vermont had fully joined the United States.”<sup>38</sup> Vermont was not the only part of the Union that felt British influence and intrigue. For example, James Madison feared British machinations in the west when he wrote Thomas Jefferson:

I have credible information that the people living on the western waters are already in great agitation and are taking measures for uniting their consultations. The ambition of individuals will quickly mix itself with the original motives of resentment and interest. A communication will gradually take place with their British neighbors. They will be led to set up for themselves to seize [seize] on the vacant lands to entice emigrants by bounties and an exemption from federal burdens and in all respects to play the part of Vermont on a larger theatre. It is hinted to me that British partisans are already feeling the pulse of some of the West settlements.<sup>39</sup>

Anticipating war with Spain over the Nootka Sound Crisis, the Governor General of Canada, Lord Dorchester, favored using Kentucky backwoodsmen to assist in a potential British conquest of the Spanish Floridas and Louisiana. Knowing that there were influential politicians in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 556.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 558.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 560.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 11, 1 January–6 August 1787*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 219-225.

the United States, both in the western country and the eastern seaboard that supported an independent west under British patronage and protection, Lord Dorchester sent his agents out into the various parts of the Union, establishing correspondence with American politicians in the east and Kentucky. Agents were also sent out to Detroit and Pittsburgh to sound out the sentiments of westerners on the frontier.<sup>40</sup> Around this time, a British agent named P. Allaire wrote in 1790:

5 to 7000 Men may be had from the Western Country that would assist any nation to take the Floridas from the Spaniards on Condition they the Western Territory should have a free Navigation of the Mississippi it is now in your power ... to bind us in Adamantine Chains of Friendship & Alliance with you— take the Floridas, open a free Navigation of the Mississippi for the Western Inhabitants, and you bind that Country & its inhabitants for Ever in spite of Congress or all the world, for without the Mississippi, its fruitfulness is useless, a few frigates & 2000 Men would Retake it in three Weeks & if proper means were made use of I would Engage for a Sufficient Number to Assist, those People are not as yet Subject to the Laws of the Union, they are at present a large body of People, governed by local Laws of their own forming, and propose being part of the Union on certain Conditions, as a proof of which they undertake Expeditions against the Indians, destroy them & add their Lands to their possessions, they have drove away two Spanish posts of 30 & 25 men, and have demanded & Obtained a free Navigation for their produce, this has been done contrary to the Express Orders of Congress, if therefore a proper mode is made use of ... If you order it, nothing so Easily done as your Regaining the Floridas.<sup>41</sup>

By 1791, P. Allaire was advocating for pensions to influential men in Kentucky, arguing, “If those persons of Kentuck have not some compensation made them, you create more Enemies, they may and Will in future be of Essential benefit to your House if properly treated.”<sup>42</sup> Allaire contended that if Great Britain succeeded in separating Trans-Allegheny west from the Union, the American backcountry could be like “a second India” and that control of it would “command the granary of America.”<sup>43</sup> The appeal for British, as opposed to Spanish, patronage came not only

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *The South in the New Nation: 1789-1819* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 55.

<sup>41</sup> Dean Hoslett Schuyler, *Register of Kentucky State Historical Society*, Vol. 38, No. 122 (January, 1940), 54-55.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 59.

from British sources; but also from an American one as well. One such American was an anonymous “gentlemen from Kentucky” whose “reflections” were enclosed in a letter from Lord Dorchester to Lord Sydney to illustrate how close Great Britain was to invading Spanish Louisiana and enticing Kentucky frontiersmen to assist them. This “gentleman” observed, “As the balance inclines the beam, the Atlantic States of America must sink as the Western settlements rise ... and the flimsy texture of republican government is insufficient to hold in the same political bonds a people detached and scattered over such an expanse of territory, whose views and interests are discordant.” The author continued, “Local causes, irresistible in their nature, must produce a secession of the Western settlements from Atlantic States, and the period is not very distant.” In closing, the anonymous “gentlemen from Kentucky” noted the following:

Politics of the Western Country are verging fast to a crisis, and must speedily eventuate in an appeal to the patronage of Spain or Britain. No interruption can be apprehended from Congress, the seditious temper and jarring interests of the Atlantic States forbid general arrangements for the public good, and must involve a degree of imbecility, distraction, and capricious policy which a high-toned monarchy can alone remedy, the revolutions and changes necessary to reconcile the people to such a government must involve much delay. Great Britain ought to prepare for the occasion, and she should employ the interval in forming confidential connexions with me of enterprise, capacity, and popular influence resident on the Western Waters.<sup>44</sup>

In his book *The Spanish Conspiracy*, historian Thomas Marshall Green suspected the identity of the anonymous author of the *Desultory Reflexions by a Gentleman from Kentucky* was Brigadier General James Wilkinson. Wilkinson himself sent a letter to the Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Esteban Rodríguez Miró y Sabater, which made a nearly identical proposal as the “gentlemen” but to Spanish instead of British authorities.<sup>45</sup> Wilkinson essentially revealed himself to be the “gentlemen” when he wrote to Gardoqui, the Spanish Ambassador to the United States,

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Marshall Green, *The Spanish Conspiracy. A Review of the Early Spanish Movements in the South-West. Containing ... the Early Struggles of Kentucky for Autonomy, Etc.* (Cincinnati: R. Clarke & Co, 1891), 296-297.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 298-299.

threatening Spanish authorities that he intended “to open negotiations with Great Britain,” claiming that “Great Britain stands ready, with her arms expanded, to receive and co-operate with them in their desire to open the navigation of the Mississippi.”<sup>46</sup> As such, the western territories of the United States remained on a pivot point during the Nootka Sound Crisis between Spain and Great Britain in the early 1790s, and this international crisis represented the first major foreign policy challenge to the newly inaugurated administration of George Washington. Since the Bull of Tordesillas and the days of the Spanish-sponsored Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, the world had been divided, in theory, between Spain and Portugal, and this was used as justification by the Spanish to seize British vessels off the coast of Vancouver Island in the Pacific Northwest of North America because Spain believed the Pacific Ocean to be a Spanish lake.

Furthermore, the British feared that the United States would try to take advantage of an Anglo-Spanish War to conquer the disputed frontier posts in the Old Northwest that remained in British hands in violation of the Treaty of Paris. The Spanish, meanwhile, were concerned that Great Britain would attack in alliance with the United States or would violate the neutrality of the Union by marching troops across American territory or by intriguing with Kentucky backwoodsmen to launch an assault on Louisiana on behalf of Great Britain.<sup>47</sup> Concerned Kentuckian Thomas Marshall warned George Washington that James Wilkinson believed that:

Great Britain stands with her arms expanded ready to receive us, and assist our efforts for the accomplishment of that object, and quotes a conversation he had a few years ago with a member of the British Parliament to that effect. He states the facility with which their province of Louisiana might be invaded united forces of the British and Americans, by means of the river Illinois, and the practicability of proceeding from thence to their province of New Mexico, if not being more than twenty days. Britain, he says, will in that case aim at the possession of Louisiana and New Orleans for herself, and leave the freedom of the navigation to America, and urges pretty forcibly the great danger the Spanish interest in North America would be in from the British power, should that nation possess herself of the mouth

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 293.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1923), 51-54.

of the Mississippi, and thereby hold the two grand portals of North America, -that river and the St Lawrence ... About this time arrived from Canada the famous Doctor (now Colonel) Conolly [Connolly]; his ostensible business was to inquire after, and repossess himself of, some lands he formerly held at the Falls of Ohio, but I believe his real business was to sound the disposition of the leading men of this district respecting the Spanish business.<sup>48</sup>

Thomas Marshall also added that John Connolly, the same man who had previously been in league with Lord Dunmore during the war and was also the mastermind behind the plan to settle loyalists in the Ohio River Valley, had “concluded with assurances that were we disposed to assert our right respecting that navigation, Lord Dorchester was cordially disposed to give us powerful assistance, that his Lordship had ... four thousand British troops in Canada beside two regiments at Detroit, and could furnish us with arms, ammunition, clothing and money, that, with this assistance, we might possess ourselves of New Orleans, fortify the Balize at the mouth of the river, and keep possession in spite of the utmost efforts of Spain to the contrary. ...” Marshall finally concluded, “It appears plain to me that the offers of Lord Dorchester, as well as those of Spain, are founded on a supposition that it is a fact that we [Kentucky] are about to separate from the Union, else, why are those offers not made to Congress. We shall, I fear, never be safe from the machinations of our enemies, as well internal as external, until we have a separate state, and are admitted into the Union as a federal member.”<sup>49</sup>

The fear of encirclement so deeply concerned American statesmen during the Nootka Sound Crisis that U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson wrote that Spain could potentially resolve the situation by ceding to the United States all the territory east of the Mississippi, arguing:

What then had Spain better do of choice? Cede to us all territory on our side of the Missis[s]ip[p]i: On condition that we guarantee all her possessions on the Western waters of that river: She agreeing further, to subsidize us, if the guarantee brings us into the war. Should Gr[eat]. Britain possess herself of the Floridas and Louisiana, Her governing principles are Conquest, Colonization, Commerce, Monopoly. She

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<sup>48</sup> Green, *The Spanish Conspiracy*, 250-253.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 250-253.

will establish powerful colonies in them. These can be poured into the gulph of Mexico, for any sudden enterprize [enterprise] there. Or invade Mexico, their next neighbor, by land. Whilst a fleet co-operates along shore, and cuts off relief. And proceed successively from colony to colony. With respect to us, if Gr[eat]. Britain establishes herself on our whole land-board Our lot will be bloody and eternal war; or indissoluble confederacy.<sup>50</sup>

Faced with this diplomatic crisis, President Washington posed a series of questions to his cabinet and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Jay, requesting their counsel, asking, “What then should be the answer of the Executive of the United States to Lord Dorchester, in case he should apply for permission to march troops through the territory of the U[nited]. States from Detroit to the Mississippi? What notice ought to be taken of the measure, if it should be undertaken without leave, which is the most probable proceeding of the two?”<sup>51</sup> Vice President John Adams counseled a refusal, remarking:

In order to preserve an honest neutrality, or even the reputation of a disposition to it, the United States must avoid as much as possible every real wrong, and even every appearance of injury to either party. To grant to Lord Dorchester, in case he should request it, permission to march troops through the territory of the United States, from Detroit to the Mississippi, would not only have an appearance offensive to the Spaniards, of partiality to the English, but would be a real injury to Spain. The answer therefore to his lordship should be a refusal, in terms clear and decided, but guarded and dignified, in a manner which no Power has more at command than the President of the United States.<sup>52</sup>

John Jay counseled peace with Great Britain at almost any price, writing:

The Subject naturally brings into view a question both difficult and important, viz whether as the possession of the Floridas would afford G[reat]. Britain additional Means and Facilities of annoying the U.S. the latter would for that Reason be justifiable in endeavoring to prevent it by direct and hostile opposition? The Danger of permitting any Nation so to preponderate, as to endanger the security of others, introduced into the Politics the Idea of preserving a Ballance of Power. How far the Principles which have thence been inferred, are applicable to the present Case, would merit serious Inquiry, if the U.S. had only to consider what might be right

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 11, 1 January–6 August 1787*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 113-117.

<sup>51</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford, *The United States and Spain in 1790: An Episode in Diplomacy Described from Hitherto Unpublished Sources* (Brooklyn, NY: Historical Press Club, 1890), 43-44.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

and just on the occasion; but as the state of their affairs strongly recommends Peace, and as there is much a Reason to presume that it would be more prudent for them at present to permit Britain to conquer and hold the Floridas, than engage in a War to prevent it, such Inquiries would be premature.<sup>53</sup>

Thomas Jefferson disagreed, arguing that if the consequence of an Anglo-Spanish War resulted in the United States being surrounded by British territory, Americans must choose war and even ally with the Spaniards to prevent such an outcome. Jefferson noted, “I am so deeply impressed with the magnitude of the dangers which will attend our government if Louisiana and the Floridas be added to the British Empire, that in my opinion we ought to make ourselves parties in the general war expected to take place, should this be the only means of preventing the calamity.”<sup>54</sup> Henry Knox, for his part, would counsel a refusal of the request, suggesting that the president pass the issue to Congress if Great Britain did trespass on American soil, reasoning:

The United States are too well aware, of the great and permanent evils, which would result from England’s becoming possessed of the Mississippi and West Florida, to concur in any arrangements to facilitate that event. The law of nations establish the principle, that every neutral nation may, refuse the passage of troops through its territory, when such passage may tend to its injury. In the present case, the passage of the British troops, would be to effect an object directly contrary to the interests and welfare of the United States. If therefore the demand should be made, it may be refused, consistently with the principles of self-preservation, and the law of nations.<sup>55</sup>

In his response, Alexander Hamilton observed the dangers of allowing the British to gain a foothold on the western frontier of the Union, noting:

An increase of the means of annoying us in the same hands is a certain ill consequence of the acquisition of the Floridas and Louisiana by the British. This will result not only from contiguity to a greater part of our territory, but from an increased facility of acquiring an undivided influence over all the Indian tribes inhabiting within the borders of the United States. Additional danger of the dismemberment of the western country is another ill consequence to be apprehended from that acquisition ... making them [the western settlers] sensible on the other of their dependence on them [Great Britain] for the continuance of so

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 54-55.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 103-104.

essential an advantage [i.e. access to the Mississippi River], they might hold out to them the most powerful temptation to a desertion of their connection with the rest of the United States ... It has been seen that the ill effects to be apprehended from the conquest of the Spanish territories in our neighborhood are, an increase of the means whereby we may be hereafter annoyed, and of the danger of the separation of the western country from the rest of the Union ... It seems evidently our true policy to cultivate neutrality. This, at least, is the ground on which we ought to stand, until we can see more of the scene, and can have secured the means of changing it with advantage ... when are able to make good our pretensions, we ought not to leave in the possession of any foreign power the *territories* at the mouth of the Mississippi, which are to be regarded as the key to it.<sup>56</sup>

Regarding the various groups of separatists within the United States who might be exploited if America should not remain neutral in an Anglo-Spanish conflict stemming from the Nootka Sound Crisis, a report to the Privy Council concluded that “the Lords are of the opinion that in a commercial view it will be for the Benefit of this Country to prevent Vermont and Kentuck and all the other Settlements now forming in the Interior parts of the great Continent of North America, from becoming dependent on the Government of the United States, or on that of any other Foreign Country, and to preserve them on the contrary in a State of Independence, and to induce them to form Treaties of Commerce and Friendship with Great Britain.”<sup>57</sup> The author also noted, “Besides the State of Vermont and the Settlement of Kentuck, six other Settlements are said to be already forming in the interior parts of the American Continent, some of them by encouragement from the United States; others under the Protection of the Spanish Government; and some appear to have no connection hitherto with any Foreign Power.”<sup>58</sup>

The author recommended his government pursue a “policy, which ought to direct the Conduct of Government with respect to Vermont applies equally in a Commercial Light to all the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 83, 87, 91, 94.

<sup>57</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “English Policy Toward America in 1790-1791,” *The American Historical Review* 8, no. 1 (Oct., 1902): 84.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 84.



other Settlements, that are forming in the interior parts of the American Continent ...”<sup>59</sup> The other western settlements mentioned in addition to Kentucky included those on the Cumberland and Holston Rivers in Tennessee, which made up the State of Franklin, with some Britons even stating their “daily expectation of hearing of a coalition between them [i.e., Franklinites] and the Vermonters and New Hampshire Grants, who are also disaffected; and it is a matter of doubt whether the balance of power would not be in their favor, even against the United States, if matters should come to an open rupture, as there are a great many over the whole continent quite tired of their independence.”<sup>60</sup> According to historian J. Leitch Wright, Jr. in his book *Britain and the American Frontier: 1783-1815*, the other potential settlements alluded to by the Board of Trade as possible allies along with Kentucky and Vermont were the area of Western Pennsylvania and Virginia known as Westsylvania, the Tennessee settlements of Cumberland and Holston, or the State of Franklin, and the Connecticut Yankees in the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania.<sup>61</sup>

Around this time, Lieutenant Governor Simcoe of Canada practically begged his superiors in London to adopt the Board of Trade’s recommendations, writing, “A communication with the Ocean by way of the Mississippi, if the Spanish power would let you have Pensacola (which places you between him and danger) will give you both flanks of America; two such glorious communications with the back-country ours, must ever keep the Americans in subjection... The navigation of the Mississippi and the occupying of Pensacola would make the State of Kentucky look up to you for union and alliance. ...”<sup>62</sup> Historian Samuel Flag Bemis noted the following:

The British Government was not averse to a secession of Vermont and Kentucky, and wished to see a buffer community under British protection extending all along

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>60</sup> Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion*, 58.

<sup>61</sup> James Leitch Wright, *Britain and the American Frontier: 1783-1815* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), 61.

<sup>62</sup> Samuel Flag Bemis, *Jay’s Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1923), 170.

the frontier between the Atlantic states and Canada. This would secure control of the Great Lakes and the fur trade to the south of them and would prevent Spain from marching with or without American cooperation, across the Northwest Territory against Canada. It would also afford a big market for English manufactures imported by means of the water communication of the Great Lakes and the Champlain system. Such was the gist of a report of the Privy Council based on the information of the Government's observers of western separatism.<sup>63</sup>

Even after the Nootka Sound Crisis subsided, throughout the early 1790s, Wilkinson's cabal, known as the "Secret Committee of Correspondence of the West," included prominent Kentuckians James Innes, Benjamin Sebastian, and James Murray and was continually intriguing on the American frontier.<sup>64</sup> Wilkinson had even been hinting at a western union between the Cumberland and Franklin settlements and the district of Kentucky since at least the year 1787 when he talked about "a distinct confederation of the inhabitants of the West" with a "friendly understanding with Spain" or Great Britain.<sup>65</sup> Although Wilkinson eventually turned to the Spanish instead of the British, he was sincere in his desire to carve a separate political entity out of the Trans-Allegheny West of the United States. In 1795, the Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Francisco Luis Héctor de Carondelet, said that "G.W. [General Wilkinson] can aspire to the same dignity in the western states that P.W. [President Washington] has in the eastern. . . ."<sup>66</sup> Carondelet also wrote, "I doubt that a person of his character would prefer, through vanity the advantage of commanding the army of the Atlantic states, to that of being the founder, the liberator in fine, the Washington of the Western states. His part is as brilliant as it is easy; all eyes are drawn toward him; he

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<sup>63</sup> Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 54.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur P. Whitaker and Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Spanish-American Frontier, 1783-1795. The Westward Movement and the Spanish Retreat in the Mississippi Valley* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 196-197.

<sup>65</sup> Kathleen DuVal, *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2015), 317.

<sup>66</sup> Andro Linklater, *An Artist in Treason: The Extraordinary Double Life of General James Wilkinson* (New York: Walker, 2010), 152.

possesses the confidence of his fellow-citizens and of the Kentucky volunteers; at the slightest movement the people will name him the General of the new republic.”<sup>67</sup>

In their book *The Spanish-American Frontier*, historians Arthur Preston Whitaker and Samuel Eliot Morison asserted that Wilkinson and his cabals’ goal was in fact:

a new Union, a Mississippi Valley republic. The very phrase with which they described themselves, ‘the men of the Western waters,’ suggested unity by indicating the bond of union: all of these settlements were situated on the waters of the Ohio or near the Cumberland plateau. Indian affairs and the navigation of the Mississippi were matters of common interest in these settlements, and when they were not managed to the satisfaction of the people there, inflammatory addresses were circulated and committees of correspondence formed in Kentucky, Cumberland, Franklin, and even western Pennsylvania. So far the frontiersmen had closely and consciously imitated the patriots of ‘76, but there was still one step that they had not taken: they had not yet sought foreign aid against the oppressor. There was curiously enough much talk of British intervention, but it came to nothing. The current of the rivers that passed their doors pointed to Spain as the nation that should play the part of France in this second American Revolution. Floridablanca [Spain’s Chief Minister], however, was no Vergennes, and Wilkinson no Washington.<sup>68</sup>

However, in 1793, when France declared war on both Spain and Great Britain, the two former rivals momentarily found themselves with a common enemy. Under these circumstances and fearful that the United States might take advantage of each European power’s continental distractions, the Spanish Charges d’Affaires ad interim José de Jáudenes y Nebot met with a mysterious man who went by the title M. Mitchell and claimed to be a representative of a tentative alliance between the Whiskey rebels and Kentucky separatists. This “M. Mitchell” [Mr. Mitchell?] claimed to have been an associate of Whiskey rebel leader David Bradford and may have been connected to the John Mitchell held for trial along with Bradford for inciting the rebellion in Western Pennsylvania. After consulting with his coconspirators on the American frontier, Mitchell interviewed Jáudenes in Philadelphia, bringing with him a memorial from a group of men claiming

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>68</sup> Whitaker and Morison, *The Spanish-American Frontier*, 93-94.

to be the “secret committee of correspondence of the West.”<sup>69</sup> This secret committee of frontiersmen proposed establishing a new state west of the Allegheny and Appalachian Mountains, centered around the Cumberland Plateau and allied with Spain and Great Britain in exchange for the free navigation of the Mississippi and a mutual territorial guarantee of their new state.<sup>70</sup>

However, the conspirators of the “Secret Committee of Correspondence of the West” made it clear that they would not wait forever for Spain to act. They declared that, in the year 1795, either a pro-Spanish separatist state would come to power in the West or that the Kentuckians would sail down the Mississippi and take New Orleans from Spain. Their *fait accompli* was that, if the Spanish wanted to avoid the latter, they must send enough rifles and ammunition to assist an army of 10,000 men in revolutionizing the West. As such, separatist movements from Vermont to Tennessee were waiting on the whims of Spain and Great Britain to actively support them in the years between 1788 and 1795, with each movement being held as a card in a geopolitical game to be played at an opportune moment. However, so as long as the U.S. restrained itself from taking the British-held frontier posts in the Great Lakes region, Great Britain held the Vermont separatists in check. Likewise, so long as the U.S. held its citizens back from attempting to take control of New Orleans and the Mississippi River by force, Spain restrained the separatists south of the Ohio River. Thus, each nation feared the potential of driving the United States into the arms of the other during the Nootka Sound Crisis. Eventually, Spain would agree to the Pinckney Treaty, granting American settlers access to the Mississippi and, hence, diffusing separatist sentiment in the West.<sup>71</sup>

In the territory north of the Ohio River, in what historians today refer to as the Old Northwest, Great Britain maintained control over the frontier posts that they had promised to

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<sup>69</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty: A Study of America's Advantage from Europe's Distress, 1783-1800* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1926), 244-247.

<sup>70</sup> See “Map of Proposed Western Separatist State, 1794” in the Appendices of this dissertation on page 335.

<sup>71</sup> Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, 104-107.

evacuate by the terms of the Treaty of Paris. Citing a failure of the newly independent United States to pay down its outstanding debts and compensate loyalists for lost property, the British refused to evacuate the posts. In 1785, Foreign Minister John Jay observed, “The Detention of the Posts, the strengthening of the garrisons in our Neighborhood and various other circumstances bespeak a language very different from that of kindness and good will” and later concluded “I am well informed ... that some of the Loyalists advise and warmly press for the Detention of the Posts. It is strange that Men who for ten Years have done Nothing but deceive should still retain any Credit.”<sup>72</sup> From his post in London, U.S. Minister to Great Britain John Adams reported talk “of a general Confederation of the Indian Nations against the United States which the Refugees [Loyalists] propagate, partly for the Pleasure they take in the thought and partly to persuade the Government to build Ships and forts upon the Lakes, Services in which they hope to get employment under the Crown and the fingering of some of its Money ...” so they feel that “they may play with us as they please” because of the weakness of the Union.<sup>73</sup>

Alarmingly, in March 1786, the U.S. Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Jay informed Congress that “the number of forces stationed in the Province of Quebec” suggested the “asperity observable in the British Nation toward us ...” which “creates Suspicions that they wish to see our Difficulties of every kind increase and multiply.”<sup>74</sup> Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Army Lt. Colonel Josiah Harmar suspected British hands in the Indians’ intransigence, writing that Great Britain was sending her “villainous emissaries” out from among the occupied posts to “poison the minds of the savages.”<sup>75</sup> There was indeed some truth to Harmar’s suspicions because the British

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<sup>72</sup> Frederick D. Williams, *The Northwest Ordinance: Essays on Its Formulation, Provisions, and Legacy* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1989), 26.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>75</sup> Marks, *Independence on Trial*, 7.

Superintendent of the Indian Department in Canada Sir John Johnson told Mohawk leader Joseph Brant, “Do not suffer an idea to hold a place in your mind that it will be for your interest to sit still and see the Americans attempt the Posts. It is for your sakes, chiefly, that we hold them.”<sup>76</sup> Lord Sydney also wrote Dorchester that “assistance to be derived from the Indians would be extremely desirable” and “to afford them active assistance would be a measure extremely imprudent, but at the same time it would not become us to refuse them such supplies of ammunition as might enable them to defend themselves ... there can be no objection to furnishing them with a supply.”<sup>77</sup>

With continued Indian depredations on the frontier, war was inevitable. In the early days of what would become known as the Northwest Indian War, the U.S. Army suffered several serious setbacks, the worst of which was the costly and catastrophic defeat of General Arthur St. Clair at the Battle of the Wabash on November 4, 1791. After St. Clair’s defeat, British officials began to envision the creation of a barrier or buffer state made up of the Northwestern Indian Confederacy. The substitution of this neutral Indian barrier state in the place of sovereign U.S. territory in the Ohio River Valley and the Great Lakes region was a resurrection of an idea that French diplomat Rayneval suggested to Lord Shelburne during the Paris peace negotiations.<sup>78</sup> A delegation of Northwestern Indian tribes was sent to Lord Dorchester in Quebec in the summer of 1791 to state Indian demands on the United States and ask for his mediation. Although Dorchester agreed to help mediate, he did not promise armed assistance to help them force the issue.<sup>79</sup>

Also, Dorchester unofficially offered to the American government to mediate between the United States and the Northwestern Indian tribes in a conversation with Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. However, Hamilton coldly responded, “If the United States were at war with

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<sup>76</sup> Bemis, *Jay’s Treaty*, 15.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 16-17.

<sup>78</sup> Alfred L. Burt, *The United States, Great Britain, and British North America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), 29.

<sup>79</sup> Bemis, *Jay’s Treaty*, 115-117.

a great or respectable nation the case would be different: a foreign mediation under certain circumstances might be desirable ... On the present occasion the thing in its existing shape is inadmissible and I could not submit such a paper to the President's consideration. The objects of warfare are vagrant Indian tribes who cannot be considered to be on the footing on which such a system would place them."<sup>80</sup> On another occasion, Hamilton responded to the British offer by stating that any "cession of territory or right or the allowance of any other Power to interfere in the disputes with the Indians would be considered ... impractical and inadmissible."<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, U.S. Minister to France Gouverneur Morris suspected the British of duplicity, telling Washington that their "game is evident. The Mediation is to be with us a Price for adopting his Plans and with the Indian Tribes a Means of constituting himself their Patron and Protector. It may be proper to combine all this with the late Division of Canada and the present measures for the Military organization of the Upper Country [referring to Upper Canada or Ontario]."<sup>82</sup>

By early 1792, the Northwestern Indian tribes, emboldened by their victory over U.S. forces at the Battle of the Wabash River, now demanded a border with the United States at the Ohio River.<sup>83</sup> Around this time, the project of creating an Indian barrier state reached London and gained the support of Sir Henry Dundas, the Secretary for Home Affairs. Dundas wrote to the British Envoy to the United States, George Hammond, calling for "an effectual and lasting barrier" consisting of the Indian nations between the United States and British North America. Dundas explained that such a possession held by the Northwestern Indian Confederacy might "become a natural barrier" and that "the interposed country" could "serve as a barrier should extend along the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>82</sup> Williams, *The Northwest Ordinance*, 27.

<sup>83</sup> Burt, *The United States, Great Britain, and British North America*, 118.

whole line of His Majesty's Dominions, and that of the United States of America."<sup>84</sup> The desire to create an Indian Barrier State on the frontier of the U.S. and Canada was consistent with the British plan to have a barrier of friendly proxy states or protectorates stretching along the U.S. frontier. To British officials, mediation was seen as the vehicle through which a neutral Indian barrier state might be forced upon an increasingly desperate United States during the Northwest Indian War.<sup>85</sup>

When news that war had broken out between France and Great Britain came across the Atlantic in 1793, Governor Simcoe and Lord Dorchester, both believing that the United States would declare war on Great Britain under the Franco-American Treaty of 1778, gave orders to occupy the site of the old Miamis fort at the mouth of the Maumee River and fortify the old post. The building of Fort Miami was a clear violation of the Treaty of Paris because the treaty called for the withdrawal of British forces from existing posts in the Old Northwest, and Fort Miami was a new post on land recognized by Great Britain as being under U.S. sovereignty.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, on February 10, 1794, Lord Dorchester met with a delegation of the Northwest Indian tribes.<sup>87</sup> In an inflammatory speech, Dorchester declared, "From the manner in which the people of the [United] States push on, and act, and talk on this side, and from what I learn of their conduct towards the sea, I shall not be surprised if we are at war with them in the course of the present year ... We have acted in the most peaceable manner, and ... with patience, but I believe our patience is almost exhausted."<sup>88</sup> The clear implication to the Northwestern Indian tribes was that they would soon have the British as an ally in their war against the Americans.

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<sup>84</sup> Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 117-118.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 115-116.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 174-176.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

<sup>88</sup> Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 258.



However, in April 1794, the Miami fortification was complete, and by July that year, Revolutionary War veteran General “Mad” Anthony Wayne’s “Legion of the United States” was already on the march. Methodically advancing along a tributary of the Maumee called the Glaize and then along the main river, the U.S. Legion met the forces of the Northwestern Indian tribes at a place called Fallen Timbers, near modern-day Toledo, Ohio. Using expert combined infantry and cavalry tactics, Wayne’s army quickly overcame the Indian positions.<sup>89</sup> After the battle, Wayne’s forces advanced on the British-held Fort Miami at the mouth of the Maumee, and a tense standoff ensued. Despite some taunting by General Wayne, cooler heads prevailed, and the U.S. Legion retired to one of their chain forts, Fort Defiance, at the confluence of the Glaize and Maumee Rivers.<sup>90</sup> The resulting Treaty of Greenville (1795) negotiated by General Anthony Wayne ended hostilities between the Northwestern Confederacy and the United States for nearly a generation. By the terms of the treaty, much of the modern state of Ohio was ceded to the United States for settlement by American citizens.<sup>91</sup>

With the Northwestern Confederacy defeated, nothing stood between Wayne’s army and an attack on the remaining British-occupied frontier posts in the Northwest Territory. The failure of the British to come to the aid of the Northwestern Confederacy after the Battle of Fallen Timbers and the official terms of the Jay Treaty (1794) effectually ceded the posts and the Old Northwest to the United States, thereby convincing the Northwestern Indian tribes that they had been abandoned by their former British patrons.<sup>92</sup> In 1795, when reflecting on the previous decade of British policy towards the United States after the Treaty of Paris, James Monroe wrote, “With this view [of separating the west] she refused to surrender the forts, excited the Indians to make war

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<sup>89</sup> Bemis, *Jay’s Treaty*, 177-178.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 180-181.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 263-264.

<sup>92</sup> Sword, *President Washington’s Indian War*, 314-315, 328.

on our families, encouraged Spain to refuse our right to the Navigation of the Mississippi. [Great Britain will use the unease of the western people over the navigation issue] and improve it into an opportunity of separating the new from the old states and connecting them with her interests in Canada ... Next to conquest, separation would be the most advantageous for Britain [who would] become the ally of the western states and play them off against the eastern.”<sup>93</sup> Although Monroe was opposed to the Jay Treaty, Jay inadvertently helped set the table for future expansion by buying the United States time to build its strength, even though peace had been his primary goal.

In the late 1780s and early 1790s, Great Britain also hoped to flip the allegiance of the Southern Indian tribes south of the Tennessee River from Spain to Great Britain to close the circle around the United States; their best hope of doing so was a man named William Augustus Bowles. Bowles, a half-Creek Maryland loyalist who had served with British forces in Florida during the Revolutionary War, wanted to establish a separatist Indian state in territory belonging to the United States and Spanish Florida. Although the boundaries of this proposed State of Muskogee were vague, if established on the entirety of lands belonging to the Southern Indian tribes, it would have included both East and West Florida and most of the United States south of the Cumberland or Tennessee Rivers. Bowles would go on to style himself as the Director General of the State of Muskogee and wanted to establish this proposed new state’s capital at Coweta in modern-day Alabama, then successively Wekiva on the Chattahoochee, and later Miccosukee on the Florida–Georgia line between the U.S. State of Georgia and the Spanish Floridas.<sup>94</sup>

In the early 1790s, Bowles pitched the idea of the State of Muskogee as a British protectorate to Lord Dunmore, who by then had become the British Governor of the Bahamas.

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<sup>93</sup> Williams, *The Northwest Ordinance*, 27.

<sup>94</sup> J. Leitch Wright, *William Augustus Bowles: Director General of the Creek Nation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1967), 147.

Bowles claimed that the new state would be open to settlement by British immigrants and even expected the Southern Indians to intermarry with the growing European population, blending away their differences over time.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, Bowles wanted to draft a national constitution, write official proclamations, establish printing presses, grammar schools, and even a university. In addition to establishing a Muskogee navy, Bowles also wanted to organize a professional army.<sup>96</sup> However, Spanish officials had other plans for the territory claimed by Bowles' State of Muskogee and wanted instead to unite the Southern Indian tribes into a Southern Indian Confederacy allied with the Spanish Empire. Still, Spanish officials faced opposition to their plans from Bowles' rival, the Creek leader Alexander McGillivray, who wanted instead to maintain peace with the United States under the Washington Administration. After Bowles was captured by Spanish forces in early 1792 and McGillivray died in the winter of 1793, the Southern Indians finally agreed to a Spanish–Indian alliance and signed the Treaty of Nogales on October 28, 1793.

Therefore, the Spanish finally succeeded in bringing the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw under the protection of the Spanish Empire and into a general confederation with one another and the Creek nation. The Spaniards even built a capital for this new Southern Indian Confederacy that they called “Confederacion,” which was near present-day Gainesville, Alabama, giving a clear indication of their intention to create a rival, border state to the United States, even on the territory of the Union itself. Also, because of this treaty, the tribes entered an offensive and defensive alliance with Spain and pledged to defend Spanish possessions in the Floridas and Louisiana, as well as giving a promise to consult with Spanish authorities before engaging in any hostilities or treaties with the United States. This last stipulation was almost identical to the one negotiated between the Northwestern Indian tribes and Governor Simcoe of Canada, thereby

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 102, 149.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 148-149.

representing a real threat that both Spain and Great Britain might have Indian allies hostile to the United States on territory each power previously recognized as part of the U.S.<sup>97</sup>

Interestingly, during the Northwest Indian War, Spanish officials in Louisiana and the Floridas even encouraged the Southern Indian tribes to take up arms against the United States and fight alongside the Northwestern Indian tribes. The Spanish governor at Pensacola, Arthur O'Neil, urged the Southern Indian tribes "to join quickly in war against the United States while they were engaged in a war with the Northern tribes; if they did not, that as soon as they (the United States) conquer the Northern tribes, they would be upon them and cut them off."<sup>98</sup> To this end, O'Neil supplied the Southern Indians with the weapons of war they needed to carry out attacks on American settlers. The Spanish Governor of Louisiana Carondelet emphasized the importance of the Southern Indians embroiling the United States in a costly war, writing to O'Neil, "This diversion will prevent the Northern Indians, who are aided by the English, from being annihilated during this campaign, and with this the Americans will be stuck between two fires and it will compel them to return what they have taken, or they will be exposed to a general devastation of their Settlements on this side of the Appalachians."<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, the Spanish Governor of Cuba, Luis de las Casas, commented on the strategy of engineering an alliance between the Southern and Northwestern Indian tribes, writing, "The Plan of forming a general alliance of all the Indian nations in between the King's possessions and those of the United States, attracting them and preserving them with our Party, inspiring them to be opposed to cede lands to the Americans in order to contain their borders farther away from

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<sup>97</sup> Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty*, 201-204.

<sup>98</sup> Robert M. Owens, *Red Dreams, White Nightmares, Pan-Indian Alliances in the Anglo-American Mind 1763-1815* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 123.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

our[s], and forestall them extending their continued disguised usurpations.”<sup>100</sup> Luis de las Casas called this strategy “the most advantageous to the interests of the state [Spain] in that Continent.”<sup>101</sup> British Indian Agent Alexander McKee noted in the spring of 1794 that “speeches brought lately into that Country from the Mississippi in the Name of the Spaniards, Southern & Western Indians which seems to have given the Indians in this Quarter great Spirits and made the Nations in General more unanimous than ever in supporting one another and their common Interest.”<sup>102</sup>

Some Americans even suspected these attempts to create a general Indian Confederacy. South Carolinian Pierce Butler noted, “There can no longer be any doubt of a general Indian War or combination under the auspices of the British, and I imagine the Spanish also.”<sup>103</sup> Secretary of War Henry Knox feared such a combination, writing, “It is certainly an evil to be involved in hostilities with tribes of savages amounting to two or three thousand, as is the case Northwest of the Ohio. But this evil would be greatly increased, were a general Indian war to prevail south of the Ohio; the Indian Warriors of the Four Nations in that quarter not being much short of fourteen thousand, not to advert to the combinations which a general Indian war might produce with the European Powers, with whom the tribes both North and South of the Ohio are connected.”<sup>104</sup> Although Washington wanted to push the Northwest Indian War to an absolute victory, he was also far-sighted enough to understand the importance of keeping the Southern Indians out of the conflict. Knox wrote that Washington was insistent on keeping the peace in “the Southern quarter ...” because “he is exceedingly apprehensive that the flame of War once kindled in that region upon the smallest scales will extend itself and become general.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

Although Spain and Great Britain had been allies since 1793 when France declared war on the monarchs of Europe, by 1794–1795, Spain was seeking to leave its alliance with Great Britain, thus dooming any hope of a general Indian Confederacy cooperating with one or both European powers. By July 1795, Spain would again be at peace with France, following the conclusion of the War of the Pyrenees (1793–1795). Meanwhile, with fears that the Jay Treaty negotiations would result in an alliance between America and Great Britain, Spain was motivated to conclude Pinckney’s Treaty with the United States in late 1795. At this point, the Spanish government anticipated retaliation from the British for abandoning the First Coalition and anticipated the enthusiastic participation of American backwoodsmen who wanted to force open the navigation of the Mississippi and drive Spain from New Orleans in any potential war launched by Great Britain on Spain. Instead of risking the hostility of Americans on its borders, Spanish officials hoped to keep the U.S. as a neutral power to act as a buffer between British North America and Spanish Louisiana. As a result, Spain caved to almost every major demand of the United States.<sup>106</sup>

As a result of Pinckney’s Treaty (1795), which was negotiated by U.S. Minister to Great Britain Thomas Pinckney, Spain finally agreed to a border between the United States and the Spanish Floridas at the 31st parallel, as well as Spanish withdrawal from forts or posts on the eastern side of the Mississippi north of the Florida border, abandonment of active support of any Southern Indian Confederacy, and, perhaps most importantly, the free navigation of the Mississippi River and the right of deposit for U.S. goods at the port of New Orleans.<sup>107</sup> In one bold stroke, the effect of opening the Mississippi River in its complete course to U.S. trade ended the impetus for western separatism, just as the abandonment of Spanish support for the Southern Indian tribes ended any effective organization and resistance in that quarter. The cooling of

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<sup>106</sup> Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, 104-107.

<sup>107</sup> Bemis, *Pinckney’s Treaty*, 391-411.

sentiments in favor of western separatism among U.S. settlers and the end of the Southern Indian alliances could not have come at a worse time for Spain. Soon after Pinckney's Treaty, the Spanish would again have reason to fear for the security of Louisiana with Blount's Conspiracy.

As British officials feared, their former ally Spain agreed to a military alliance with France in 1797. The shifting alliances of Europe would play out once more on the geopolitical field of North America, again exposing Spain's American colonies to British attack. For the first time since the Nootka Sound Crisis, the Western United States found itself between the two millstones of Spanish and British North America. Although history remembers the Blount Conspiracy as the work of U.S. Senator Tennessean William Blount, the apparent architect behind the conspiracy was Robert Liston, the British Minister to the United States in Philadelphia. In late 1796, after facing the rejection of his petition to supply the Southern Indians with goods by the U.S. Secretary of War James McHenry, a former U.S. Indian Agent and a friend of Blount, John Chisholm, went to Liston and proposed an expedition made up of Loyalists and Indians in the backcountry of the United States, east of the Mississippi and north of the Spanish-American border to reconquer Florida for the British Crown. Chisholm asked for the cooperation of a British naval squadron to assist his forces in taking Mobile and Pensacola. Liston wrote out the plan and submitted it to the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Grenville, in a dispatch on January 25, 1797.<sup>108</sup>

At a meeting with a private doctor named Nicholas Romaine in New York in February 1797, a friend of the British North American land speculator Sir William Pulteney and Henry Dundas, Blount expressed his desire to see Florida and Louisiana in British, rather than Spanish, hands. Blount informed Romaine of Chisholm's planned expedition against the Spanish Floridas and told him that it had the support of an important person in Philadelphia, most likely referring

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<sup>108</sup> Abernethy, *The South in the New Nation*, 174-191.

to Robert Liston. According to Chisholm's testimony, Blount and Romaine sought to enlarge the scope of the conspiracy by recruiting frontiersmen from New York and Pennsylvania who would join up with Mohawk leader Joseph Brant and an Iroquois force to go down the Ohio River to take Spain's New Madrid colony on the Mississippi and then advance to the source of the Red River before moving on with a force to St. Louis and, according to some accounts, even Santa Fe. Meanwhile, another force consisting of frontiersmen from Kentucky and Tennessee would combine with Choctaw Indians and Natchez British Loyalists led by Blount, who would take New Orleans, as another force made up of Cherokees and Creeks with Florida Loyalists led by Chisholm would take Pensacola and all Spanish West and East Florida.<sup>109</sup>

Co-conspirator John Mitchell's account differed in several ways from Chisholm in that he claimed that Canadian regulars and militia would take part in the expedition against New Madrid alongside Brant's Iroquois and Northern frontiersmen, but St. Louis and Santa Fe were not mentioned as objectives. Regardless, such a movement through U.S. territory would have been a clear violation of U.S. neutrality. Also, British commissions would go to the leaders of these expeditions, and British naval forces would assist in the blockade of both Pensacola and the mouth of the Mississippi River. As a result of these operations, Louisiana and the Floridas would come under British rule. To reward U.S. frontiersmen, navigation of the Mississippi would be open to both British and American citizens alike. However, through a chance event, one of Blount's letters detailing the plot fell into the hands of a loyal American who rushed it off to Philadelphia to inform Secretary of War James McHenry and Secretary of State Timothy Pickering. In June, Liston received a letter informing him of the decision of the British government not to support the Blount Conspiracy plot for fear of violating U.S. neutrality.<sup>110</sup> However, it was not only the British

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 174-191.

<sup>110</sup> Abernethy, *The South in the New Nation*, 174-191.



government that threatened to limit the expansion of the United States through the acquisition of Louisiana. This can also be seen in French Minister of Foreign Affairs Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand's argument to the Spanish government in 1798 when he explained:

There are no other means of putting an end to the ambition of the Americans than that of shutting them up within the limits which Nature seems to have traced for them; but Spain is not in a condition to do this great work alone. She cannot, therefore, hasten too quickly to engage the aid of a preponderating Power, yielding to it a small part of her immense domains in order to preserve the rest ... Let the Court of Madrid cede these districts [Louisiana and the Floridas] to France, and from that moment the power of America is bounded by the limit which it may suit the interests and the tranquility of France and Spain to assign her. The French Republic, mistress of these two provinces, will be a wall of brass forever impenetrable to the combined efforts of England and America.<sup>111</sup>

Although King Carlos of Spain delayed in signing the treaty of retrocession, the French Press was still rife with excitement.<sup>112</sup> The *Gazette de France* wrote, "France's acquisition of Louisiana would create an impenetrable barrier to American expansion" and a "counterpoise to the domination of the United States."<sup>113</sup> The rumored retrocession was possible because Spain had long harbored apprehensions about the United States' growing power. Spanish Count and Secretary of State Pedro Pablo Abarca de Bolea Aranda once wrote to the King of Spain:

This Republic has been born, as it were a pygmy; she has needed the help and assistance of no less than two such powerful states as France and Spain, in order to conquer her independence; but a day will come when she will be a giant, a veritable awe-inspiring colossus in those regions; she will forget the favors that she has received; she will only think of her own interest and her own convenience. ... The first step of the new nation will be to seize Florida, so as to dominate the Gulf of Mexico. She will then conquer New Spain and the vast empire, the defence of which will be rendered impossible to us, as we shall not be able to struggle against a powerful nation, established on the same continent ...<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Gary Willis, *Henry Adams and the Making of America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 152-153.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas Fleming, *The Louisiana Purchase*. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 35.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>114</sup> Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana. With City and Topographical Maps of the State, Ancient and Modern. 3d Ed.* (New Orleans: A. Hawkins, 1885. [New York]: [AMS Press], 1972), 3:393-394.

The Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Baron of Carondelet affirmed these predictions as he documented the aggressive expansionism of American settlers, whom he described as “hostile to all subjection, advancing and multiplying in the silence of peace and almost unknown, with a prodigious rapidity, ever since the independence of the United States was recognized. ...<sup>115</sup> And in time they will demand the possession of the rich mines of the interior provinces of the very kingdom of Mexico.”<sup>116</sup> The Spanish Intendant of Louisiana, Martin Navarro, echoed this in a memorial forwarded to the King of Spain. Of the memorial, historian Charles Gayarre wrote:

In this document, the Intendant depicted in vivid colors the dangers which Spain had to apprehend for her American colonies, from the thirteen provinces that had lately become independent and had assumed their rank among the nations of the earth, under the appellation of the United States of America. He dwelt with peculiar emphasis on the ambition and the thirst of conquest which his keen eye could already detect in the breast of the new-born giant, who, as he predicted with remarkable accuracy, would not rest satisfied until he extended his domains across the continent, and bathed his vigorous young limbs in the placid waves of the Pacific. When was there a truer prophet? And how was this dread event, so clearly foreseen, to be prevented? — By severing the Union— by dividing from the Atlantic States the boundless West, where so much power was already slumbering in the lap of wilderness.<sup>117</sup>

Early American historian François-Xavier Martin also wrote of Navarro’s memorial:

In this document, he dwells much on the ambition of the United States, and their thirst for conquest; whose views he states to be an extension of territory to the shores of the Pacific ocean; and suggest the dismemberment of the western country, by means of pensions and the grant of commercial privileges, as the most proper means, in the power of Spain, to arrest the impending danger ... The attempt was therefore strongly recommended, as success would greatly augment the power of Spain, and forever arrest the progress of the United States to the west.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> James Alexander Robertson, and Paul Alliot, *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807: Social, Economic, and Political Conditions of the Territory* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1981), I:297.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 298.

<sup>117</sup> Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, 3:216-217.

<sup>118</sup> François-Xavier Martin, William Wirt Howe, and John Francis Condon, *The History of Louisiana, from the Earliest Period* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1963), 100.

As rumors of the retrocession of Louisiana from Spain to France spread across the Atlantic, President Jefferson wrote, “The cession of Louisiana and the Floridas by Spain to France ... completely reverses all the political relations of the U.S. and will form a new epoch in our political course ... There is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans ... The day that France takes possession of N[ew] Orleans ... From that moment, we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation.”<sup>119</sup> In his Second Inaugural, after the Louisiana Purchase was concluded, Jefferson further noted, “I know that the acquisition of Louisiana has been disapproved by some ... that the enlargement of our territory would endanger its union ... The larger our association the less will it be shaken by local passions; and in any view is it not better that the opposite bank of the Mississippi should be settled by our own brethren and children than by strangers of another family?”<sup>120</sup>

For a time, both Federalists and Democratic Republicans could agree on the necessity of the United States acquiring the Louisiana territory, if not only New Orleans itself, and its benefit to the Union as a whole. However, after the Election of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency in 1800, most Federalists opposed further U.S. expansion because it supposedly threatened to diminish the political power of Federalist strongholds such as New England. With Jefferson at the helm, only a handful of Federalists maintained the former nationalism of their party, thus abandoning the ground of utopian optimism in terms of national expansionism to the Democratic Republicans. Though one notable exception was Thomas Jefferson’s old rival and the former architect of the Federalist Party in the administrations of George Washington and for a time, John Adams; Alexander Hamilton, who wrote in the *New York Evening Post* about Louisiana:

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<sup>119</sup> Fleming, *The Louisiana Purchase*, 38.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Letters and Addresses of Thomas Jefferson* (United States: National Jefferson Society, 1903), 170.

this purchase has been made during the period of Mr. Jefferson's presidency, and, will, doubtless, give eclat to his administration ... On the part of France the short interval of peace had been wasted in repeated and fruitless efforts to subjugate St. Domingo; and those means which were originally destined to the colonization of Louisiana ... To the deadly climate of St. Domingo, and to the courage and obstinate resistance made by its black inhabitants are we indebted for the obstacles which delayed the colonization of Louisiana, till the auspicious moment, when a rupture between England and France gave a new turn to the projects of the latter, and destroyed at once all her schemes as to this favourite object of her ambition ... It was made known to Bonaparte, that among the first objects of England would be the seizure of New-Orleans ... The First Consul could not doubt, that if an English fleet was sent thither, the place must fall without resistance; it was obvious, therefore, that it would be in every shape preferable that it should be placed in the possession of a neutral power; and when, besides, some millions of money, of which he was extremely in want, were offered him, to part with what he could no longer hold ... The real truth is, Bonaparte found himself absolutely compelled by situation, to relinquish his darling plan of colonising [colonizing] the banks of the Mississippi.<sup>121</sup>

Also, John Quincy Adams, who was a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, wrote of the transaction years later, he recalled a conversation that he had:

with Mr. King on that subject, and found his opinions concerning it concurring with my own; and, I understood from him, not differing from those of General Hamilton. We agreed, and lamented that one inevitable consequence of the annexation of Louisiana to the Union would be to diminish the relative weight and influence of the Northern section; that it would aggravate the evil of the slave representation; and enfeebling extension of its line of defence against foreign invasion. But the alternative was, -Louisiana and the mouths of the Mississippi in the possession of France, under Napoleon Bonaparte. The loss of sectional influence, we hoped and believed, would be more than compensated by the extension of national power and security. A fearful cause of war with France was removed. From a formidable and ambitious neighbor, she would be turned, by her altered and steadily operating interests, into a natural ally. Should even these anticipations fail, we considered a severance of the Union as a remedy more desperate than any possible disease.<sup>122</sup>

Several years after the Blount Conspiracy and the U.S. acquisition of Louisiana, Aaron Burr lost his race for the Governorship of New York and began planning what would eventually

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<sup>121</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *The Political Writings of Alexander Hamilton: Volume 2, 1789-1804: Volume II, 1789-1804* (United States: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 563.

<sup>122</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Documents Relating to New-England Federalism* (United States: Little, Brown, and Company, 1905), 148.

become known as the Burr Conspiracy. On May 23, 1804, Burr met secretly with Brigadier General James Wilkinson, the former architect of the old Spanish Association Conspiracy. Nothing has been recorded of this meeting and not much is known about what was discussed, but Wilkinson wrote a follow-up message imploring Burr “to see my maps,” a collection of maps of the Southwestern United States as it existed at the time.<sup>123</sup> In a meeting with another one of his coconspirators, a Scottish mercenary named Charles Williamson, Burr was told of Williamson’s plans to create an army which he called “the Levy” for the purpose of attacking various Spanish possessions in North America. Burr then told Williamson of Wilkinson and his plans regarding the Western United States, as well as New Orleans and the Louisiana territory.<sup>124</sup> Williamson told Burr that he would go to England to try to win over British support for their plan and get promises of a naval squadron, presumably to blockade the mouth of the Mississippi.<sup>125</sup> Before departing, Williamson conferred with the British Minister to the United States Anthony Merry, who afterwards wrote of Aaron Burr’s plans to the British Foreign Secretary Dudley Ryder:

I have just received an offer from Mr. Burr ... to lend his assistance to His Majesty’s Government in any Manner in which they may think it fit to employ him, particularly in endeavouring to effect a Separation of the Western Part of the United States from that which lies between the Atlantick [sic] and the Mountains, in it’s whole Extent.— His Proposition on this and other Subjects will be fully detailed to your Lordship by Col[onel]. Williamson who has been the Bearer of them to me, and who will embark for England in a few Days.<sup>126</sup>

Anthony Merry later noted the following of the former Vice President:

Mr. Burr ... has mentioned to me that the inhabitants of Louisiana seem determined to render themselves independent of the United States and that the execution of their design is only delayed by the difficulty of obtaining previously an assurance of protection and assistance from some foreign power and of concerting and connecting their independence with that of the inhabitants of the Western parts of

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<sup>123</sup> Thomas Fleming, *Duel: Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr and the Future of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 262.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 262.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

the United States, who must always have a command over them by the rivers which communicate with the Mississippi. It is clear that Mr. Burr ... means to endeavor to be the instrument for effecting such a connection. He has told me that the inhabitants of Louisiana, notwithstanding that they are almost all of French or Spanish origin, as well as those of the Western part of the United States, would, for many obvious reasons, prefer having the protection and assistance of Great Britain to the support of France; but that if his Majesty's government should not think proper to listen to his overture, application will be made to that of France ...<sup>127</sup>

Merry also noted Burr "pointed out the great commercial advantage which his Majesty's dominions in general would derive from furnishing almost exclusively (as they might through Canada and New Orleans) the inhabitants of so extensive a territory."<sup>128</sup> Although the Burr Conspiracy has been shrouded in mystery for over two centuries, by examining the words of Burr and his coconspirators, a general outline can be determined. As indicated by a cipher letter from Burr to Wilkinson, Burr's associate, U.S. Naval Officer Commodore Thomas Truxton, would allegedly lay the groundwork for the plot by initiating a mutiny in the U.S. Navy, and from there, he would go to Jamaica to arrange British naval support for a blockade of the mouth of the Mississippi. In the meantime, Burr would go west and sail down the Ohio River, gathering men and boats for his expedition along the way. Burr's army would then descend the Mississippi River and rendezvous with Wilkinson near Natchez, Mississippi, around December 1806. At this time, it would be determined whether to seize Baton Rouge or move on to New Orleans.<sup>129</sup>

Furthermore, according to information received by Secretary of the Orleans Territory John Graham, who questioned Burr's accomplice, the wealthy Western Virginia planter Harman Blennerhassett and his neighbor Alexander Henderson, Burr and his force would capture New Orleans by taking advantage of French and Spanish inhabitants' discontent with U.S. rule. Burr's

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<sup>127</sup> Walter Flavius McCaleb, *The Aaron Burr Conspiracy: And, A New Light on Aaron Burr* (New York: Argosy-Antiquarian, 1966), 21.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>129</sup> Abernethy, *The South in the New Nation*, 280.

men would also seize the U.S. Army arsenal, as well as a French cannon held in the city, rob the city's banks, and then proceed to set up a separatist government under the protection of some European power, either Great Britain or France. With Burr's new government in control of the port of New Orleans and with its access to the Gulf of Mexico threatened, the western states of the Union would be forced to unite with Burr's new empire to retain its privileges. With General Wilkinson and most of the U.S. Army in the South stationed near the border between the United States and New Spain during the so-called "Neutral Ground" Crisis, New Orleans would be vulnerable to Aaron Burr's attack.<sup>130</sup>

According to Judge Thomas "Tommy" Rodney, Chief Justice of the Mississippi Territory, who had been in contact with President Jefferson, it was clear which European power would be Burr's empire's protector. Rodney wrote his son, "The Design of the Conspiracy is said to be to unite Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, The Floridas and part at least of Mexico into an Independent Empire—the Spanish Governors of those Provinces are to act in concert with the Conspirators of our Country to Effect this purpose under the Patronage and Protection of G[reat].B[ritain]. And that they Expect a British Fleet to aid them which is to arrive at the mouth of the Misisipi [Mississippi] within two or three months at Farthest— Col: Burr, Genl. Wilkinson and D[aniel]. Clarke— are said to be the Leaders—."<sup>131</sup> One of Aaron Burr's alleged accomplices and financial backers, New Jersey Federalist Senator Jonathan Dayton, told Spanish Minister to the United States Carlos Martínez de Irujo y Tacón, 1st Marquess of Casa Irujo the following:

Toward the close of the last session and the end of March, Colonel Burr had various secret conferences with the English minister, to whom he proposed a plan not only for taking the Floridas, but also for effecting the separation and independence of the States of the West, -a part of this plan being that the Floridas shall be associated in this new federative republic; England to receive as a reward for her services a decisive preference in matters of commerce and navigation, these advantages to be

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 287-288.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *The Burr Conspiracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 202.

secured by means of a treaty which will be made upon the recognition by England of this new republic. This plan met the approbation of the English minister who recommended it to his court.<sup>132</sup>

However, when British Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger died and the American-friendly Charles James Fox became the new British Foreign Secretary, Burr's hopes for British assistance died, too. According to Dayton, on the subject of Burr's intrigue, "[The] project was well received by the English Cabinet; more particularly by Mr. Dundas, or Lord Melville," and Dayton claimed that funding, arms, munitions, and naval support were being prepared "in order to effect the conquest of the Floridas and the emancipation of the Western States. ..." <sup>133</sup> As British Minister Anthony Merry later wrote of Aaron Burr:

He observed, what I readily conceive may happen, that when once Louisiana and the Western country became independent, the Eastern States will separate themselves immediately from the Southern; and that thus the immense power which is now risen up with so much rapidity in the western hemisphere will, by such a division, be rendered at once formidable; and that no moment could be so proper for the undertaking in question and particularly for Great Britain to take part in it at the present, when she has the command of the ocean and France is prevented from showing that interference in the business which she would otherwise certainly exercise.<sup>134</sup>

As to this prospect, Louis Marie Turreau, the French Ambassador to the United States, though concerned about the potential loss of Spain's American colonies, commented on the possible dissolution of the United States, "The project of effecting a separation between the Western and Atlantic States marches abreast with this one. ... This division of the confederated States appears to me inevitable, and perhaps less remote than is commonly supposed; but would this event, which England seems to favor, be really contrary to the interests of France?" <sup>135</sup> On the subject of the breakup of the Union, Spanish Minister to the United States Carlos Martínez de Irujo

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<sup>132</sup> McCaleb, *The Aaron Burr Conspiracy*, 55.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 60.



or Yrujo similarly commented from the Spanish perspective, adding that “Spain would view with extreme satisfaction the dismemberment of the colossal power which was growing up at the very gates of her most precious and important colonies.”<sup>136</sup> However, the success of Burr’s plan relied on one man in particular: Brigadier General James Wilkinson.

While in New Orleans, shortly after the transfer of Louisiana’s sovereignty to the United States, James Wilkinson took up again with his former Spanish handlers and sought to turn the situation to his favor. As the highest-ranking officer in the U.S. Army, Wilkinson could portray himself as a national hero by thwarting Burr’s plans, and as Agent 13 of the Spanish Empire, he could earn his pension with his Spanish handlers and ensure a hefty retainer for as long as the two nations shared a common border. Wilkinson likely hoped to revive the old Spanish Association Conspiracy from his days in Kentucky. However, Burr’s attempt to merge the old Spanish Conspiracy with a more recent “Mexican Association” plot to deprive Spain of Mexico, a plan which had been favored by Great Britain, clashed with Wilkinson’s loyalty to Spain. Therefore, Wilkinson would not dare attempt Burr’s scheme unless he could be assured of its success, which would require the active support of Great Britain or some other major power.

When war between Spain and the U.S. threatened during the “Neutral Ground Crisis,” which was a dispute over the border between Spanish Texas and American Louisiana, Wilkinson saw the utility of having a readily available force of soldiers in the form of Burr’s private army to use against Spain if war broke out. However, when he realized that the U.S. would not go to war with Spain and that no foreign assistance would be forthcoming to assist Burr’s conspiracy, Wilkinson decided to strike a truce with Spanish forces, fearing that he had nothing to gain by backing a losing cause and too much to lose with his U.S. Army salary and Agent 13 Spanish

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

pension at stake. Perhaps no one summed up Wilkinson's betrayal of Burr better than Yrujo: "According to appearances, Spain has saved the United States from the separation of the Union which menaced them. This would have taken place if Wilkinson had entered cordially into the views of Burr—which was to be expected, because Wilkinson detests this [U.S.] government, and the separation of the Western States has been his favorite plan. The evil has come from the foolish and pertinacious perseverance with which Burr has persisted in carrying out a wild project against Mexico. Wilkinson is entirely devoted to us. He enjoys a considerable pension from the King."<sup>137</sup>

While the Burr trial was underway, another British insult to American honor occurred with the Chesapeake Affair, when the crew of the *U.S.S Chesapeake* resisted attempts by the *HMS Leopard* to board their ship so that the British might be able to search for deserters from the Royal Navy. In response to this outrage, President Jefferson, faced with the poor state of U.S. preparedness for war, feebly resorted to placing an embargo against Great Britain. The resulting Embargo Act of 1807 was fiercely resisted in commercial and mercantile New England, which relied heavily on trade with Great Britain. As the effects of the Embargo Act began to be felt, many New Englanders began flouting the embargo by carrying on an illicit trade with the British through Canada. In response, Jefferson responded with a supplementary act to the embargo itself, often referred to as the Enforcement or Force Act, which authorized the president to enforce the embargo, even through coercive means if necessary.

The Essex Junto Federalists, which the British referred to as "Colonel Pickering's Party" [referring to former Secretary of State Timothy Pickering] represented by U.S. Senator from Massachusetts Josiah Quincy in Congress, appealed to the various state legislatures of New England in an act that John Quincy Adams called "the first instance in the history of the

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<sup>137</sup> Abernethy, *The Burr Conspiracy*, 198.

Constitution where a Senator of the United States had made such an appeal to the government of a state by whose legislature he had been chosen. Its principle was itself a dissolution of the Union, - a transfer of the action of the national government to that of the separate state upon objects exclusively delegated to the authority of the Union.”<sup>138</sup> However, in the aftermath of the Chesapeake Affair, the British government dispatched special envoy George H. Rose to reach a settlement with the United States to diffuse the Anglo-American crisis.

While Rose was in Washington, New England Federalist Timothy Pickering reached out to assure him that “our best citizens consider the interests of the United States interwoven with those of Great Britain, and that our safety depends on hers. Men, thus enlightened, could they but control the measures of their own government, would give them a direction mutually beneficial to the two nations.”<sup>139</sup> On January 2, 1809, outgoing President Thomas Jefferson wrote to Virginia representative John Randolph, stating:

The Monarchists of the North have been able to make so successful use of the embargo as to have federalized the South Eastern States and endangered New York, and they now mean to organize their opposition by the regular powers of their State Governments. The Massachusetts legislature which is to meet in the middle of the month, it is believed, will call a convention to consider the question of a separation of the Union, and to propose it to the whole country east of the North [Hudson] River, and they are assured the protection of Great Britain ... We must save the Union! But our difficulties do not end here; for if war takes place with England we have no security that she will not offer neutrality and commerce to New England and that the latter will not accept it.<sup>140</sup>

Realizing that the Embargo Act had to be repealed to avert a civil war, Jefferson called on Congress to repeal and replace it, which they did with the Non-Intercourse Act of March 7, 1809. However, in the last days of the Embargo Act, the Governor General of British North America,

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<sup>138</sup> Charles Raymond Brown, *The Northern Confederacy According to the Plans of the “Essex Junto”, 1796-1814* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), 57.

<sup>139</sup> Brown, *The Northern Confederacy*, 58.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 66-67.

Sir James Henry Craig, entered negotiations with a former U.S. Army officer and New England merchant by the name of John Henry, who was then residing in Montreal. The nature of these negotiations can be found in Craig's "secret and confidential" instructions to Henry. Craig wrote:

The principal object which I commend to your attention is the endeavor to obtain the most accurate information of the true state of affairs in that part of the Union [New England], which, from its wealth, the number of inhabitants, and the known intelligence and ability of several of its leading men, must naturally possess a very considerable influence over, and will indeed, probably lead, the other Eastern States of America, in the part that they may take at this important crisis ... if the Federalists of the Eastern States should be successful in obtaining that decided influence which may enable them to direct public opinion, it is not impossible that, rather than submit to a continuance of the difficulties and distress to which they are now subject, they will exert that influence to bring about a separation from the general Union ... in such an event, they would look up to England for assistance, or be disposed to enter into a connection with us.<sup>141</sup>

Feeling the pulse of New Englanders in his journey through that section of the Union, Henry reported to Craig after the repeal of the Embargo Act, expressing disappointment and writing, "I lament the repeal of the embargo, because it was calculated to accelerate the progress of these states toward a revolution that would put an end to the only Republic that remains to prove that a Government founded on political equality cannot exist in a season of trial and difficulty, or is calculated to insure either security or happiness to a people."<sup>142</sup> Confessing the true nature of his mission in New England, Henry wrote to Lord Liverpool, "Soon after the Chesapeake affair, when the Governor General of British America [James Henry Craig] had reason to believe that the two countries would be involved in war, and had submitted to His Majesty's Minister's the arrangements of the English party in the United States for an effective resistance to the general Government, which would probably terminate in a separation of the Northern States from the general Government, he applied to the undersigned to undertake a mission to Boston."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 68-69.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 73.

Following his rejection by the British government, a disaffected Henry turned to Washington, exposing the plot of 1809 to Secretary of State James Monroe in February 1812. The papers were purchased by the United States government and were used to full effect by the Madison Administration in their attempt to make the case for a second war with Great Britain. President James Madison then revealed the plot to Congress in March 1812, declaring, “These documents furnish proof to the plot for resisting the laws, destroying the Union, and forming a political connection between the Eastern States and Great Britain.”<sup>144</sup> However, although nothing ever came of the Henry Plot, as Madison later concluded during the Hartford Convention years later, “Without foreign cooperation, revolt & separation will hardly be risked; and what the effect of so profligate an experiment may be first on deluded partizans.”<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, the Henry Plot represented a real threat to the integrity of the Union and would have established a British ally in a strategic position vis-à-vis the United States. After the repeal of the Embargo Act, the conspiracy of the Northern Confederacy only lay dormant, however, with the conspirators biding their time until another opportunity presented itself.

With Madison’s revelation of the Henry Letters to Congress, yet another reason to see the British Empire expelled from North America entered the debate over a potential war with Great Britain. U.S. representative from Kentucky John Desha wrote of the Henry Letters, “Can any American, after this discovery ... doubt the propriety of ousting the British from the continent, or hesitate in contributing his proportionable part of the expense which will necessary be incurred in the laudable undertaking?”<sup>146</sup> This position and its rationale even gained the support of former

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>145</sup> “From James Madison to Wilson Cary Nicholas, 26 November 1814,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 8, July 1814–18 February 1815 and supplement December 1779–18 April 1814*, eds. Angela Kreider, J. C. A. Stagg, Mary Parke Johnson, Anne Mandeville Colony, and Katherine E. Harbury (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 401–402.

<sup>146</sup> Julius Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (The MacMillan Company, 1949), 54.

president Thomas Jefferson, who wrote, “Upon the whole, I have known no war entered into under more favorable auspices ... Our present enemy will have the sea to herself ... while we shall be equally predominant at land, and shall strip her of all her possessions on this continent ... The infamous intrigues of Great Britain to destroy our government (of which Henry’s is but one sample), and with the Indians to tomahawk our women and children, prove that the cession of Canada, their fulcrum for these Machiavellian levers must be a *sine qua non* [indispensable condition] at a treaty of peace.”<sup>147</sup>

However, Jefferson mistakenly believed that taking Canada from the British would be easy, writing early in the war, “The acquisition of Canada this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching, and will give us experience for the attack of Halifax the next, and the final expulsion of England from the American continent.”<sup>148</sup> Despite Jefferson’s ill-placed optimism, his comments demonstrate the strategic thinking behind U.S. expansionism, whether it is termed Continentalism or Manifest Destiny. Around the same time as the revelation of the Henry Plot, the admission of Louisiana as a new state of the Union threatened to provide another catalyst for the secession of New England. The “Essex Junto” Federalists of New England continued to oppose western expansion because they saw it as challenging their region’s historical influence and political power within the Union. On January 14, 1811, Josiah Quincy warned, “If this bill passes [to admit Louisiana] the bonds of this Union are virtually dissolved; that the states which compose it are free from their original obligations, and that, as it will then be the right of all, so it will be the duty of some, definitely to prepare for a separation, -amicably if they can,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

violently if they must.”<sup>149</sup> In a letter to Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry over the admission of Louisiana to the Union in the early months of 1811, John Quincy Adams warned that:

Massachusetts federal politicians have got to talk so openly and with such seeming indifference ... for a dissolution of the Union, they are so valiant in their threats of resistance to the laws ... in the prospects of a war with America, which most of the British statesmen now at the helm consider as in the line of wise policy ... [they] calculate boldly and without disguise or concealment upon the co-operation of the Massachusetts federalists. The Massachusetts election, therefore is a touchstone of a national principle, and upon its issue may depend the question of peace and war between the United States and England. However hostile a British ministry may feel against us, they will never venture upon it until they can depend upon an active co-operation with them, within the United States. It is from the New England federalists alone that they can expect it ... I have known now more than seven years the projects of the Boston faction against the union. They have ever since that time at least, been seeking a pretext and an occasion for avowing the principle ... It is my attachment to the union which makes me especially anxious for the result of the Massachusetts elections. They are a contest of life and death for the union. If that party are not ultimately put down in Massachusetts ... the union is gone. Instead of a nation co-extensive with the North American continent, destined by God and nature to be the most populous and most powerful people ever combined under one social compact, we shall have an endless multitude of little insignificant clans and tribes, at eternal war with one another, for a rock or a fish pond, the sport and fable of European masters and oppressors.<sup>150</sup>

In a conversation with his father John Adams later that same year, John Quincy Adams addressed these schemes in connection with the “problem of neighborhood”:

Nor could I possibly discover any Interest, which would not suffer more by the natural and inevitable collisions, of independent and disconnected bordering Nations, having no common deliberative principle of association, than it could while they were united under one and the same system of Legislation ... As [to] the conception of dividing the Union ... I therefore believed that it would ultimately prove unsuccessful, though probably not untill after the experiment of a *civil War*—What and whom a Civil War might in its progress bring forth, I could not foresee ... to feed between them a perpetual state of future War between the different Sections that now compose the Union—It was possible that instead of two such wild beasts, the Nation when once split up might produce an indefinite number of them, and monarchies and oligarchies, and democracies might arise ... and the more they multiplied the more materials would they furnish for future War ... grounded on the assumed principle of dividing the Union, I did see ... at the

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<sup>149</sup> Brown, *The Northern Confederacy*, 78.

<sup>150</sup> “To John Adams from John Quincy Adams, 30 June 1811,” in *Writings of John Quincy Adams: Volume 4*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (United States: Macmillan, 1914), 127-128.

expenditure of blood and treasure, and freedom and happiness to the great mass of the Nation in all its parts, from which the hand of a patricide would shrink with compunction ... The picture of border Wars, is ... what awaits us if we ever yield to that senseless and stupid call for division, which I have so long heard muttered in my own neighbourhood ... In short *Union* is to me what the *Balance* is to you; and as without this there can be no good Government among mankind in any state, so without that, there can be no good Government among the People of North-America in the state in which God has been pleased to place them.<sup>151</sup>

Also, John Quincy Adams summarized his feelings in another place:

The whole Continent of North America appears to me destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one Nation—speaking one language—professing one general System of religious and political principles and accustomed to one general tenor of social usages and customs—For the Common happiness of them all, for their Peace and Prosperity, I believe it indispensable that they should be associated in one federal Union—The relative proportion of power between the different members of this Union, is as insignificant as the same question between North-End and South-End—that is totally subordinate to the all important and all absorbing principle of Union— I have no apprehension that the People of Massachusetts will ever be trampled upon, by the power of the Union, though their relative proportion of that power, should become as small as that of Rhode-Island or Delaware is now, in comparison to the whole—But let that federal Union, which secures to each member the sympathies of the same body be dissolved, and every part will in turn inevitably be trampled upon by the others, and America like the rest of the Earth will sink into a common field of battle for Conquerors and Tyrants.<sup>152</sup>

Therefore, some three decades before John O’Sullivan first coined the phrase “Manifest Destiny,” John Quincy Adams articulated the nearly identical position of Continentalism. The breakdown in Anglo-American relations after the Chesapeake Affair also reached in the western regions, where the peace established between white settlers and American Indians in the Treaty of Greenville negotiated by General Wayne after the Battle of Fallen Timbers and ending the Northwest Indian War was threatening to unravel. When the Shawnee leader known as the Prophet began to stir up the Northwestern Indian tribes, Governor William Henry Harrison of the Indiana

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<sup>151</sup> “To John Adams from John Quincy Adams, 31 October 1811,” in *Writings of John Quincy Adams*. (United States: Macmillan, 1913), 264-267.

<sup>152</sup> “To John Adams from John Quincy Adams, 31 August 1811,” in *Writings of John Quincy Adams*. (United States: Macmillan, 1913), 209.



Territory saw the hand of Great Britain moving behind the renewed commotion in the Old Northwest. Amid the Anglo-American war scare of 1807–1808, Harrison stated his belief that “at this moment ... I sincerely believe [British] agents are organizing a combination amongst the Indians within our limits, for the purpose of assassination and murder.”<sup>153</sup> Unknown to Harrison at the time, British officials in Canada were actively seeking an alliance with Tecumseh during the Chesapeake Crisis. However, Tecumseh declined the British offer because he was still hoping to avoid a war with the U.S., but would change his mind after the Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809.<sup>154</sup>

By this time, however, the British desperately attempted to restrain the Northwestern Indian tribes because the Embargo Act of 1807 had just been repealed.<sup>155</sup> Still, after the U.S. victory over the Prophet at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811 and the worsening relations between the United States and Great Britain that followed, the aims of the British and Northwestern Indians finally aligned. Even before the declaration of war, western newspapers believed there was a connection between the depredations of the Northwest Indians against the western settlers. In his book, *The Expansionists of the War of 1812*, Julius Pratt observed, “The *Fredonian* saw no hope of peace and security from the savages until ‘another WAYNE shall force them to become our friends, and another WASHINGTON exterminates from the Canadas, the base remains of royal perfidy.’ The British ‘must be for ever driven from all their possessions in America.’”<sup>156</sup> Pratt continued, quoting the *Kentucky Gazette*, which wrote, “The invasion of Canada, now more than ever necessary, as presenting whilst in the possession of Britain, a never-failing source of Indian

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<sup>153</sup> Robert M. Owens, *Mr. Jefferson’s Hammer: William Henry Harrison and the Origins of American Indian Policy* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 2007), xiv.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 139-140.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 208-211.

<sup>156</sup> Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812*, 56.

hostility Until those civilized allies of our Savage neighbors, are expelled from our continent, we must expect the frequent recurrence of the late scenes on the Wabash.”<sup>157</sup>

Still, after the disastrous U.S. invasion of Canada in the early years of the War of 1812 and the abandonment of most of the Michigan Territory to British control, various members of the British government attempted to revive the idea of a neutral Indian barrier state. Notably, British reasoning behind the neutral Indian barrier state idea was that a buffer country was needed to protect British North America from future American expansionism and U.S. military invasions. As British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Robert Stewart, Viscount of Castlereagh, stated, “The best prospect of future Peace appears to be that the two Governments should regard the Indian Territory as a useful Barrier between both States.”<sup>158</sup> British Under Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Henry Goulburn spoke of this proposed American Indian state as a “definitively marked out ... permanent barrier between the dominions of Great Britain and the United States” and called it a *sine qua non* (indispensable condition) for peace between the two countries.<sup>159</sup>

When asked about the proposed border between the United States and this potential American Indian state, the British suggested the line established by the Treaty of Greenville in 1795. British negotiators told their American counterparts that they could keep southern Ohio (which had already become a State of the Union in 1802), but it would have to cede the Northern part of Ohio to the new Indian state. When U.S. negotiator and former Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin asked what would become of the Americans who had already settled beyond the Greenville line, British diplomat William Adams responded, “They must shift for themselves.”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Bradford Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams: England and the United States 1812-1823* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), 69.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 76-77.

No intelligent American statesmen entertained the fantasy that such an American Indian state would be truly “neutral” in name and deed but rather believed it would become an appendage of the British Empire in North America. In 1814, while reflecting upon the various British demands, Gallatin confided to James Monroe, “It is now evident that Great Britain intends to strengthen and aggrandize herself in North America.”<sup>161</sup>

Astutely, John Quincy Adams interpreted the British motives for establishing a neutral Indian barrier state as a blatant attempt to curb American expansion, or as Adams explained:

The strongest feature in the general complexion of his discourse, was the inflexible adherence to the proposed Indian Boundary line. But the pretext upon which this proposition had in the first instance been placed, the pacification with the Indians, and their future security was almost abandoned . . . The security of Canada was now substituted as the prominent motive. But the great and real one, though not of a nature ever to be acknowledged, was occasionally discernable through all its veils. This was no other than a profound and ranking Jealousy at the rapid increase of population and of settlements in the United States; an impotent longing to thwart their progress and to stunt their growth. With this temper prevailing in the British Councils.<sup>162</sup>

Also, John Quincy Adams wrote of the neutral Indian barrier state idea to Secretary of State James Monroe, noting that:

If Great Britain meant to preclude forever the people of the United States from settling and cultivating those territories, she must not think of doing it by a treaty. She must formally undertake and accomplish their utter extermination. If the government of the United States should ever submit to such a stipulation . . . all its force, and all that of Britain combined with it, would not suffice to carry it long into execution. It was opposing a feather to a torrent. The population of the United States in 1810 passed seven millions. At this hour it undoubtedly passed eight. As it continued to increase in such proportions, was it in human experience or in human power to check its progress by a bond of paper, purporting to exclude posterity from the natural means of subsistence which they would derive from the cultivation of the soil? Such a treaty, instead of closing old sources of dissension, would only open new ones. A war thus finished would immediately be followed by another, and Great Britain would ultimately find that she must substitute the project of

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<sup>161</sup> Williams, *The Northwest Ordinance*, 29.

<sup>162</sup> Andrew C. McLaughlin, *Report on the Diplomatic Archives of the Department of State, 1789-1840* (Washington, D.C.: Published by the Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1906), 49.

extermination the whole American people, to that of opposing against them her barrier of savages.<sup>163</sup>

Although the outcome of the last British campaign of the War of 1812 against New Orleans occurred after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed, it was ensured by the bold actions of then Brevet General Andrew Jackson in his victory over the “Red Stick” Creeks at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend on March 27, 1814, and the Battle of Pensacola between November 7th and 9th later that year. Jackson had long suspected the British of encouraging the warmongering “Red Stick” movement among the Creeks, writing in 1814, “The British are using every art to draw them to their standard, and it is only by feeding them under existing circumstances that we can calculate on a continuation of their friendship. where the carcass is, there will the fowls be gathered together.”<sup>164</sup> Jackson warned Spanish authorities that “a murderous rebellious barbarous Banditti who have not only embrued [imbued] their hands in the in[n]ocent blood of our helpless women and children ... excited to these horrid deeds of butchery by an open enemy great Britain, and supplied with the means of carrying on the war by his Catholic Majesty ... having received information that the refugee Banditti from the creek nation now in Pensacola are drawing rations from your government and under the drill of a British officer preparing with your knowledge (if not consent) for resuming their acts of barbarity against the citizens of Our frontier.”<sup>165</sup>

For these reasons Jackson decided to attack the British in Spanish West Florida, where they were illegally staging their forces in a neutral nation’s territory, notifying his superiors, “I have been induced to determine to drive the British and Indian force from that place, possess myself of the [Fort] Barancas, (which I expect to find occupied by the former) and all other points that may

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<sup>163</sup> John Quincy Adams and Worthington Chauncey Ford, *The Writings of John Quincy Adams Vol. V* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 115-116.

<sup>164</sup> Andrew Jackson, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Vol. III, 1814-1815*, eds. Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, Sharon Macpherson, and John H. Reinbold (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 102.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

be calculated to prevent a British fleet from entering Pensacola Bay. This will put an end to the Indian war in the South, as it will cut off all foreign influence.”<sup>166</sup> Also, by securing the areas to the northeast and east of New Orleans, Jackson forced the British to attempt a strategically difficult ascent up the Mississippi River and against the Crescent City. Although the resulting Battle of New Orleans of January 8, 1815, is remembered today as a historic and decisive defeat of British arms, what is not as well known are the objectives of an anticipated British victory in Louisiana and Florida. On that subject, historian J. Fred Rippy noted in his book *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain Over Latin America (1808-1830)*, “An important project of the war with the United States was an attack upon its southern coast with the view of restoring not only the Floridas but also Louisiana to Spain. No movement of the contest proved more Quixotic and yet few objects were pursued with more tenacity.”<sup>167</sup>

When British Colonel Edward Nicolls landed at Pensacola and occupied the Spanish position at Fort Barrancas, he claimed that he would be followed by a great force of British arms and that the Gulf Coast would soon be in British hands. Nicolls also called upon the people of Louisiana and Kentucky to support British forces, promising Spanish officials that all of Louisiana would eventually be returned to Spain. Nicolls’ call for support from the Western States of the Union no doubt raised the specter among many American leaders about a possible British resurrection of the old “Spanish Conspiracy” under British and possibly Spanish sponsorship.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, Royal Navy Admiral Alexander Cochrane also commented on the main British objectives behind the Southern campaign in a report that he forwarded to the War Office stating, “I have not a doubt in my mind that three thousand British troops landed at Mobile where they

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>167</sup> J. Fred Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain Over Latin America (1808-1830)* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc, 1964), 45.

<sup>168</sup> Abernethy, *The South in the New Nation*, 374-376.

would be joined by all the Indians, with the disaffected French and Spaniards, would drive the Americans out of Louisiana and the Floridas.”<sup>169</sup>

In addition to sending British agents Captain H. Pigot and Captain George Woodbine among the Creek Indians to establish alliances and train their warriors, Admiral Cochrane also equipped Nicolls with pamphlets that encouraged slaves to desert their plantations and assist the British invasion of Louisiana with the promise of land in the West Indies and protection from their former masters. Cochrane also issued the proclamation titled “A British Appeal to American Slaves” on April 2, 1814, granting freedom to escaped slaves to “bring the consequences of the War home to their own Doors.”<sup>170</sup> Pigot himself was convinced that Georgia’s slaves would rally to the British cause.<sup>171</sup> The fear of a slave rebellion combined with an Indian uprising was arguably more pronounced in Georgia and the Gulf Coast than anywhere else in the United States. Georgia Governor Peter Early lamented to General David Blackshear that Georgia faced “insurrection on one side, and Indian massacre on the other.”<sup>172</sup> As illustrated in Alan Taylor’s book *The Internal Enemy*, the stoking of fear amongst Southern slaveholders by British officials was a strategy employed by Great Britain to draw U.S. forces away from the front in Canada and elsewhere so that Americans in the Southern States would have to defend against a potential slave rebellion.<sup>173</sup>

Finally, the relinquishment of any part of the Floridas seized by the United States prior to and during war, as well as the retrocession of Louisiana to their ally Spain, was indeed a goal of the British negotiators. With Napoleon seemingly vanquished and Spain now an ally of Great Britain, British officials recanted their original support of the United States’ acquisition of the

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<sup>169</sup> Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain*, 46.

<sup>170</sup> Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772 -1832* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 211.

<sup>171</sup> Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain*, 45-46.

<sup>172</sup> Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 328.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 177-178.

Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, noting that “the conditions under which France had acquired Louisiana from Spain were not communicated; the refusal of Spain to consent to its alienation was not known; the protest of her ambassador had not been made; and many other circumstances attending the transaction ... were, as there is good reason to believe, industriously concealed.”<sup>174</sup> The British condemnation of the piecemeal U.S. acquisition of Florida from Spain was more scathing, commenting on the “hostile seizure of a great part of the Floridas” done “under the most frivolous pretenses” and “the occasion and circumstances under which that unwarrantable act of aggression took place have given rise throughout Europe to but one sentiment.”<sup>175</sup>

In response, U.S. negotiators refused to engage in any discussion with British officials over the legitimacy of the American acquisitions from France, Spain, or any other third party. In addition to the establishment of a neutral Indian barrier state in the Old Northwest Territory, the British also wanted Louisiana and West Florida to revert back to Spain, and as a military strategy, they even hinted at reopening the long dormant separatist movement among Americans west of the Allegheny Mountains. With these objectives coupled with British hopes of a separate peace with New England, which would be tantamount to that region’s secession from the United States, it seems as if the wildest dreams of British officials was nothing less than the end of American expansion and eventual dissolution of the Union. Furthermore, the traditional American fears of “encirclement” and an unfavorable “balance of power” in North America, as well as the issues related to the “problem of neighborhood” raised by the threatened secession of New England or the western states of the Union, were on full display during the negotiations to end the war. The suspicion that such a deliberate British policy existed would only continue to grow in the minds of American statesmen after the conclusion of the War of 1812.

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<sup>174</sup> Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain*, 53.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

### Chapter 3: Continentalism and the Origins of the Monroe Doctrine

In the years after the War of 1812, American policymakers had to contend with a variety of crises that threatened to undermine the stability of the Union. Discontent over the Panic of 1819, the Marbury vs. Madison decision of the Supreme Court, sectionalist rivalry over the admission of Missouri to the United States, and the ongoing collapse of the Spanish-American Empire on the very doorstep of the American Union all contributed to the evolution of a national security strategy which included the Monroe Doctrine, and was intimately connected to the idea behind Manifest Destiny. However, the factors that came together to give birth to the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 had been seeded well before the War of 1812, and Thomas Jefferson, who is sometimes understood as indifferent to the idea of an extensive national republic and, at times, supportive of the idea of multiple confederacies living side by side on the North American continent, by the time the war broke out, had become an ardent nationalist and expansionist. In a letter to his successor James Madison, Jefferson even foreshadowed Manifest Destiny:

As to [Napoleon] Bonaparte ... he ought the more to conciliate our good will, as we can be such an obstacle to the new career opening on him in the Spanish colonies. that he would give us the Floridas to withhold intercourse with the residue of those colonies cannot be doubted. but that is no price; because they are ours in the first moment of the first war, & until a war they are of no particular necessity to us. but, altho[ugh] with difficulty, he will consent to our receiving Cuba into our union to prevent our aid to Mexico & the other provinces. that would be a price, & I would immediately erect a column on the Southernmost limit of Cuba & inscribe on it a *Ne plus ultra* [Jefferson likely meant *Non terrae plus ultra* "No land further beyond"] as to us in that direction. we should then have only to include the North [Canada] in our confederacy, which would be of course in the first war, and we should have such an empire for liberty as she has never surveyed since the creation: & I am persuaded no constitution was ever before so well calculated as ours for extensive empire & self-government ... it will be objected to our receiving Cuba, that no limit can then be drawn for our future acquisitions. Cuba can be defended



by us without a navy, and this develops the principle which ought to limit our views. nothing should ever be accepted which would require a navy to defend it.<sup>1</sup>

However, with French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's decision to install his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne in 1808, Jeffersonian Republicans had second thoughts about conciliating Napoleonic France in the New World, hence initiating a drastic reevaluation of U.S. policy toward Spain's American colonies after they revolted against Napoleonic rule from Iberia. This new U.S. approach to Spanish America was called Jefferson's "Large Policy" by historian Arthur Whitaker in his book *The United States and the Independence of Latin America, 1800-1830*. Jefferson's "Large Policy" was intimately connected with American fears that Spanish America might fall under British or French influence. Whitaker traced the origins of Jefferson's "Large Policy" to a memorandum endorsed by the Jefferson Cabinet and dated October 22, 1808, when it was determined that the sentiments of the United States government should be made known to influential leaders in Cuba and Mexico. The memo explained the following to the Spanish-American leaders:

If you remain under the dominion of the kingdom and family of Spain, we are contented; but we should be extremely unwilling to see you pass under the dominion or ascendancy of France or England. In the latter cases should you choose to declare independence, we cannot now commit ourselves by saying we would make common cause with you but must reserve ourselves to act to the then existing circumstances, but in our proceedings we shall be influenced by friendship to you, by a firm belief that our interests are intimately connected, and by the strongest repugnance to see you under subordination to either France or England, either politically or commercially.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, although James Madison has usually been designated as the originator of the "No-Transfer" strategic doctrine of United States foreign policy, Thomas Jefferson may have a

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<sup>1</sup> "Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, April 27, 1809," in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Vol. 1, 4 March 1809 to 15 November 1809*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 168–170.

<sup>2</sup> Logan, *No Transfer*, 106.

strong claim to being the godfather of that concept. Meanwhile, the question of the true boundaries of Louisiana led to a further discussion over whether the U.S. should just seize what they believed to be a part of the territory included in the Louisiana Purchase, including East and West Florida.

As early as 1803, James Madison wrote to James Monroe that Spanish East and West Florida were:

separated from her other territories on this continent by New Orleans, the Mississippi, and the whole of western Louisiana, are now of less value to her than ever, while to the United States they retain the peculiar importance derived from their position and their relations to us thro[ugh] the navigable rivers running from the United States into the Gulph of Mexico. In the hands of Spain they must ever be a dead expense in time of peace, indefensible in time of war, and at all times a source of irritation and ill blood with the United States. The Spanish Government must understand in fact that the United States can never consider the amicable relations between Spain and them as definitively and permanently secured without an arrangement on this subject.<sup>3</sup>

In 1805, U.S. Minister to Spain Charles Pinckney and U.S. Minister to the United Kingdom James Monroe wrote to Secretary of State James Madison, commenting on the disposition of Florida and Louisiana during the Napoleonic Wars:

We are therefore of opinion that it will be best to adopt the latter course, to take possession of both the Floridas; and of the whole country west of the Mississippi to the Rio Bravo [Rio Grande]; unless it should be thought better to rest at the Collorado; tho' we think the broader the ground taken the better ... On that ground we might negotiate. The refusal to pay for the suppression of the deposit, and for Spanish spoliations would justify taking possession of East Florida. The refusal to compromise the affair of the western limits, of French spoliations and West Florida, gives us a fair right at least to take what belongs to us ... The destiny of the new World is in our hands, it is so considered by Europe, and in marking any limits to our course, in such a movement, it should appear to proceed in a consciousness of that fact, from a spirit of moderation, of justice, and love of peace, not from the dread of any power, and in any view of the consequences. Such a course of proceeding we think more likely to succeed than any other; and should it succeed it will not fail to prduce [sic] its effect in our relation with all the possessions of European powers in our quarter.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "From James Madison to James Monroe, July 29, 1803," in *The Papers of James Madison, Secretary of State Series, Vol. 5, 16 May–31 October 1803*, eds. David B. Mattern, J. C. A. Stagg, Ellen J. Barber, Anne Mandeville Colony, and Bradley J. Daigle (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 240–245.

<sup>4</sup> "To James Madison from Charles Pinckney and James Monroe, May 25, 1805," in *The Papers of James Madison, Secretary of State Series, Vol. 9, 1 February 1805–30 June 1805*, eds. Mary A. Hackett, J. C. A. Stagg, Mary Parke

In addition, in 1807, in the wake of the Burr Conspiracy, President Jefferson thought of punishing Spain or Great Britain for their suspected intrigues with former Vice President Aaron Burr, writing to Madison that:

as soon as we have all the proofs of the Western intrigues let us make a remonstrance and demand of satisfaction, and, if Congress approves, we may in the same instant make reprisals on the Floridas, until satisfaction for that and for spoiliations and until a settle[en]t. of boundary. I had rather have war against Spain than not, if we go to war against England. our Southern defensive force can take the Floridas, volunteers for a Mexican army will flock to our standard, and rich pabulum will be offered to our privateers in the plunder of their commerce and coasts. probably Cuba would add itself to our confederation.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, Jefferson considered using the Burr Conspiracy as a pretext for launching an invasion of coveted and strategic Spanish territories. However, at the time, Jefferson did not fully appreciate that Burr's desire for Spanish territory would have made both the U.S. and Spain the potential victims of his intrigues. Still, responding to an offer by Napoleon in 1808 to use his influence to help the United States acquire the Floridas if the Americans joined France in a war against Great Britain, Secretary of State James Madison wrote the following to General John Armstrong in Paris:

The United States having chosen as the basis of their policy a fair and sincere neutrality among the contending powers, they are disposed to adhere to it as long as their essential interests will permit; and are more especially disinclined to become a party to the complicated and general warfare which agitates another quarter of the Globe, for the purpose of obtaining a separate and particular object, however interesting to them. It may be intimated at the same time, that in the event of such a crisis as will demand from the United States a precautionary occupation of the Floridas against the hostile designs of Great Britain it will be recollected with satisfaction that the measure had been contemplated with approbation by His Imperial Majesty [Napoleon I].<sup>6</sup>

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Johnson, Anne Mandeville Colony, Angela Kreider, and Katherine E. Harbury (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 398–401.

<sup>5</sup> "To Thomas Jefferson from James Madison, August 16, 1807," in *Life of Thomas Jefferson: Third President of the United States* (United States: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1874), 673.

<sup>6</sup> "James Madison to John Armstrong, Jr., May 2, 1808," in *The Writings of James Madison: 1808-1819* (United States: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 28.

However, failing the acquisition of the Floridas through the good offices of Napoleon, Jefferson considered other ways of acquiring that territory from Spain. Later that summer, Jefferson suggested that the United States might take the Floridas as payment for mercantile violations committed by the various belligerents during the Napoleonic Wars. On this, Jefferson wrote to Madison that “should the conference announced in mr Pinckney’s letter of June 5. settle friendship between England & us, & Bonaparte continue at war with Spain, a moment may occur favorable, without compromising us with either France or England for seizing our own from the Rio Bravo [Rio Grande] to Perdido as of right, & the residue of Florida as a reprisal for spoliations.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, on August 12, 1808, Jefferson wrote to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn that “should England make up with us, while Bonaparte continues at war with Spain, a moment may occur when we may without danger of commitment with either France or England seize to our own limits of Louisiana as of right, & the residue of the Floridas as reprisal for spoliations . . . The enforcing the embargo would furnish a pretext for taking the nearest healthy positions to St. Mary’s, and on the waters of Tombigbee.”<sup>8</sup>

In preparation for this possible taking of East and West Florida from Spain, Jefferson told U.S. Minister to France Albert Gallatin that upon “learning the situation of affairs in Spain, it had occurred to me that it might produce a favorable occasion of doing ourselves justice in the South. we must certainly so dispose of our Southern recruits and armed vessels as to be ready for the occasion.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to his hopes of taking East and West Florida, Jefferson also constantly entertained ambitions of acquiring Cuba or at least having it remain in Spanish hands under the

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<sup>7</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, August 12, 1808,” in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Volume V* (N.P.: Outlook Verlag, 2018), 269.

<sup>8</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to Henry Dearborn, August 12, 1808,” in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Volume V* (N.P.: Outlook Verlag, 2018), 268-269.

<sup>9</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, August 11, 1808,” in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (United States: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1898), 202-203.

status quo, writing to Albert Gallatin that “I shall sincerely lament Cuba’s falling into any hands but those of it’s present owners. Spanish America is at present in the best hands for us, & ‘chi sta bene, non si muove’ [let him who stands well, stand still] should be our motto.”<sup>10</sup> Still, Jefferson and members of his administration were frequently disquieted over the prospect of the strategically important island of Cuba falling into hands other than Spain, whom they considered a weak and declining power. For example, in 1810, Albert Gallatin warned of British designs on Cuba:

England will try to govern the Spanish colonies through a nominal Spanish regency, and will for that purpose keep up a war in some one corner of Spain, and oppose revolutionary movements in the colonies. I think also that she will attempt to take possession of Cuba where the Spanish regency may if necessary be removed. The English interest and prejudices against us arising from that source will therefore be the principal obstacles to our views in that quarter. These being merely commercial and both on that account & from political motives opposed to an undue British ascendancy, we may expect new sources of collision. Florida & Cuba are by far the most important objects & will require some immediate decision.<sup>11</sup>

A similar argument to the strategic vulnerability that Florida in British hands might present to U.S. national security was also made in connection with Americans’ desire to acquire Cuba by the Governor of the Orleans Territory, William C. C. Claiborne, who wrote, “The great avenue for the Commerce of the Western States would be secured, and a unity of interests established and perpetuated between the several Members of the America[n] family, that would place our Union beyond the reach of change.”<sup>12</sup> Relatedly, Jefferson earlier made clear the opposition of the United States to any change in the status quo to Spanish territories on the periphery of the Union from Spain to another European power, writing the following to Claiborne:

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<sup>10</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, May 17, 1808,” in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Volume V* (N.P.: Outlook Verlag, 2018), 231.

<sup>11</sup> “Albert Gallatin to James Madison, September 17, 1810,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 545–546.

<sup>12</sup> James E. Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 36.

The Patriots of Spain have no warmer friends than the administration of the US. but it is our duty to say nothing & to do nothing for or against either. if they succeed, we shall be well satisfied to see Cuba & Mexico remain in their present dependance; but very unwilling to see them in that of either France or England, politically or commercially. we consider their interests & ours as the same, and that the object of both must be to exclude all European influence from this hemisphere. we wish to avoid the necessity of going to war, till our revenue shall be entirely liberated from debt. then it will suffice for war without creating new debt or taxes. these are sentiments which I would wish you to express to any proper characters of either of these two countries and particularly that we have nothing more at heart than their friendship.<sup>13</sup>

In this respect, Jefferson was so serious that he even connected his statements on a non-transfer of territories to a desire to avoid war, implying that such a turn of events might necessitate an appeal to arms. Also, concerning ongoing French actions in Spain, Jefferson wrote the following to James Monroe:

If, as is expected, Bonaparte should be succesful in Spain, however every virtuous & liberal sentiment revolts at it, it may induce both powers to be more accomodating with us. England will see here the only asylum for her commerce & manufactures worth more to her than her orders of council, & Bonaparte having Spain at his feet, will look immediately to the Spanish colonies & think our neutrality cheaply purchased by a repeal of the illegal parts of his decrees, with perhaps the Floridas thrown into the bargain. should a change in the aspect of affairs in Europe produce this disposition in both powers, our peace and prosperity may be revived and long continue. otherwise we must again take the tented field as we did in 1776. under more inauspicious circumstances. there never has been a situation of the world before, in which such endeavors as we have made would not have secured our peace. it is probable there never will be such another.<sup>14</sup>

From these comments, it can be seen that Jefferson was constantly evaluating the international landscape for an opportune time to wrest certain territories away from Spain, such as the potential French or British assumption of sovereignty or influence over the Spanish Empire.

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<sup>13</sup> "Thomas Jefferson to William C. C. Claiborne, October 29, 1808," in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Volume 12*, eds. Albert Ellery Bergh and Richard Holland Johnston (United States: Issued under the auspices of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association of the United States, 1907), 186-187.

<sup>14</sup> "Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, January 28, 1809," in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. (United States: Issued under the auspices of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association of the United States, 1907), 240-242.

Speaking on the possible creation of independent Spanish-American states and the rise of British influence there, Jefferson warned what would happen if the British succeeded:

We shall have in them [Spanish America], of consequence ... hostile and dangerous neighbors; while Great Britain will monopolize their trade, and if our present difficulties continue, perpetually instigate them to hostility against us ... Disposed as Great Britain is to do us harm, she may yet make use of the Spaniards on this continent for that purpose. And though the Spaniards have long been considered as contemptible, let it be remembered that a nation is always regenerated by a revolution ... It is not perhaps even now too late to retrieve the advantages the Administration have overlooked. A change of conduct may regain us the affections and friendship [of Spanish America] which have been unnecessarily lost. And this, sir, is to be more desired, when we look forward to what is likely to be the situation of the European continent if Spain is conquered. It will then be subject to the will and despotism of Napoleon ... It will be here, then, on this regenerated continent [that “the arts of peace”] may hope to find repose and protection.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, Jefferson was equally concerned that the Spanish-American colonies might be transferred to a hostile France or influenced to hostility against the United States as satellites of Great Britain under de facto British control. Regarding British hostility during Chesapeake Affair, Jefferson anticipated that, in the event of war between the United States and Great Britain, “England will immediately seize on the Floridas as a point d’appui [fulcrum] to annoy us. What are we to do in that case? I think she will find that there is no nation on the globe which can gall her so much as we can.”<sup>16</sup> However, war was temporarily averted, and the issue of Florida was left to following administrations to resolve. After leaving the White House, Jefferson counseled recently inaugurated President James Madison on April 19, 1809, “I suppose the conquest of Spain will soon force a delicate question on you as to the Floridas & Cuba which will offer themselves to you. Napoleon will certainly give his consent without difficulty to our receiving the Floridas, & with some difficulty possibly Cuba. and tho’ he will disregard the obligation whenever he thinks

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<sup>15</sup> Arthur P. Whitaker, *The United States and the Independence of Latin America: 1800-1830* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 1964), 50-51.

<sup>16</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to General Armstrong, July 17, 1807,” in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson: Correspondence and Papers, 1803-1807* (United States: Lightning Source Incorporated, 2010), 467.

he can break it with success, yet it has a great effect on the opinion of our people & the world to have the moral right on our side of his agreement as well as that of the people of those countries.”<sup>17</sup>

Suggesting to Madison that Napoleon might be open to ceding the Spanish Floridas to the United States in exchange for U.S. neutrality, Jefferson advised Madison to be patient but ready to take advantage of international events as they unfolded. In warning of the threat posed by a potentially British-held Florida to the United States, Secretary of State James Monroe wrote to U.S. Minister to the United Kingdom John Quincy Adams about rumors that Spain had already ceded the Floridas and its claims to New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory to Great Britain:

If the British government has accepted a cession of this territory from Spain, and is taking measures for its occupancy, her conduct must be considered as decidedly hostile to the U[nited] States. As well might the British government send an army, to Philadelphia, or to Charlestown, as to New Orleans, or to any portion of Louisiana Westward of the Perdido, knowing as it does the just title of the United States to that limit. To send a considerable force to East-Florida, even should the British government state, that it had accepted the cession of that province only, could not be viewed in a friendly light. Why send a large force there, if Spain has ceded, and is ready to surrender the province, unless the British government has objects in view, unjust in their nature, the pursuit of which must of necessity, produce war with the United-States? East-Florida in itself is comparatively nothing; but as a post, in the hands of Great-Britain, it is of the highest importance. Commanding the Gulph of Mexico, and all its waters, including the Mississippi with its branches, and the streams emptying into the Mobile, a vast proportion of the most fertile and productive parts of this Union, on which the navigation and commerce so essentially depend, would be subject to its annoyance, not to mention its influence on the Creeks and other neighboring Indians. It is believed if Great-Britain has accepted the cession of East-Florida, and of it only, that she has done it with intention to establish a strong post there, and to avail herself of it for all the purposes above suggested. If the cession has greater extent, the design is more apparent.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, April 19, 1809,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Vol. 1, 4 March 1809 to 15 November 1809*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 154-156.

<sup>18</sup> United States State Department, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States Concerning the Independence of the Latin-American Nations* (India: Oxford University Press, 1925), 17.



Regarding Florida, in 1810, Madison began a personal correspondence with an American adventurer and filibusterer named Samuel Fulton. Fulton offered his services to Madison and the U.S. government in attempting to wrest West Florida from Spain. Fulton wrote Madison about, “the unhappy situation of old Spa[in] I have but little hopes that she can hold out much longer against the colossal power of Bonaparte, should she fall we must of course change our masters here [in Florida]; the choi[c]e would be general, in favour of the government over which you have the Hono[r] to Preside. Should the President & Congress jud[ge] wright to take possession of this detatch[ed] provin[ce] [Florida] I will make to reclaime of you that friendship and service which you so generously offerd me ... ”<sup>19</sup> Offering to assist the United States government in contingency plans to prevent the takeover of the Floridas by another power—France or Great Britain in particular—Fulton clearly understood that the United States would not permit those Spanish provinces to fall to any other power than Spain.

President Madison later wrote to his Secretary of State Robert Smith about Mississippi Territorial Governor David Holmes and the filibustering movements that were gathering against Spanish Florida on July 17, 1810, noting, “I think Gov[erno]r. Holmes should be encouraged in keeping a wakeful eye to occurrences & appearances in W[est] Florida, and in transmitting information concerning them ... In the event either of foreign interference with W[est] F[lorida] or of internal convulsions, more especially if threatening the neighboring tranquility, it will be proper to take care of the rights & interests of the U. S. by every measure within the limits of the Ex[ecutive] Authority.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, Madison was clearly concerned that Floridian filibusterers and

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<sup>19</sup> “To James Madison from Samuel Fulton, April 20, 1810,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 320-321.

<sup>20</sup> “James Madison to Robert Smith, July 17, 1810,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 419-421.

revolutionaries might disturb the peace of the U.S. states and territories along the Gulf Coast neighboring on Spanish Florida, thereby raising the traditional fears associated with the “problem of neighborhood,” even if he and his fellow Jeffersonian Republicans did not, at least in principle, oppose filibustering expeditions.

Around this time, Madison was also notified by the War Department concerning reports of American citizens preparing to attack the port of Mobile, writing on August 7, 1810, “From the Spanish governor at Mobile, Maximilian de St. Maxent, about plans of American settlers to attack that town. Believes the information to be correct and that hostilities against Pensacola can also be expected. Has discovered that the plans of the settlers include seizing the ammunition at Fort Stoddert in order ‘to disable the troops here from acting.’ ... would be almost universally pleasing to the inhabitants of this Country.’ Discusses the grievances of the settlers against the Spanish authorities and reports that the Spanish have reinforced Mobile as well as sought allies among the Choctaw and Creek Indians.”<sup>21</sup> A few weeks later, a Tennessee doctor with ties to New Orleans, John R. Bedford, wrote Madison on the feelings of the inhabitants of West Florida, noting on August 26, 1810, that “We all are at great loss what plan is best to adopt. We find the people somewhat divided. Some for the U[nited]. States, some for Britain & many for F 7<sup>th</sup> [Ferdinand VII of Spain].”<sup>22</sup> Such reports added to the perception that Spain might unleash the Indians upon U.S. settlers or that the loyalties of some Floridians placed its future disposition toward the Union in jeopardy, with some even favoring a close connection with the British Empire.

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<sup>21</sup> “To James Madison from John Smith, August 7, 1810,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 466.

<sup>22</sup> “To James Madison from John R. Bedford, August 26, 1810,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 508-510.

Acknowledging this precarious strategic situation on the U.S. frontier concerning the Spanish Floridas, Madison wrote to Secretary of War William Eustis on August 30, 1810, asking “Will you turn your thoughts to the question, what steps are within the Executive Competency, in case the deliberations of the people of W[est] Florida should issue in an offer to place the territory under the Authority of the U.S.?”<sup>23</sup> Eustice responded to Madison on September 7, 1810, writing:

The movements of our own citizens as well as those of the Inhabitants of W[est]. Florida I have observed with (an interest?) proportionate to the consequences which may (result) from them. But as it is impossible to (divine?) what course they might take, it is equally difficult to determine what part should be taken by Government. Should their deliberations issue in a proposal to place the territory under the authority of the U. S. on terms which shall be deemed (admissible or) justifiable, protection of some kind will (necessarily be implied?)—protection under such circumstances (implies force; how far?), how near and to what extent must depend on (events and?) may not probably require to be determined before the (next month).<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, in his discussions with the War Department, Madison began to consider the potential need to intervene in Florida in order to prevent that Spanish province from falling into British hands, for if the revolutionaries sought British assistance, it would almost certainly come with terms unfavorable to the United States. Also, as the inhabitants of West Florida were divided in their loyalties between the United States, Great Britain, and Spain, there was the possible complication that Napoleon Bonaparte might seek to prop up his brother Joseph’s claim to the Floridas on behalf of Napoleonic Spain.

However, after the inhabitants of West Florida rose to overthrow Spanish rule and declare themselves the Republic of West Florida on September 23, 1810, President Madison was finally

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<sup>23</sup> “James Madison to William Eustis, August 30, 1810,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 516-517.

<sup>24</sup> “To James Madison from William Eustis, 7 September 1810,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 531-532.

forced to decide on whether to recognize the independence of the West Florida Republic or seize and annex the territory to the United States. Fearing that a large number of inhabitants of British descent in West Florida from its time as a British colony might invite Great Britain to establish a foothold in the new republic, Madison determined to invade the territory and incorporate it into the Union. The annexation of the so-called Republic of West Florida would be the first of several strategic annexations that would, over time, incorporate all of the Spanish Floridas into the United States. However, Congress would need to be notified regarding any military action by the armed forces, as well as the reasons and justification behind the president's decision to seize the disputed territory. On October 19, 1810, Madison updated Jefferson on the status of West Florida:

The Crisis in W[est] Florida, as you will see, has come home to our feelings and our interests. It presents at the same time serious questions, as to the Authority of the Executive, and the adequacy of the existing laws, of the U. S. for territorial administration. And the near approach of Cong[ress] might subject any intermediate interposition of the Ex[ecutive] to the charge of being premature & disrespectful, if not of being illegal. Still, there is great weight in the considerations, that the Country to the Perdido, being our own, may be fairly, taken possession of, if it can be done without violence, above all if there be danger of its passing into the hands of a third & dangerous party. The successful party at Baton Rouge have not yet made any communication or invitation to this Gov[ernment]. They certainly will call in, either our Aid or that of G[reat] B[ritain] whose conduct at the Caraccas gives notice of her propensity to fish in troubled waters. From present appearances, our occupancy of W[est] F[lorida] would be resented by Spain, by England, & by France, and bring on, not a triangular, but quadrangular contest.<sup>25</sup>

As his correspondence with Jefferson reveals, Madison was torn between his legal authority as president and the possibility that a hostile British presence might be established in Florida. Finally, on October 27, 1810, Madison set aside his misgivings and issued a proclamation declaring the United States' annexation of the revolting Republic of West Florida, which read:

Whereas the Territory South of the Mississippi Territory and Eastward of the river Mississippi, and extending to the River Perdido, of which possession was not

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<sup>25</sup> "James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, October 19, 1810," in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 305-320.

delivered to the United States in pursuance of the Treaty concluded at Paris on the 30th April 1803, has at all times, as is well known, been considered and claimed by them, as being within the Colony of Louisiana conveyed by the said Treaty, in the same extent that it had in the hands of Spain, and that it had when France originally possessed it ... whereas a crisis has at length arrived subversive of the order of things under the Spanish Authorities whereby a failure of the United States to take the said Territory into its possession may lead to events ultimately contravening the views of both parties, whilst in the mean time the tranquility and security of our adjoining territories are endangered ... Considering moreover that under these peculiar and imperative circumstances, a forbearance on the part of the United States to occupy the Territory in question, and thereby guard against the confusions and contingences which threaten it ... considering finally that the Acts of Congress tho[ugh] contemplating a present possession by a foreign authority, have contemplated also an eventual possession of the said Territory by the United States, and are accordingly so framed as in that case to extend in their operation, to the same: Now be it known that I James Madison, President of the United States of America, in pursuance of these weighty and urgent considerations, have deemed it right and requisite, that possession should be taken of the said Territory, in the name and behalf of the United States.<sup>26</sup>

To provide a clearer picture of just exactly what type of outcome he was seeking to prevent, Madison wrote to U.S. Minister to the United Kingdom William Pinkney on October 30, 1810, notifying him of the policy being pursued by the U.S. government regarding Florida:

The occupancy of the Territory as far as the Perdido, was called for by the crisis there, and is understood to be within the auth[orit]y of the Executive. E[ast] Florida also is of great importance to the U.S. and it is not probable that Cong[ress]s. will let it pass into any new hands. It is to be hoped G[reat] B[ritain] will not entangle herself with us, by seizing it, either with or without the privity of her Allies in Cadiz. The position of Cuba gives the U.S. so deep an interest in the destiny even of that Island, that altho[ugh] they might be an inactive they could not be a satisfied spectator, at its falling under any European Gov[ernmen]t. which might make a fulcrum of that position, ag[ain]st. the commerce or security of the U. S. With respect to Spanish America, generally, you will find, that G[reat] B[ritain] is engaged in the most eager, and if without the concurrence of the Spanish Auth[orit]y at Cadiz, the most reproachful grasp of political influence and commercial preferences.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Presidential Proclamation, October 27, 1810," in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 595-597.

<sup>27</sup> "James Madison to William Pinkney, October 30, 1810," in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 2, 1 October 1809–2 November 1810*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 603-606.

After citing possible British intrigues, Madison then explained his proclamation to Congress regarding the West Florida Rebellion on December 5, 1810, writing that:

Among the events growing out of the state of the Spanish Monarchy, our attention was imperiously attracted to the change, developing itself in that portion of West Florida, which, though of right appertaining to the United States, had remained in the possession of Spain; awaiting the result of negotiations for its actual delivery to them. The Spanish Authority was subverted; and a situation produced, exposing the Country to ulterior events, which might essentially affect the rights and welfare of the Union. In such a conjuncture, I did not delay the interposition required for the occupancy of the Territory West of the River Perdido; to which the title of the United States extends, and to which the laws provided for the Territory of Orleans, are applicable. With this view, the Proclamation, of which a copy is laid before you, was confided to the Governor of that Territory, to be carried into effect. The legality and necessity of the course pursued, assure me of the favorable light in which it will present itself to the Legislature; and of the promptitude, with which they will supply, whatever provisions may be due, to the essential rights and equitable interests of the people, thus brought into the bosom of the American family.<sup>28</sup>

However, despite the annexation of West Florida to the United States, Madison keenly had his eye on other Spanish territories that might invite foreign intervention or occupation by virtue of continued Spanish weakness. Regarding East Florida, Madison asked Congress for a joint resolution granting the President of the United States the authority to pre-empt the foreign takeover of similar territories adjoining the United States. On January 3, 1811, Madison wrote, "Taking into view ... the posture of things with which they are connected, the intimate relation of the country adjoining the United States eastward of the river Perdido to their security and tranquility, and the peculiar interest they otherwise have in its destiny, I recommend to the consideration of Congress, the seasonableness of a declaration that the United States could not see, without serious inquietude, any part of a neighboring territory, in which they have, in different respects, so deep and so just a concern, [to] pass from the hands of Spain into those of any other foreign Power."<sup>29</sup> Soon after this

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<sup>28</sup> "President's Annual Message to Congress, December 5, 1810," in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 3, 3 November 1810–4 November 1811*, eds. J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 49-56.

<sup>29</sup> Logan, *No Transfer*, 118.

request, Congress promptly responded to Madison with the suggested resolution of authorization which read, in part, as follows:

Taking into view the peculiar situation of Spain, and of her American provinces; and considering the influence which the destiny of the territory adjoining the southern border of the United States may have upon their security, tranquility, and commerce: Therefore, Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That the United States, under the peculiar circumstances of the existing crisis, cannot, without serious inquietude, see any part of the said territory pass into the hands of any foreign power; and that a due regard to their own safety compels them to provide, under certain contingencies, for the temporary occupation of the said territory ... An Act to enable the President of the United States, under certain contingencies, to take possession of the country lying east of the river Perdido, and south of the state of Georgia and the Mississippi territory, and for other purpose. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That the President of the United States be, and he is hereby, authorized, to take possession of, and occupy, all or any part of the territory lying east of the river Perdido, and south of the state of Georgia, and the Mississippi territory, in case an arrangement has been, or shall be, made with the local authority of the said territory, or any part thereof, by any foreign government; and he may, for the purpose of taking possession, and occupying the territory aforesaid, and in order to maintain therein the authority of the United States, employ any part of the army and navy of the United States which he may deem necessary.<sup>30</sup>

This joint resolution of Congress, which received President Madison's signature on January 15, 1811, became the immediate ancestor of the "No-Transfer" or "Non-Transfer" principle that would be found in later corollaries of the Monroe Doctrine. The "No-Transfer" or "Non-Transfer" clause of the Monroe Doctrine itself grew out of the fears and anxieties with which Americans viewed their European rivals and those rivals' historic hostility to republican governments, especially after the defeat of Napoleon and the final outcome of the French Revolution. Also, the disposition of Spain's remaining holdings in the New World took on an added importance in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812. Observing the

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<sup>30</sup> Logan, *No Transfer*, 119-120.

antagonism of the European powers toward the United States following the defeat of Napoleon, John Quincy Adams wrote to his father John Adams on August 1, 1816:

The contemplation of our external Relations ... makes me specially anxious to strengthen our National Government—The conduct and issue of the late War has undoubtedly raised our national character in the consideration of the world—But we ought also to be aware that it has multiplied and embittered our Enemies—This Nation [England] is far more inveterate against us than it ever was before—All the restored Governments of Europe are deeply hostile to us—The Royalists every where detest and despise us as Republicans—All the victims and final vanquishers of the French Revolution abhor us as aiders and abettors of the French during their career of Triumph—Wherever British influence extends it is busy to blacken us in every possible manner—In Spain, the popular feeling is almost as keen against us as in England—Emperors, Kings, Princes, Priests, all the privileged Orders, all the Establishments, all the votaries of legitimacy, eye us with the most rancorous hatred—Among the crowned heads, the only friend we had was the Emperor Alexander, and his friendship has I am afraid been more than cooled—How long it will be possible for us to preserve Peace with all Europe, it is impossible to foresee—Of this I am sure, that we cannot be too well or too quickly prepared for a new conflict to support our rights, and our interests—The tranquility of Europe is precarious, it is liable to many sudden changes, and great convulsions; but there is none in probable prospect, which would give us more security than we now enjoy against the bursting of another storm upon ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

Still, even before the Napoleonic Wars ended, Secretary of State James Monroe similarly wrote President Madison, “Should Bonaparte be overset, and France subjugated, I hope that the jealousy entertain[e]d of G[reat] Brit[ai]n by the other powers will prevent any union between them against us, or her attempting singly any hostile project: the unsettled state of France, which may be presumed, let the contest terminate as it may, will likewise operate in our favor ... Still I think that we ought to anticipate & be prepar[e]d for the worst. Our gov[ernmen]t deprives us of friends, or rather make[s] all the gov[ernmen]ts of Europe our enemies.”<sup>32</sup> Even Thomas Jefferson wrote his personal friend and sometimes informal French agent Du Pont de Nemours that the

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<sup>31</sup> “To John Adams from John Quincy Adams, August 1, 1816,” in *Writings of John Quincy Adams: Volume 8* (United States: Macmillan, 1916), 60-61.

<sup>32</sup> “To James Madison from James Monroe, August 12, 1815,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, Vol. 9, 19 February 1815–12 October 1815*, eds. Angela Kreider, J. C. A. Stagg, Mary Parke Johnson, and Anne Mandeville Colony (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 527.



“hostile intentions of Great Britain towards us is sound, I am satisfied, from her movements North & South of us ... she feels the gloriole (halo) of her late golden achievements tarnished by our successes against her by sea and land; and will not be contented until she has wiped it off by triumphs over us also. I rely however on the Volcanic state of Europe to present other objects for her arms and her apprehensions: and am not without hope we shall be permitted to proceed peaceably in making children, and maturing and moulding our strength & resources.”<sup>33</sup> Describing the tenuous international situation of the United States vis-a-vis Europe, Jefferson encapsulated the view of many of America’s leading statesmen of the time.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to general European hostility against the United States, British influence in Spanish East Florida continued to increase, with British merchants such as Robert C. Ambrister, Alexander Arbuthnot, and George McGregor continuing to operate in the Spanish province with impunity. In 1817, Colonel Edward Nicolls and his men even occupied Galveston and Amelia Island in Florida, negotiating the so-called Treaty of Nicolls’ Outpost containing a British offensive and defensive alliance with the Seminoles, which he encouraged London to ratify, demonstrating yet another attempt by certain Britons to encircle the United States.<sup>35</sup> Although London disavowed Nicolls’ treaty, rumors that Great Britain was attempting to acquire Spanish rights to both Louisiana and East Florida caused John Quincy Adams to press British Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh for answers. Castlereagh responded by denying any attempt by the British Empire to aggrandize itself in North America, but his denial also came with a warning.

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<sup>33</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, December 31, 1815,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Vol. 9, September 1815 to April 1816*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 304-306.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of Bonapartist vs. Revolutionary France in American thought, see Jeffrey Zvengrowski, *Jefferson Davis Napoleonic France and the Nature of Confederate Ideology 1815-1870* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain*, 55, 57.

Castlereagh told Adams, “If we should find you hereafter pursuing a system of encroachment upon your neighbors, what we might do defensively is another consideration.”<sup>36</sup> Castlereagh also followed this warning with a reminder of the existing alliance between Spain and Great Britain.

When Spanish officials became aware of this veiled British threat to the United States as it relates to Spanish territories, they began to call on their allies to guarantee their possession of the Floridas and to pressure the Americans to back off of their encroachments on that province. Arguing that U.S. annexation of Florida would be detrimental to British interests, Spanish diplomat Conde de Fernan-Nunez wrote to Castlereagh hoping to coordinate British and Spanish policies to block the United States “with the view of checking the enterprizes of an ambitious Power and of extinguishing the contagious fire of rebellion and insurrection.”<sup>37</sup> The Spanish Envoy to the United States government, Luis de Onis even suggested selling the Floridas to Great Britain just to deny them to the United States.<sup>38</sup> Also, before John Quincy Adams was recalled to the United States to serve as the new U.S. Secretary of State under President James Monroe, Adams recounted a noteworthy conversation that he had with Lord Castlereagh that only served to increase his suspicions of British attitudes toward U.S. expansion. Adams recalled that Castlereagh asked him:

If the United States were not very desirous of obtaining a cession of the Floridas. I told him that we contended the cession of West Florida was included in that of Louisiana, Because it had formed a part of the original French colony, the whole of which had been retroceded by Spain to France, and then by France to the United States. He asked whether there was not also some question of boundary to the west of the river Mississippi. I said there was, but I did not know precisely where Spain pretended the line was to be drawn in that quarter. He hinted that Spain might perhaps consent to an accommodation upon the Florida side, if the United States would concede on the side of the Mississippi.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>37</sup> Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams*, 283.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 284.

<sup>39</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848. Volume III* (United States: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1874), 550.

Naturally suspicious, it was also around this time that Adams notified Monroe that Conde de Fernan-Nunez “assured me with the most earnest protestations that his government had come to a full and frank determination to adjust all their differences with the United States, *however disagreeable that adjustment might be to some others*. But I suppose that Florida for the boundary line on the Mississippi was the basis of their [British] project, and it would be curious if that should be disagreeable to *others*,”<sup>40</sup> thereby implying that Great Britain or France might be displeased if the Mississippi were not agreed to as the boundary of the United States in exchange for Florida. Therefore, according to Adams, the Spanish government seemed willing to come to an agreement with the Americans, but the British government wanted Spanish officials to leverage Florida to get the United States to agree to the abandonment of its territory west of the Mississippi River.

Also in his *Memoirs*, Adams recalled another conversation that he had with Castlereagh in 1817, writing, “We had some further conversation upon the state of relations between the United States and Spain, and examined the ground upon a map. He asked, if the Floridas were ceded to the United States, what objection they would have to the Mississippi for a boundary. I showed him the whole range of territory marked upon his own map “Louisiana,” and said that would be the objection. ...” Reflecting on Castlereagh’s comments, Adams added, “His project of offering the mediation of Great Britain to settle the differences between the United States and Spain surprised me much, after what had passed at [the Treaty of] Ghent. But his plan of bounding us by the Mississippi was exactly what I should have expected from a British mediator.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, when he heard of this, the Spanish ambassador understood Castlereagh to mean that Great Britain “would

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<sup>40</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Writings of John Quincy Adams: 1816-1819* (United States: Macmillan, 1916), 208.

<sup>41</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs: Volume III*, 560.

forcibly oppose any extension of the limits of the United States, on the side of Mexico.”<sup>42</sup> This apparent British threat no doubt served to embolden Spanish intransigence.

According to historian J. Fred Rippy, Castlereagh’s offer to mediate a transfer of Florida to the United States and his recommendation to Adams that the Americans accept the Mississippi River as the western boundary of the United States clearly had the protection of Mexico in mind. Despite such lofty reasoning, this goal represented another example of attempted British encirclement against the United States. However, ignoring British offers of mediation, U.S. leaders believed that they could reach a deal with Spain that would come with fewer strings attached. However, some Americans, like Major General Andrew Jackson, were not content to wait for the Spaniards to come to see the wisdom of ceding their “derelict province” of Florida to the United States. Incensed by continuous attacks on U.S. citizens in the State of Georgia by the various Indian tribes across the border from Spanish Florida, Jackson was firmly convinced that the Creek warriors who fled to the Spanish province after their defeat in the Creek War were being incited by British merchants or, at the very least, were being supplied with arms by them.<sup>43</sup> Soon after this, Jackson decided to invade East Florida to put an end to the instability on the U.S. frontier with the Spanish province by loosely interpreting instructions from President Monroe and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun as a free hand to take military action. Monroe commented on Jackson’s Invasion of Florida to Thomas Jefferson on December 23, 1817, writing:

The affair with general Jackson is not terminated; it is however probable that it will be, on just principles, & retain him in service: that of Amelia Island & Galvestown, is also still a cause of concern, tho’ the probability is, that the public mind, will discriminate, between a banditti, form’d of adventurers, of all nations, except the Spanish Colonies, plan[e]d in our own country, & resting for support, on presumed impurity within us, & the cause of the colonies themselves, to which, we all wish success. It is also probable that the Colonies will disavow them. The agent of

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<sup>42</sup> Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain*, 75-76.

<sup>43</sup> John Missall and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America’s Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016), 21-50.

Buenos Ayres, has done it. The allied powers, that is, G[reat] B[ritain] & France [tho’[ugh] the latter has not been so explicit] have intimated a desire to arbitrate our differences with Spain, on the ground of making the Miss[issippi] the boundary, whence it is inferr[e]d that if we pushed a quarrel with Spain, they would interpose against us. Russia stands aloof.<sup>44</sup>

In the mind of Monroe, British schemes in Florida were intimately connected to U.S. negotiations with Spain regarding Florida and a potential Mississippi River boundary. Before the invasion, Jackson assigned U.S. Brigadier General Edmund Pendleton Gaines to take the so-called “Negro Fort,” which Gaines proceeded to do on July 27, 1816. Negro Fort was a former outpost evacuated by the British after the War of 1812 and handed over to a group of runaway slaves called the Black Seminoles. While evacuating, British forces left behind gunpowder, ammunition, and arms to the Black Seminoles. U.S. forces promptly surrounded this strategic position, and when Gaines’ men fired into Negro Fort, a stray cannonball or “hot shot” landed in the gunpowder magazine of the entrenchments. The resulting explosion killed nearly 250 people almost instantly, thereby reducing the fort and eliminating it as a threat to the U.S. invasion of the Floridas. On March 15, 1818, Jackson entered East Florida, and on April 6, 1818, his men swiftly took control of Fort St. Mark’s, where he captured British “merchants” Alexander Arbuthnot and Robert Ambrister. Arbuthnot and Ambrister were subsequently court-martialed and summarily executed by Jackson’s forces on April 29, 1818, for aiding, supplying, and encouraging deadly Indian attacks on U.S. citizens on the Southern Frontier.<sup>45</sup> Explaining his actions, Jackson wrote:

The British government is involved in the agency- If Arbuthnot and Ambrister are not convicted as the authorised Agents of Great Britain there is no room to doubt but that that Government had a knowledge of their assumed character-and was well advised of the measures which they had adopted to excite the Negroes & Indians in East Florida to war against the U[nited] States- I hope the execution of these Two unprincipled villains will prove an awfull example to the world, and convince the

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<sup>44</sup> “James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, December 23, 1817,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Vol. 12, 1 September 1817 to 21 April 1818*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 271-272.

<sup>45</sup> Missall, *Seminole Wars*, 21-50.

Government of Great Britain as well as her subjects that certain, if slow retribution awaits those unc[h]ristian wretches who by false promises delude & excite a Indian tribe to all the horrid deeds of savage war.<sup>46</sup>

The execution of two British nationals by an American General on Spanish territory provoked a brief international crisis, but both governments sought more details before undertaking any drastic responses. Led by Henry Clay, Congress debated censuring Jackson, while Monroe and Calhoun were tempted to disavow his actions and the invasion of Florida in its entirety. However, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams stood alone among all the major figures of the federal government in defending the “Hero of New Orleans” from attack. Adams placed the blame squarely at the feet of the British instigators and dereliction of their government in failing to curb their activities. Adams explained this to British officials:

It is thus only that the barbarities of the Indians can be successfully encountered. It is thus only that the worse than Indian barbarities of European imposters, pretending authority from their governments, but always disavowed, can be punished and arrested. Great Britain yet engages the alliance and cooperation of savages in war; but her government has invariably disclaimed all countenance or authorization to her subjects to instigate them against us in time of peace. Yet, it so happened, that, from the period of our established independence to this day, all the Indian wars with which we have been afflicted have been distinctly traceable to the instigation of English traders or agents. Always disavowed, yet always felt; more than once detected, but never before punished.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, once evidence of the guilt of the two executed British nationals was provided by the U.S. government to British authorities, British anger over the incident subsided. More importantly, Adams believed that Jackson’s invasion of Florida could be used to pressure Spain into selling that province to the United States. Adams’ instincts proved correct when the Spanish finally became convinced that the British would not intercede to help them retain Florida and,

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<sup>46</sup> Andrew Jackson, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume IV, 1816-1820*, eds. Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and George H. Hoemann (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 199.

<sup>47</sup> William Stephen Belko, *America's Hundred Years' War: U.S. Expansion to the Gulf Coast and the Fate of the Seminole, 1763-1858* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 89.

thereafter, agreed to officially cede all of the Floridas to the United States. As a result of the Adams–Onís, or Transcontinental Treaty, of 1819, Spain also ceded to the United States all of its claims to the Pacific Northwest of North America, or what would later become known as the Oregon Country. Adams later explained the treaty, noting with satisfaction that “the acquisition of the Floridas has long been an object of earnest desire to this country. The acknowledgement of boundary to the South Sea [Pacific Ocean] forms a great epoch[a] in our history. The first proposal of it in this negotiation was my own, and I trust it is now secured beyond the reach of revocation. It was not even among our claims by the Treaty of Independence with Great Britain. It was not among our pretensions under the purchase of Louisiana—For that gave us only the range of the Mississippi and its waters.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, in exchange for the United States’ assumption of all of the claims of its citizens against Spain, the Spanish government agreed to such terms.

Other terms of the treaty that would become far more controversial in the following decades were that the American government agreed to the Sabine River as the boundary between the United States and the Viceroyalty of New Spain, thereby in effect abandoning U.S. claims to Spanish Texas. However, despite agreeing to the Adams–Onís Treaty in 1819, it would not be ratified by the Spanish government until 1821. In the meantime, a series of domestic crises threatened to potentially unravel the Union, and westerners’ angst over the U.S. abandonment of Texas would come to play a part. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars, British producers dumped surplus accumulated goods onto the U.S. market to drive domestic manufacturers out of business, European demand for American foodstuffs drove up agricultural prices, and a speculative land boom created by cheap public lands led to a speculative, inflationary bubble, eventually resulting

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<sup>48</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of the Life of John Quincy Adams* (United States: Crosby, Nichols, Lee, 1860), 92.

in the Panic of 1819.<sup>49</sup> Also, with the landmark Supreme Court decisions of *Martin vs. Hunter's Lesse* (1816), in which the court asserted the right to review cases before state courts, and *McCullough vs. Maryland* (1819), in which the Supreme Court struck down the State of Maryland's attempt to tax the second Bank of the United States, both decisions only served to scandalize the sentiments of the ultra-states' rights Old Republicans. Finally, the sectional rivalry and debate over the admission of Missouri to the Union only exacerbated the divide over slavery, which eventually led to the Missouri Crisis and an eventual compromise.

Relatedly, one unintended consequence of the speculative postwar land boom was that those westerners who owed the federal government some \$22 million almost became invested in the failure of the Union in hopes that its collapse would relieve them of their debts, or as one Kentucky author wrote, it was "the most portentous evil that ever existed in America; it threatens a dissolution of the Union" because "the existence of the debt depend[ed] on the continuance of the union," and he warned that westerners were "preeminently well situated for the formation of a separate government."<sup>50</sup> On the Missouri Crisis, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "The banks, bankrupt law, manufactures, Spanish treaty are nothing. these are occurrences which like waves in a storm will pass under the ship. but the Missouri question is a breaker on which we lose the Missouri country by revolt, & what more, God only knows. from the battle of Bunker's hill to the treaty of Paris we never had so ominous a question."<sup>51</sup> The question, as one Kentucky newspaper asked, was whether Missouri "shall be recognized as an *independent state*, or as a *colony*."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> George Dangerfield, *The Awakening of American Nationalism: 1815-1828* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 176-179.

<sup>50</sup> Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, 130.

<sup>51</sup> "Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 10 December 1819," in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Vol. 15, 1 September 1819 to 31 May 1820*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 271-273.

<sup>52</sup> Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, 132.



Some U.S. leaders like Henry Clay worried that slavery restrictionists threatened to overturn the established principle that territories could enter the Union on an equal footing as the original states, noting that such people seemed to argue that “because the territory of Missouri was acquired by purchase, she is our vassal.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, on the Missouri Crisis, President James Monroe warned that if “you place the new, on the footing of a league, govern[e]d by good faith, as in the case of ordinary treaties, between independent powers”<sup>54</sup> rather than a Union bound by the full faith and credit of the people of the United States, the Republic would not survive. Monroe even argued that it was the hope of the restrictionists to drive a wedge between the Eastern and Western states “to make the Alleghany mountain the boundary” and worried that “one sectional division being made[,] the impulse given it might go on.”<sup>55</sup> In a letter to Jefferson, Monroe compared opposition to the admission of Missouri to the Hartford Convention, writing, “This march to greatness, has been Seen with profound regret, by those, in the policy suggested, but it has been impelled by causes over which they have had no controul. Several attempts have been made to impede it, among which, the Hartford convention in the late war, and the proposition for restricting Missouri, are the most distinguished.”<sup>56</sup>

Branding those who opposed the extension of the Union with the addition of Missouri as “Hartford” men, Monroe’s arguments were adopted by Andrew Jackson nearly a generation later with those opposed to the Annexation of Texas. Meanwhile, in private, Jefferson speculated on how the Union might break and what the shards of its broken edifice might look like:

Nothing has ever presented so threatening an aspect as what is called the Missouri question. the Federalists compleatly put down, and despairing of ever rising again

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>56</sup> “James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, [received 27] May 1820,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Vol. 15, 1 September 1819 to 31 May 1820*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 615-617.

under the old division of whig and tory, devised a new one, of slave-holding, & non-slave-holding states, which, while it had a semblance of being Moral, was at the same time Geographical, and calculated to give them ascendancy by debauching their old opponents to a coalition with them ... however it served to throw dust into the eyes of the people and to fanaticise them, while to the knowing ones it gave a geographical and preponderant line of the Patomac and Ohio, throwing 14. states to the North and East, & 10. to the South & West. with these therefore it is merely a question of power: but with this geographical minority it is a question of existence ...<sup>57</sup>

Further, Jefferson continued to write of his frustrations on this issue in 1820:

The Missouri question is a meer party trick. the leaders of federalism defeated in their schemes of obtaining power by rallying partisans to the principle of monarchism, a principle of personal, not of local division, have changed their tack, and thrown out another barre to the whale. they are taking advantage of the virtuous feelings of the people to effect a division of parties by a geographical line ... some of these leaders, if they could attain the power they ambition, would rather use it to keep the union together, but others have ever had in view it's separation ... I fear not that after a little trial, they will think better of it, and return to the embraces of their natural and best friends. but this scheme of party I leave to those who are to live under it's consequences. we who have gone before have performed an honest duty, by putting in the power of our successors a state of happiness which no nation ever before had within their choice. if that choice is to throw it away, the dead will have neither the power nor the right to controul them. I must hope nevertheless that the mass of our honest and well meaning brethren of the other states will discover the use which designing leaders are making of their best feelings, & will see the precipice to which they are led, before they take the fatal leap.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, Jefferson lamented in his private correspondence around this time:

The Missouri question aroused and filled me with alarm. the old schism of federal & republican, threatened nothing, because it existed in every state, and united them together by the fraternism of party. but the coincidence of a marked principle, moral & political, with a geographical line, once concieved, I feared would never more be obliterated from the mind; that it would be recurring on every occasion & renewing irritations, until it would kindle such mutual & mortal hatred, as to render separation preferable to eternal discord. I have been among the most sanguine in believing that our Union would be of long duration. I now doubt it much, and see the event at no great distance, and the direct consequence of this question: not by the line which has been so confidently counted on. the laws of nature controul this:

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<sup>57</sup> "From Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, 26 December 1820," in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Volume 10* (United States: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1899), 177.

<sup>58</sup> "From Thomas Jefferson to Charles Pinckney, 30 September 1820," in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series, Volume 16: 1 June 1820 to 28 February 1821* (United States: Princeton University Press, 2020), 488-489.

but by the Potomak, Ohio, and Missouri, or more probably the Missis[s]ip[p]i upwards to our Northern boundary. my only comfort & confidence is that I shall not live to see this: and I envy not the present generation the glory of throwing away the fruits of their fathers sacrifices of life & fortune, and of rendering desperate the experiment which was to decide ultimately whether man is capable of self government? this treason against human hope will signalize their epoch in future history, as the counterpart of the medal of their predecessors.<sup>59</sup>

Combined with the U.S. abandonment of Texas in the Adams–Onis Treaty of 1819, the delay in admitting Missouri as a state of the Union led some to believe that it was the intention of Monroe’s administration to “mak[e] the Mississippi the western limit”<sup>60</sup> of the Union. If this was the case, as the editor of the *Daily National Intelligencer*, Joseph Gales Jr., noted, “Missouri is a State, & it is not in the power of Congress to say her *nay*, unless they declare her Independence of the US.”<sup>61</sup> For his part, Henry Clay worried that if Missouri existed independent of the Union, it might draw “the hardy yeomanry inhabiting the states around and distant from her” and that if Congress continued to play on the “powerful local causes operating in the West” Missouri or even Texas might eventually entice “some, and ultimately all, of the Western States from the confederacy.”<sup>62</sup> In truth Clay, the prime mover behind the compromise that would eventually end the crisis, was personally motivated by his fear that the Union might dissolve into “three distinct confederacies.”<sup>63</sup> Even in submitting his solutions to the economic woes of the country that he called the “American System,” Clay feared that if it failed “there would be a dissolution of the Union by the mountains.”<sup>64</sup> Although the Missouri Crisis ended due to the patriotic efforts of men like Clay, Texas remained outside of the Union and became a key touchpoint for sectional rivalry.

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<sup>59</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to William Short, 13 April 1820,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Vol. 15, 1 September 1819 to 31 May 1820*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 538-541.

<sup>60</sup> Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, 147.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

Meanwhile, on the international stage, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Tsarist Russia, whose manpower was indispensable to the effort to defeat Napoleon, was in an ideal position to impose its will upon the European continent. In addition to the project of hemming France in with strong neighbors and placing a restored Bourbon monarch on its throne to establish a new, delicate “balance of power” in Europe, Russia pressed its allies Austria, Prussia, and Great Britain to build upon their Quadruple Alliance by forming a “Holy Alliance” to defend against the very radicalism that led to the French Revolution and the wars that followed. In the second Treaty of Paris, the signatories pledged, “In order to consolidate the intimate ties which unite the four sovereigns for the happiness of the world, the High Contracting Powers have agree[d] to renew at fixed intervals, either under their own auspices or by their representative ministers, meetings consecrate to great common objects and the examination of such measures as shall be judged most salutary for the peace and prosperity of Europe.”<sup>65</sup> With this post-Napoleonic War association cemented, the European powers soon turned their collective attention to the crumbling Spanish Empire in the New World.

Although France would later be added to the Quadruple Alliance in 1818 by the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, thus making the Holy Alliance a Quintuple instead a Quadruple Alliance, if albeit briefly before the exit of Great Britain, the alliance remained explicitly European in nature. Still, Tsar Alexander expressed his hope that the United States would eventually become a member of the Holy Alliance, as indicated by the dispatch of U.S. diplomat Leverett Harris to Secretary of State Monroe on January 4/16, 1816, stating, “If the United States chose to yield their assent to this treaty the Emperor would receive it with deference. That notwithstanding many opinions had gone abroad, formed to preserve the peace of Europe, and that whilst Russia continued to hold her

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<sup>65</sup> William P. Cresson, *The Holy Alliance: The European Background of the Monroe Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1922), 28.

present power this peace would not be troubled.”<sup>66</sup> However, despite Tsar Alexander’s hopes that the United States might join the Holy Alliance, America’s leaders continued to hold to the country’s historical position of neutrality and no entangling alliances with any European powers. Still, in the following year, the Tsar’s diplomatic instructions noted his expectation that the United States would eventually join the Holy Alliance and that:

the United States is to be considered a Christian Power, they should necessarily accede to the Act of 14<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> September. On the other hand, however, such adherence should be characterized by a purely spontaneous desire, and should arise from a wish inspired by a sincere conviction that the spirit of this agreement is not only salutary for the powers of the world but also in no ways coercive. As the Emperor has not had any opportunity of judging of the true disposition of the American Government, and is also ignorant of the obstacles which the Constitution of that country might oppose to an agreement of this character, His Majesty has not extended any invitation to the United States. Nevertheless, the Envoys of His Majesty are now authorized to make a careful inquiry concerning the opinions of the American Government.<sup>67</sup>

Of all the European powers, Russia was the friendliest to the United States, and its offers to American diplomats may have originated from a desire to not see the United States isolated, or it may have been a clever way of pledging the United States to back off from assisting in the independence of Spanish America. Regardless of the Tsar’s motives, discussion of French intervention in Spain’s rebelling colonies had existed since at least the Bourbon Restoration in France, and it accelerated considerably after the French Invasion of Spain in 1823. Between 1818 and 1819, France had been attempting to establish a Bourbon on the throne of Argentina in what has been termed the “Buenos Ayres incident.” French agents even reported that Juan Martín de Pueyrredón, the supreme revolutionary director of the United Provinces of La Plata (Argentina), actually favored the establishment of a monarchy under French influence.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 52.

French President of the Council of Ministers Jean-Joseph Dessolles even proposed Charles Louis, the Duke of Lucca, for the position of king, though it came to naught.<sup>68</sup> Although the British were unaware of the Buenos Aires intrigue at the time, they began to suspect that the French and Spanish governments were conspiring to put Bourbons on the thrones of Mexico and Peru. On December 10, 1822, the Duke of Wellington noted, “If the Spanish Government wished to send an Infant to Mexico or Peru, or to any part of Spanish America, attended by troops, with a view to make an endeavour to renew the connection between those Colonies and Spain, the expedition now fitting in the ports of France should be at the orders of the Spanish Government to convey the Infant and the troops wherever they pleased.”<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, these suspicions by the Duke of Wellington were not entirely unfounded.

On the issue of such a French intervention, French Minister of Foreign Affairs François-René de Chateaubriand told the Austrian ambassador in Paris on March 11, 1823, “In respect to the offer of all kinds of aid which will be offered to His Majesty [King Ferdinand of Spain] ... these succours (secours) were maritime aid [i.e., naval support]” in nature.<sup>70</sup> French Prime Minister Joseph de Villèle also wrote to the Duc d’ Angouleme, “In all those countries there exists armed partisans of the mother-country; if the Infantes did not find kingdoms already reduced to submission, they would at least find kingdoms easy to conquer with the aid of our marine and our credit,”<sup>71</sup> in addition to a minor detachment of troops. Villele even complained to the British Ambassador how the “agents of the United States ... labor to counteract our measures, only for the purpose of establishing a system favorable to the democratic and calculating principles of their

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<sup>68</sup> Harold Temperley, “French Designs on Spanish America in 1820–5,” *The English Historical Review* XL, no. CLVII (1925): 37.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>71</sup> Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1823-1826* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), 112.

own Government, and attaining the commercial objects of which they never lose sight.”<sup>72</sup> Villele hoped to gain British support for establishing European monarchies in Latin America, telling the British Ambassador to France, Sir Charles Stuart, that France was “ready to act with his Majesty’s Government which may tend to preserve the monarchial form of government in the new states.”<sup>73</sup> However, as will be seen, these French hopes were little short of sheer fantasy.

As such, British Foreign Secretary George Canning had long suspected these rumored Bourbon intrigues, writing that “France meditates, and has all along meditated, a direct interference in the affairs of Spanish America has been shown by M. de Villele’s general language, and by M. de Chateaubriand’s specific offers of succour (through M. de Lagarde).”<sup>74</sup> Of course, the French denied this, telling Ambassador Stuart that “nothing would have been easier than to obtain a request in writing from the King of Spain for the departure of a joint French and Spanish expedition for Vera Cruz [Mexico]. That they were aware however that such a measure must have led to a war between the two countries, and that the return of the French squadrons to Brest had prevented all suspicion of such a project.”<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, however, in August 1824, a conference was held in Paris in which the representatives of France, Austria, Prussia, and Russia encouraged Spain to reconquer its rebelling colonies, which was only a year after the Holy Alliance unleashed Bourbon France upon Spain to prop up the Spanish monarchy there.<sup>76</sup>

Despite French assurances, Canning remained unconvinced by French denials, writing on December 7, 1825, “The spirit of encroachment on the part of France is as much alive as at any former period of her history, and some day or other, and on some point or other, we must, I am

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>74</sup> Temperley, “French Designs on Spanish America,” 40-41.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 36.

afraid, meet and check it. But the day and the point must be well chosen.”<sup>77</sup> Concerning France, Louis XVIII’s minister at Washington D.C., the Hyde de Neuville, sent out several dispatches to the Duke of Richelieu, Armand-Emmanuel de Vignerot du Plessis, with ideas for establishing several monarchies headed by Bourbon royals in Latin America; this project remained a cherished French object for nearly a decade after the Congress of Vienna.<sup>78</sup> When independence was discussed by the European powers, French Ambassador to London François-René de Chateaubriand wrote, “If Europe is obliged to recognize the *de facto* governments of America, its whole policy should be aimed toward the encouraging of the establishment of monarchies instead of republics, whose principle exports would be their principles.”<sup>79</sup> At the Congress of Aix-La-Chapelle, the French also called for “the recognition of the independence of Buenos Aires, on condition that a constitutional monarchy be established with a Spanish Prince occupying the throne, and of certain concessions being granted, favorable to Spanish trade.”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, these French schemes seemed dangerously close to getting the full approval of the Holy Alliance.

According to Louis XVIII, this line of policy was one of the “means of preventing the general conflagration by which America is menaced, a disaster whose reactions on Europe would be terrible. Thus the progressive emancipation of this great continent [America], because it is in line with the inevitable order of things, will be restrained and rendered less dangerous to the European system by conserving the forms of monarchical government.”<sup>81</sup> However, French-born Russian diplomat Pozzo di Borgo predicted that the ongoing revolutions in Latin America might serve to strengthen the geopolitical position of the Americans, noting “the advantages which

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>78</sup> Cresson, *The Holy Alliance*, 61.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



accrue therefrom to the United States ... that the dismemberment of the Spanish-American Continent would result to the advantage of the Federal Government. There is no longer doubt that the Floridas will be ceded to them, and that the Union will extend its possessions along the Gulf of Mexico, until it has developed and dominated through the possession of the neighboring positions the whole extent of that vast body of water which is destined to become its absolute property.”<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the souring of even the Russian government to the growing power of the United States presented an ominous turn of events regarding U.S. and Holy Alliance relations.

For example, the Russian Tsar’s representative in the United States, the Chevalier de Poletica, writing about Spain’s revolting American colonies, warned that the European Powers “most directly interested feel that both a spirit of justice and their own public interest require that a strict neutrality be observed in the struggle between Spain and her colonies ... public opinion, all powerful in a republic, is always ambitious. The people of the United States demand of their government that it should extend its already immense territory and should, therefore, support the insurgents.”<sup>83</sup> The Tsar’s government, despite its friendliness to the United States, was genuinely concerned about the spread of republicanism. In a memorandum to the Russian diplomatic corps at Aix-La-Chapelle in 1818, his dispatch warned of:

An event which would cause irredeemable differences in the development of the situation would be the recognition by any power of the government set up by the insurgents. Unfortunately, this is not an improbable event. The popular party in the United States, much strengthened of late, is preparing to make a strong effort to secure the recognition of the independence of Buenos Aires during the next session of Congress. Consideration of their actions reveal their ambitions to make of the American Continent one Grand Confederated Republic at the head of which will be found the United States. In the actual state of affairs, the United States centralizes all its efforts in developing its resources and population. It is directed by a moderate policy and does not offer a menace to Europe. This would not continue to be the case should a large portion of South America adopt its institutions. A whole republican world, young, ardent and enriched by the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 86.

production of every climate, will then set itself up in opposition to an old monarchical Europe, overpopulated and shaken by thirty years of revolution. This is a perspective worthy of the earnest consideration of all European statesmen. The consequences of all this might be incalculable ... The essential point is to gain time; a united representation by the Powers of Europe would undoubtedly have a great effect on the American Government ...<sup>84</sup>

In addition to expressing his fears of a unified republican New World led by the United States and arrayed against the crowns of the Old World, Tsar Alexander asked his contemporaries at the Congress of Verona in 1822:

How could ... after all this, after the ten years struggle of the powers against revolution, after a triumph over it in the Old World, permit the recognition of revolution in the New? The contradiction would be manifest, and the continental alliance undermined to its foundation. Too many examples demonstrate that the contagion of revolutionary principles is arrested by neither distance nor physical obstacles. It crosses the seas, and often appears with all the symptoms of destruction which characterize it, in places where not even any direct contact, any relation of proximity might give ground for comprehension. France knows with what facility and promptitude a revolution can be carried from America to Europe ... The Emperor therefore shares completely the opinion pronounced on this point by the foreign minister of His Most Christian Majesty to the cabinet of London, that the future state of Spanish America concerns the interest of all the Allies, and that it is between them and with the King of Spain that this important question ought to be treated and decided by common accord.<sup>85</sup>

As to what the Tsar meant by the line “France knows with what facility and promptitude a revolution can be carried from America to Europe,” the answer may be revealed from some private words Tsar Alexander had with the French Minister in July 1825, where he advised France not to recognize the independence of Haiti. In this correspondence, the Tsar declared, “In the great struggle we are carrying on, the issue is between good and evil—law against fact—order against license. The present unfortunate example is both risky and dangerous ... The recognition of the independence of the United States led directly to the French Revolution.”<sup>86</sup> Notably, toward the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 79-80.

<sup>85</sup> Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1823-1826*, 131.

<sup>86</sup> Cresson, *The Holy Alliance*, 129-130.

end of his life, the Tsar fell more and more under the sway of the reactionary Austrian Chancellor Klemens von Metternich, who believed that the “first preoccupation of Spain should be to assure as completely and as permanently as possible the possession of the important island of Cuba ... The contemplation of the present and future welfare of the faithful colony [Cuba] cannot fail to strengthen the legitimist party where that party is still *condemned* to struggle against the partisans of independence; it will serve perhaps to revive the courage of the friends of the ancient order in other colonies, where attachment to the mother country is repressed rather than destroyed.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, Metternich saw the vital necessity of the Spanish maintaining their hold on Cuba to encourage loyalists elsewhere in Spanish America.

Furthermore, Metternich’s principal adviser, Freiherr Friedrich von Gentz, advised, “It may still be possible to save Mexico and Peru, by adopting an enlightened and liberal system,” but in the other colonies, it “will perhaps be possible some day to reestablish the royal authority, taking advantage of the civil dissensions which will arise in those unhappy countries; but I do not think that either a continuation of the war or direct negotiations will restore them to Spain.”<sup>88</sup> The Prussians were even more pessimistic, noting that Spanish forces were most likely already revolutionized and unreliable, while the Holy Alliance itself “lack[ed] arms to reach America,” let alone the ability to project its power across the Atlantic without at least the tacit approval or, even more unlikely, outright assistance of Great Britain.<sup>89</sup> Reflecting on the failed attempt to install Bourbon monarchies in Latin America, Chateaubriand later lamented, “The monarchical emancipation of the Spanish colonies by the generous influence of the eldest son of the Bourbons

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<sup>87</sup> Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1823-1826*, 139.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

would have raised France to the highest degree of prosperity and glory. Such was the last dream of my mature years; I believed myself in America, but I awoke in Europe.”<sup>90</sup>

The movements of the monarchies of Europe were made more ominous by the continued existence of several flashpoints for future conflict between the United States and the European Powers, Great Britain included, which understandably preoccupied American policymakers in the postwar world. For example, John Quincy Adams had been tracking both British and Russian movements in the Pacific Northwest of North America in connection with the response of the Holy Allies to Spain’s revolting colonies. In 1818, Adams wrote, “The views of the Russian government, with reference to their own settlements and pretensions on the north-west coast, acquire additional interest; but the whole system of Russian policy, as it bears on her relations with Great Britain, with the European alliance, with Spain and South American affairs, may require the most steady and attentive observation, as it may link itself with objects of importance to the interests and welfare of the United States.”<sup>91</sup> John Quincy Adams’ early attention as Secretary of State during the Monroe Administration was devoted to resolving these and other crises with the governments of Spain, Russia, and Great Britain.

Before adding Spanish claims on the Pacific Northwest of North America to their existing claims, the United States signed the Anglo-American Convention with Great Britain in 1818, in which each party agreed to a joint condominium over the Oregon Country for ten years with the free navigation of its waters and rivers for each side, as well as reaffirming fishing rights off Newfoundland and other commercial agreements. The Anglo-American Convention of 1818 was also important because it drew the boundary between the United States and British North America

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<sup>90</sup> Edward Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America, 1820-1867: Equilibrium in the New World* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 81.

<sup>91</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Writings of John Quincy Adams: 1816-1819* (United States: Macmillan, 1916), 374.

at the 49th parallel west from the Lake of the Woods to the Continental Divide of the Rocky Mountains, thus exchanging the northernmost part of the Mississippi Valley watershed that had been part of the Louisiana Purchase for areas of Rupert's Land and part of the Red River Colony or Selkirk Settlement/Assiniboia Grant south the 49th parallel. Notably, the United States and Great Britain had previously agreed to a demilitarization of the Great Lakes in the separate Rush–Bagot Agreement from only a year before. However, in a letter dated July 22, 1823, in discussing British Claims in Oregon with U.S. Minister to the U.K., Richard Rush, John Quincy Adams asserted what would become the “Non-Colonization” principle of the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>92</sup>

Adams noted to Rush that British newspapers were claiming that “the whole country, from the latitude 56°30' to the boundary of the United States, in latitude 48°, or thereabouts, is now and has long been in the actual possession of the British Northwest Company,” but Adams responded, “It is not imaginable that, in the present condition of the world, *any* European nation should entertain the project of settling a colony on the Northwest Coast of America.”<sup>93</sup> In what would become the foundation of the Monroe Doctrine, John Quincy Adams wrote that:

The exclusive rights of Spain to any part of the American continents have ceased ... Those independent nations will possess the rights incident to that condition, and their territories, will, of course, be subject to no exclusive right of navigation in their vicinity, or of access to them by any foreign nation. A necessary consequence of this state of things will be, that the American continents, henceforth, will no longer be subjects of colonization. Occupied by civilized independent nations, they will be accessible to Europeans and to each other on that footing alone, and the Pacific Ocean in every part of it will remain open to the navigation of all nations, in like manner with the Atlantic ... The application of colonial principles of exclusion, therefore, cannot be admitted by the United States as lawful upon any part of the Northwest Coast of America, or as belonging to any European nation. Their own [U.S.] settlements there, when organized as Territorial Governments,

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<sup>92</sup> Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, 172-173.

<sup>93</sup> John Quincy Adams and Walter LaFeber, *John Quincy Adams and American Continental Empire* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 90-91.

will be adapted to the freedom of their own institutions, and, as constituent parts of the Union, be subject to the principles and provisions of their constitution.<sup>94</sup>

Also, regarding Russian claims to the Oregon Country, in particular Tsar Alexander's Imperial Ukase of 1821, Adams wrote, "The pretensions of the Imperial Government extend to an exclusive territorial jurisdiction from the forty-fifth degree of north latitude, on the Asiatic coast, to the latitude of fifty one north on the western coast of the American continent; and they assume the right of interdicting the navigation and the fishery of all other nations to the extent of one hundred miles from the whole of that coast. The United States can admit no part of these claims."<sup>95</sup> On July 17, 1823, Adams bluntly told the Russian Minister to the United States, Baron de Tuvill, that the United States would "contest the right of Russia to any territorial establishment on this continent, and that we should assume distinctly the principle that the American continents are no longer subjects for any new European colonial establishments."<sup>96</sup> For most of the post-Napoleonic War period, the question of whether the British would remain an unofficial member of the Holy Alliance was a great mystery to many American diplomats. The natural corollary to this question was whether or not Great Britain would assist or passively allow the Holy Alliance to reimpose Spain's royal authority over its rebelling colonies.

This question was soon answered when U.S. Minister to the United Kingdom Richard Rush received a letter from British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs George Canning on August 22, 1823. In this note, Canning officially stated British policy toward Spain's rebelling colonies. The letter consisted of five main points. First, Canning stated that his government believed that the recovery of the colonies in question by Spain was hopeless. Second, the issue of their recognition as independent states was only a matter of time. Third, Great Britain would not stand in the way

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 91-92.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 98.

of any treaty between those colonies and Spain for a peaceful resolution. Fourth, Great Britain stated its intentions that it did not seek to take possession of any part of the former Spanish Empire. Fifth, Great Britain asserted its position that it would not view the transfer of any part of those former colonies to another power with indifference. Canning then proceeded to ask the U.S. Minister if the Americans could concur with these sentiments and officially affirm them to be United States policy as well and, if so, if they would be willing to issue a joint statement to that effect. Canning argued that it would be necessary to warn France and the Holy Alliance not to intervene to assist Spain in recovering her former colonies while also promising Spain that the United States and Great Britain would not attempt to take any of those colonies or parts of those colonies for themselves.<sup>97</sup>

After reading Canning's proposal, Rush stated that he could not commit the U.S. to affirm those principles without instructions from Washington. Stunned by the British proposal, Rush nevertheless believed that the offer would not have been made if some imminent threat of intervention by the Holy Alliance were not present. However, Rush remained skeptical of British intentions and privately expressed his reservations toward Canning's proposals:

I am bound to own, that I shall not be able to avoid, at bottom, some distrust of the motives of all such advances to me, whether directly or indirectly, by this government, at this particular juncture of the world. The estimate which I have formed of the genius of this government, as well as of the characters who direct, or who influence, all its operations, would lead me to fear that we are not as yet likely to witness any very material changes in the part which Britain has acted in the world for the past fifty years, when the cause of freedom has been at stake; the part which she acted in 1774 in America, which she has since acted in Europe, and is now acting in Ireland. I shall therefore find it hard to keep from my mind the suspicion that the approaches of her ministers to me at this portentous juncture for a concert of policy which they have not heretofore courted with the United States, are bottomed on their own calculations.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ernest R. May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 5-6.

<sup>98</sup> Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1823-1826*, 82.

Given recent Anglo-American diplomatic history, Rush was probably warranted in his distrust of the British government. Because Rush doubted the sincerity of the British offer, he continually resisted Canning's repeated urgings to exceed his negotiating authority and sign a joint statement. Meanwhile, President Monroe's Cabinet gathered on October 11, 1823, to discuss Canning's proposal. Although little is recorded of the cabinet's initial reactions, the counsel of Monroe's closest advisers and confidantes was sought. Monroe even shared the Rush dispatches with his two presidential predecessors, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, asking them each for their thoughts on the subject at hand. In his letter to Madison, Monroe wrote:

Two dispatches have been lately receiv[e]d from Mr. Rush, communicating a proposition from Mr Canning ... of cooperation between our two governments, in opposing, by reciprocal declaration, in the first instance, a project which he thinks exists, of the holy alliance, to invade the So[uth]. american states, as soon as the business with Spain is settled, & which he intimates the members of that alliance expect will soon be settled ... My earnest wish is to have your & his [Jefferson's] opinion, as to the part, which we ought to take, in a question of such vital importance. My own impression is, that the British government is sensible, that it can no longer, maintain that indecisive & inactive policy, which it has pursued, in the great question which agitates Europe, and that it has avail[e]d itself of the alledged project of the allied powers, of the truth of which however I have no doubt, to assume a decisive attitude against them, & in so doing, to move in concert with us, should we be so disposed ... I can not doubt, if they [the Holy Alliance] succeeded with the colonies they would, in the next instance, invade us. Ought we not then to encourage G[reat].B[ritain]., in the course she seems disposed to pursue, & avail ourselves, of any service she can render, in a cause which tho' important to her, as to balance of power, commerce &c, is vital to us, as to government.<sup>99</sup>

In response to Monroe's request, Jefferson responded on October 24, 1823:

Our first and fundamental maxim should be, never to entangle ourselves in the broils of Europe; our second, never to suffer Europe to intermeddle in Cis-Atlantic affairs. America, North & South, has a set of interests distinct from those of Europe, and peculiarly her own. she should therefore have a system of her own, separate and apart from that of Europe. while the last is laboring to become the domicil[e] of despotism, our endeavor should surely be to make our hemisphere that of freedom. One nation [Great Britain], most of all, could disturb us in this pursuit,

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<sup>99</sup> "To James Madison from James Monroe, 17 October 1823," in *The Papers of James Madison, Retirement Series, Vol. 3, 1 March 1823–24 February 1826*, eds. David B. Mattern, J. C. A. Stagg, Mary Parke Johnson, and Katherine E. Harbury (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 142-143.



she now offers to lead, aid, and accompany us in it. by acceding to her proposition, we detach her from the band of despots, bring her mighty weight into the scale of free government, and emancipate at one stroke a whole continent ... Great Britain is the nation which can do us the most harm of any one, or all on earth; and with her on our side we need not fear the whole world. With her then we should the most sedulously nourish a cordial friendship ... not that I would purchase even her amity at the price of taking part in her wars. but the war in which the present proposition might engage us ... is not her war, but ours. It's object is to introduce and to establish the American system, of ousting from our land all foreign nations, of never permitting the powers of Europe to intermeddle with the affairs of our nations. It is to maintain our own principle, not to depart from it. and if, to facilitate this, we can effect a division in the body of the European powers, and draw over to our side it's most powerful member, surely we should do it. But I am clearly of Mr. Canning's opinion, that it will prevent war, instead of provoking it. With Great Britain withdrawn from their scale and shifted into that of our two continents, all Europe combined would not dare to risk war.<sup>100</sup>

After addressing the magnitude of the British offer and how it marked a watershed event in human affairs, Jefferson then turned his attention to the question of pledging the United States not to expand to include any part of the former Spanish Empire. Jefferson continued, stating:

But we have first to ask ourselves a question. Do we wish to acquire to our own Confederacy any one or more of the Spanish provinces? I candidly confess that I have ever looked on Cuba as the most interesting addition which could ever be made to our system of states. the controul which, with Florida point this island would give us over the Gulph of Mexico, and the countries and the Isthmus bordering on it, as well as all those whose waters flow into it, would fill up the measure of our political well-being. Yet, as I am sensible that this can never be obtained, even with her own consent, but by war; and as her independance, which is our second interest, and especially her independance of England, can be secured without it, I have no hesitation in abandoning my first wish to future chances, and accepting it's independance with peace, and the friendship of England, rather than it's association, at the expence of war, and her enmity. I could honestly therefore join in the declaration proposed that we aim not at the acquisition of any of those possessions, that we will not stand in the way of any amicable arrangement between them and the mother country: but that we will oppose, with all our means, the forcible interposition of any other power, either as auxiliary, stipendiary, or under any other form or pretext, and most especially their transfer to any power, by conquest, cession, or acquisition in any other way. I should think it therefore advisable that the Executive should enco[u]rage the British government to a

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<sup>100</sup> "Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, October 24, 1823," in *Memoirs, Correspondence and Private Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Late President of the United States: Volume 4* (United Kingdom: Colburn and Bentley, 1829), 390-392.

continuance in the dispositions expressed in these letters, by an assurance of his concurrence with them ...<sup>101</sup>

Similar to Jefferson's point that the British offer was too good to ignore, Madison responded on October 30, 1823:

From the disclosures of Mr. Canning it appears, as was otherwise to be inferred, that the success of France ag[ain]st Spain would be followed by attempts of the Holy Alliance to reduce the revolutionized colonies of the latter to their former dependence. The professions we have made to these neighbours, our sympathy with their liberties & independence, the deep interests we have in the most friendly relations with them, and the consequences threatened by a command of their resources by the Great Powers confederated ag[ain]st the Rights & Reforms of which we have given so conspicuous & persuasive an example, all unite in calling for our efforts to defeat the meditated crusade. It is particularly fortunate that the policy of G[reat] Britain, tho[ugh] guided by calculations different from ours, has presented a co-operation for an object the same with ours. With that co-operation we have nothing to fear from the rest of Europe; and with it the best reliance on success to our just & laudable views. There ought not to be any backwardness therefore, I think, in meeting her in the way she has proposed ... Our co-operation is due to ourselves & to the world: and whilst it must ensure success in the event of an appeal to force, it doubles the chance of success without that appeal. It is not improbable that G[reat] B[ritain] would like best to have the sole merit of being the champion of her new friends, notwithstanding the greater difficulty to be encountered, but for the dilemma in which she would be placed ... On the supposition that no form could be given to the Act clearing it of a pledge to follow it up by war, we ought to compare the good to be done, with the little injury to be apprehended to the U.S., shielded as their interests would be by the power & the fleets of G[reat] Britain united with their own.<sup>102</sup>

Soon after receiving the former president's advice, Monroe's Cabinet reassembled in early November, at which time President Monroe had already received the recommendations of Jefferson and Madison, with both counseling him to accept Canning's proposal. As Jefferson noted, if the United States accepted, it would virtually amount to an alliance between the United States and Great Britain against the Holy Alliance in defense of an independent Latin America,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 390-392.

<sup>102</sup> "James Madison to James Monroe, October 30, 1823," in *The Papers of James Madison, Retirement Series, Vol. 3, 1 March 1823–24 February 1826*, eds. David B. Mattern, J. C. A. Stagg, Mary Parke Johnson, and Katherine E. Harbury (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 149-150.

and although it might mean war, the prospect of such an alliance would probably deter the Holy Alliance from attempting to subdue Spain's former colonies. Jefferson's only personal regret would be having to forswear any future annexation of Cuba, through purchase or conquest, although he reasoned that a free Cuba might eventually enter the Union voluntarily. Madison went even further than Jefferson and recommended accepting Canning's proposals, along with the idea of joint support for the Greeks fighting for independence from the Ottoman Empire in Europe.<sup>103</sup> However, Monroe made it very clear that he "was averse to any course which should have the appearance of taking a position subordinate to that of Great Britain, and suggested the idea of sending a special Minister to protest against the interposition of the Holy Alliance."<sup>104</sup> This inclination by Monroe would be seconded by John Quincy Adams in the latter's own reasoning.

In Monroe's Cabinet, John Quincy Adams suggested that his exchange with Russian Minister Baron Tuyl might provide a "convenient opportunity for us to take our stand against the Holy Alliance, and at the same time to decline the overture of Great Britain ..." for as Adams noted, it "would be more candid, as well as more dignified, to avow our principles explicitly to Russia and France, than to come in as a cock-boat in the wake of the British man-of-war."<sup>105</sup> On November 21, 1823, in another cabinet meeting, Adams discussed his draft for the diplomatic notes that would be sent alongside the Monroe Doctrine and would directly state U.S. opposition to the monarchical principle of the nations of the Holy Alliance, writing, "My purpose would be in a moderate and conciliatory manner, but with a firm and determined spirit, to declare our dissent from the principles avowed in those communications; to assert those upon which our own Government is founded, and, while disclaiming all intention of attempting to propagate them by

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<sup>103</sup> May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine*, 197.

<sup>104</sup> Adams and LaFeber, *John Quincy Adams and American Continental Empire*, 101.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

force, and all interference with the political affairs of Europe, to declare our expectation and hope that the European powers will equally abstain from the attempt to spread their principles in the American hemisphere, or to subjugate by force any of these continents to their will.”<sup>106</sup> With this, John Quincy Adams’ own hand is seen in the development of the Monroe Doctrine.

In his *Memoirs*, Adams would note that President Monroe wanted to include a criticism of the Holy Alliance’s conduct in Europe regarding France’s Invasion of Spain and a statement on the independence of Greece. On November 21, 1823, Adams cautioned Monroe against any criticism of the Holy Alliance’s actions on the European continent, arguing that any statement to that effect would be tantamount to “a summons to arms—to arms against all Europe, and for objects of policy exclusively European—Greece and Spain.” Adams stated, “For more than thirty years Europe had been in convulsions; every nation almost of which it is composed, alternately invading and invaded. Empires, kingdoms, principalities, had been overthrown, revolutionized, and counter-revolutionized, and we had looked on safe in our distance beyond an intervening ocean, and avowing a total forbearance to interfere in any of the combinations of European politics.”<sup>107</sup> Adams feared that in striking a belligerent tone, the United States would be courting catastrophe, possibly provoking intervention by the Holy Alliance rather than dissuading them.

As such, Adams believed that an aggressive condemnation by Monroe “would at once buckle on the harness and throw down the gauntlet. It would have the air of open defiance to all Europe, and I should not be surprised if the first answer to it from Spain and France, and even Russia, should be to break off their diplomatic intercourse with us ... if we must come to an issue with Europe, let us keep it off as long as possible. Let us use all possible means to carry the opinion

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

of the nation with us, and the opinion of the world.”<sup>108</sup> The next day, Adams counseled Monroe, “urging him to abstain from everything in his message which the Holy Allies could make a pretext for construing into aggression upon them,” advising the president that he should leave office “at peace and in amity with all the world,” but “if this could not be, if the Holy Alliance were determined to make up an issue with us, it was our policy to meet, and not to make it. We should retreat to the wall before taking to arms, and be sure at every step to put them as much as possible in the wrong.” Adams asserted, “The ground that I wish to take is that of earnest remonstrance against the interference of the European powers by force with South America, but to disclaim all interference on our part with Europe; to make an American cause, and adhere inflexibly to that.”<sup>109</sup> Therefore, Adams continued to affirm his belief that the doctrine ought to be defensive in nature and not offend the sensibilities of the European powers.

In the last cabinet meeting on November 26, 1823, that discussed what would become known as the Monroe Doctrine, Adams again cautioned Monroe that “if an issue must be made up between us and the Holy Alliance, it ought to be upon grounds exclusively American; that we should separate it from all European concerns, disclaim all intention of interfering with these, and make the stand altogether for an American cause; that at the same time the answer to be given to the Russian communications should be used as the means of answering also the proposals of Mr. George Canning, and of assuming the attitude to be maintained by the United States with reference to the designs of the Holy Alliance upon South America.”<sup>110</sup> As the cabinet discussed whether it would mean war if the Holy Alliance chose to ignore Monroe’s warning, Attorney General William Wirt noted that Congress would have to make that ultimate determination, and Secretary

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

of War John C. Calhoun believed that Congress might have to back Monroe's statement with force to uphold American prestige and honor.

Adams echoed these sentiments the day before, cautioning that:

at all events, nothing that we should now do would commit us to absolute war; that Great Britain was already committed more than we; that the interest of no one of the allied powers would be promoted by the restoration of South America to Spain, that the interest of each one of them was against it, and that if they could possibly agree among themselves upon a partition principle, the only possible bait they could offer to Great Britain for acceding to it was Cuba, which neither they nor Spain would consent to give her; that my reliance upon the co-operation of Great Britain rested not upon her principles, but her interest.<sup>111</sup>

Also on November 26, 1823, Adams again noted his suspicions:

The Holy Alliance had any intention of ultimately attacking us, or meant to establish monarchy among us. But if they should really invade South America, and especially Mexico, it was impossible, in the nature of things, that they should do it to restore the old exclusive dominion of Spain. Spain had not, and never could again have, the physical force to maintain that dominion; and if the countries should be kept in subjugation by the armies of the Allies, was it in human absurdity to imagine that they should waste their blood and treasure to prohibit their own subjects upon pain of death to set foot upon those territories? Surely not. If then the Holy Allies should subdue Spanish America, however they might at first set up the standard of Spain, the ultimate result of their undertaking would be to recolonize them, partitioned out among themselves. Russia might take California, Peru, Chili; France, Mexico—where we know she has been intriguing to get a monarchy under a Prince of the House of Bourbon, as well as Buenos Ayres. And Great Britain, as her last resort, if she could not resist this course of things, would take at least the island of Cuba for her share of the scramble. Then what would be our situation—England holding Cuba, France, Mexico? And Mr. Gallatin had told me within these four days that Hyde de Neuville had said to him, in the presence and hearing of ten or twelve persons, that if we did not yield to the claim of France under the eight[h] article of the Louisiana Convention, she ought to go and take the country, and that she had a strong party there. The danger, therefore, was brought to our own doors, and I thought we could not too soon take our stand to repel it.<sup>112</sup>

Therefore, Adams admitted that, although it was unlikely that the Holy Alliance would intervene in Spanish America because of the anticipated and formidable opposition of the Royal

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>112</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848. Volume VI* (United States: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1874), 207.

Navy, Spain or the Holy Alliance might offer Great Britain the island of Cuba as a reward for their assistance. In this case, the nightmare scenario envisioned by Adams might become a reality, with France on the Sabine River and within striking distance of New Orleans, and Great Britain entrenched in Cuba, controlling access to the Gulf of Mexico. The concern that the British might be interested in acquiring Cuba was not unfounded because many of their newspapers had been calling for the incorporation of that island after the U.S. purchase of Florida in 1819. For example, the British paper *The Quarterly Review* asked:

Why does not England, *as part of the indemnity* due to her from Spain, transfer to her own sceptre the sovereignty of Cuba; seeing that the Havanna commands the passage from the Gulf of Mexico? Why does she not take possession of Panama on the south, and Darien on the north, and join the Waters of the Atlantic with those of the Pacific ocean, in order to resuscitate her drooping commerce? Or is it her intention still to slumber on until she is awakened from the stupefaction of her dreams by the final fall of Spanish America, and of her own North American provinces, beneath the ever-widening power of the United States?<sup>113</sup>

Another paper calling for the British acquisition of Cuba was titled “Remarks on the Cession of the Floridas to the United States of America, and on the Necessity of Acquiring the Island of Cuba by Great Britain” by J. Freeman Rattenbury. In this controversial pamphlet, Rattenbury asserted that:

It is our bounden duty, it is our imperative policy to anticipate the rivalry of the United States, and by erecting a power capable of contending with them, in their own hemisphere, prevent the destruction of our commerce ... hereafter the contest for the empire of the sea will be between England and the North American Union, a warfare suited to the prejudices of their people, and the character of their country. Spain will doubtless reluctantly consent to the alienation of ... Cuba from her sovereignty, but I trust that the Ministers of Great Britain will not permit that nation to withhold from us a possession rendered necessary to the protection of our commerce, by the weakness which has induced her to cede to the demands and menaces of the United States, the important position of the Floridas. If ever there existed a necessity for departing from the ordinary courtesy and delicacy of nations—if ever self-defence justifies coercion, surely the present is the moment;

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<sup>113</sup> Edward Howland Tatum, *The United States and Europe, 1815-1823: A Study in the Background of the Monroe Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), 165.

and the apologists for the seizure of the Danish fleet at Copenhagen, cannot want an excuse for this equally necessary violence.<sup>114</sup>

Given the bellicose calls from the British press to take Cuba as compensation for the U.S. acquisition of Florida, American concerns over Cuba seemed to be well founded. These suspicions concerning British designs on Cuba persisted well beyond 1819, for as late as the winter of 1822–1823, reports from U.S. Minister in Spain John Forsyth warned of a “Squadron sent to Havana by the British” and “the pressure upon Spain at this moment when she has so much reason to dread the determination of the European Sovereigns, by Great Britain, all combine to shew the necessity of watchfulness on our part as to the designs of that Power and the probability of their accomplishment afforded by the present condition and attitude of this Country.”<sup>115</sup> Adams wrote Forsyth’s successor in Spain, Hugh Nelson, about the vital strategic position that Cuba held relative to the security of the United States, stating the following on April 28, 1823:

In the war between France and Spain now commencing, other interests, peculiarly ours, will in all probability be deeply involved. Whatever may be the issue of this war, as between those two European powers, it may be taken for granted that the dominion of Spain upon the American continents, North and South, is irrecoverably gone. But the islands of Cuba and of Porto Rico still remain nominally and so far really dependent upon her, that she yet possesses the power of transferring her own dominion over them, together with the possession of them, to others. These islands, from their local position, are natural appendages to the North American continent; and one of them, Cuba, [is] almost in sight of our shores, from a multitude of considerations [it] has become an object of transcendent important to the political and commercial interests of our Union. It[s] commanding position with reference to the Gulf of Mexico and the West India seas; the character of its population; its situation midway between our southern coast and the island of San Domingo; its safe and capacious harbor of the Havana, fronting a long line of our shores destitute of the same advantage; the nature of its productions and of its wants, furnishing the supplies and needing the returns of a commerce immensely profitable and mutually beneficial; give it an importance in the sum of our national interests, with which that of no other foreign territory can be compared, and little inferior to that which binds the different members of this Union together.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 165-166.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>116</sup> Adams and LaFeber, *John Quincy Adams and American Continental Empire*, 128-131.



In addition to explaining the results of Cuba possibly falling into British hands, Adams also noted a scenario where “an alliance between Great Britain and Spain may be one of the first fruits of this war [between Spain and France]. A guarantee of the island to Spain may be among the stipulations of that alliance. ...” Adams also warned that “the transfer of Cuba to Great Britain would be an event unpropitious to the interests of this Union ...” and instructed Nelson “not to conceal from Spanish government the repugnance of the United States to the transfer of the island of Cuba to any other power ...” and “that the condition of Cuba cannot be changed without affecting in an eminent degree the welfare of this Union, and ... that we should consider an attempt to transfer the island, against the will of its inhabitants, as subversive of their rights, no less than of our interests; and that, as it would give them the perfect right of resisting such transfer, by declaring their own independence, so if they should ... the United States will be fully justified in supporting them to carry it into effect.”<sup>117</sup> Therefore, Adams implied that if it should appear that Cuba might be transferred from Spain to Great Britain, the U.S. might back the island’s independence as a preferable alternative to British domination.

Finally, on December 2, 1823, Monroe transmitted the message that would later become known as the Monroe Doctrine to Congress. In this statement, Monroe declared:

At the proposal of the Russian Imperial Government ... a full power and instructions have been transmitted to the minister of the United States at St. Petersburg to arrange by amicable negotiation the respective rights and interests of the two nations on the North West coast of this continent. A similar proposal had been made by His Imperial Majesty to the Government of Great Britain, which has likewise been acceded to ... the occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers ... In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy so to do. It is only when our rights are invaded or seriously menaced that we resent injuries or make preparation for our defense. With the movements in

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 128-131.

this hemisphere we are of necessity more immediately connected, and by causes which must be obvious to all enlightened and impartial observers. The political system of the allied powers is essentially different in this respect from that of America ... We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety. With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere, but with the Governments who have declared their independence and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States ... in regard to those continents circumstances are eminently and conspicuously different. It is impossible that the allied powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness; nor can anyone believe that our southern brethren, if left to themselves, would adopt it of their own accord. It is equally impossible, therefore, that we should behold such interposition in any form with indifference.<sup>118</sup>

The overall response of most of the Old World to the Monroe Doctrine was swift but predictably negative. Klemens Von Metternich remarked on this:

These United States of America, which we have seen arise and grow, and which during their too short youth already meditated projects which they dared not then avow, have suddenly left a sphere too narrow for their ambition, and have astonished Europe by a new act of revolt, more unprovoked, fully as audacious, and no less dangerous than the former. They have distinctly and clearly announced their intention to set not only power against power, but, to express it more exactly, altar against altar. In their indecent declarations they have cast blame and scorn on the institutions of Europe most worthy of respect, on the principles of its greatest sovereigns, on the whole of those measures which a sacred duty no less than an evident necessity has forced our governments to adopt to frustrate plans most criminal. In permitting themselves these unprovoked attacks, in fostering revolutions wherever they show themselves, in regretting those which have failed, in extending a helping hand to those which seem to prosper, they lend new strength to the apostles of sedition, and reanimate the courage of every conspirator. If this flood of evil doctrines and pernicious examples should extend over the whole of America, what would become of our religious and political institutions, of the moral force of our governments, and of that conservative system which has saved Europe from complete dissolution?<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> James Monroe, "The Monroe Doctrine," *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1897, Volume II*, ed. James Richardson (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898), 209-220.

<sup>119</sup> Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1823-1826*, 167.

Similarly negative was the response of the Russian Minister to the United States, Baron Von Tuyll, who responded, stating, “The attitude which the government of the United States has assumed is undoubtedly of such a nature as to demand in an American expedition undertaken by Spain and her Allies a considerable development of means and of military force. But once the decision is taken to attempt it, I should not think that the course taken by the United States, unsupported by Great Britain, would be of a nature to change such a decision.”<sup>120</sup> Also skeptical of the United States’ ability to enforce its pretensions, Baron Tuyll expressed a similar sentiment:

The American government is far from finding in its treasury the pecuniary means indispensable to equip a considerable armament. It appears extremely doubtful whether it would succeed in obtaining the authority to impose sufficient taxes for such a purpose unless it was a question of defending from menacing attack the principal states of the Union, and even in such a case it would, to all appearances, find itself a prey to considerable embarrassment. It is also doubtful whether it enjoys either at home or abroad sufficient credit to float loans sufficient to defray the expenses which such an enterprise would entail ... it is so difficult to imagine that it would succeed in raising forces sufficiently imposing to paralyze the efforts of a powerful expedition, directed against New Spain, or against Colombia, and basing itself in every case at Havana. It would succeed only with difficulty in sending aid of any kind, maritime aid excepted, in money, for the reasons explained above; in troops, because they are few in number, and because, in such circumstances, it would have to guard its own coasts ... But will the American government wish to wage a war of this nature? The lofty tone in which it has just expressed itself seems to make such a war a necessity. After having put itself forward with so much arrogance, it would compromise itself in the eyes of its own people, it would lose all its prestige with foreign governments, if it consented to remain the spectator of an expedition directed against the Spanish colonies, of which it has so loftily proclaimed itself the defender.<sup>121</sup>

However, despite finding the Monroe Doctrine repugnant, the Tsar counseled his ministers not to comment on the United States’ new policy, noting in diplomatic instructions that “His Majesty therefore invites you to preserve the passive attitude which you have deemed proper to adopt, and to continue to maintain the silence which you have imposed upon yourself.”<sup>122</sup> Not

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 172-173.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

wanting to precipitate a break in relations with the United States, the Tsar thought it best to let the apparent American effrontery slide. Meanwhile, the British governments' reaction to the Monroe Doctrine was interesting in its own way. In a letter to a friend, Canning wrote, "The Yankees will shout in triumph; but it is they who lose most by our decision. The great danger of the time—a danger which the policy of the European System would have fostered, was a division of the World into European and American, Republican and Monarchial; a league of worn-out Gov[ernmen]ts, on the one hand, and of youthful and st[i]rring Nations, with the U[nited] States at their head, on the other. We slip in between, and plant ourselves in Mexico. The U[nited] States have gotten the start of us in vain, and we link once more America to Europe. Six months more—and the mischief would have been done."<sup>123</sup> Similar to Chateaubriand's earlier lament, Canning's reminiscence also was filled of talk of frustrated designs and unfulfilled opportunities.

As to what exactly Canning was planning, as an alternative to the "universal democracy" of the United States and the reactionary monarchism of Continental Europe, Canning hoped to establish constitutional monarchies based on the British model in Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Brazil. According to Canning, it "would cure the evils of universal democracy and prevent the drawing of the line of demarcation which I most dread- America *versus* Europe."<sup>124</sup> As Canning later reflected on his policy, he noted, "I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old."<sup>125</sup> According to British historian H. W. V. Temperley, Canning "wished therefore to delay the recognition of republics, until it was clear that the cause of constitutional kings was lost."<sup>126</sup> If true, this would explain Canning's weak reply to Rush's question asking why Great Britain had

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<sup>123</sup> Harold William Vazeille Temperley, "The Later American Policy of George Canning," *The American Historical Review* 11, no. 4 (1906): 781-782.

<sup>124</sup> H. W. V. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827* (London: Frank Cass and Co. LTD, 1966), 129, 139.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 154.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

thus far failed to recognize the democratic republics of Latin America. Still, Canning was not the only Briton who feared a close connection between the U.S. and Latin America, as Lord Liverpool wrote Wellington, “If we allow these new states to consolidate their system and their policy with the United States of America, it will in a very few years prove fatal to our greatness, if not endanger our safety.”<sup>127</sup> These quotes demonstrate that a fear persisted among some British officials that the United States might succeed in drawing other American states into its sphere of influence.

Canning later elaborated on his earlier apprehensions in a memorandum, writing of the growing maritime power of the United States, he stated:

In this branch of national industry the people of the United States are become more formidable rivals to us than any other nation which has ever yet existed ... The views and policy of the North Americans seem mainly directed towards supplanting us in navigation in every quarter of the globe, but more particularly in the seas contiguous to America ... Sooner or later we shall probably have to contend with the combined maritime power of France and of the United States. The disposition of the new States is at present highly favourable to England. It we take the advantage of that disposition, we may establish through our influence with them a fair counterpoise to that combined maritime power.<sup>128</sup>

In addition, regarding the territorial expansion of the United States in the direction of Mexico, Temperley wrote that Canning “used every effort to get her [the United States] to observe towards Mexico the boundaries laid down with Old Spain and to dissuade her [the United States] from incursions into Texas. Definitely settled territorial boundaries were, in his view, the best guarantee of the existing balance of power, and any questioning of them a sure sign of its disturbance.”<sup>129</sup> On the idea of using an independent Mexico as a barrier to U.S. expansionism and influence, George Canning candidly admitted the following in private:

The other and perhaps still more powerful motive is my apprehension of the ambition and ascendancy of the U[nited] S[tates] of Am[erica]: It is obviously the

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<sup>127</sup> Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 64-65.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>129</sup> Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827*, 466.

policy of that Gov[ernmen]t to connect itself with all the powers of America in a general Transatlantic League, of which it would have the sole direction. I need only say how inconvenient such may be in time of peace, and how formidable in case of war. I believe we now have the opportunity (but it may not last long) of opposing a powerful barrier to the influence of the U[nited] S[tates] by an amicable connection with Mexico, which from its position must be either subservient to or jealous of the U[nited] S[tates]. In point of population and resources it is at least equal to all the rest of the Spanish colonies; and may naturally expect to take the lead in its connections with the powers of Europe. I by no means think it at present necessary to go beyond the mere relations of amity and commercial intercourse; but if we hesitate much longer ... all the new states will be led to conclude that we regret their friendship upon principle, as of a dangerous and revolutionary character, and will be driven to throw themselves under the protection of the U[nited] S[tates], as the only means of security.<sup>130</sup>

Although the British would ultimately succeed in pulling Latin America into the economic orbit of Great Britain as Canning had intended, the Monroe Doctrine still served several important purposes. Indeed, too few historians have recognized the connection between the original Monroe Doctrine and the movement for Manifest Destiny or its predecessor, Continentalism. However, during the cabinet debates over the Monroe Doctrine, an interesting exchange took place between John Quincy Adams and John C. Calhoun concerning the future of American expansion, one which established a clear link between Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine. Calhoun had urged the acceptance of Canning's proposal with reasoning similar to that of Jefferson and Madison, arguing that, by allying with the only power capable of harming the United States, America would not only secure Latin America from the Holy Alliance, but also secure it from Great Britain itself. Adams responded to Calhoun by reminding him that, in accepting Canning's proposal, it would mean that the United States would have to forswear the future acquisition of Cuba or Texas.<sup>131</sup> Adams put the case quite plainly, stating, "The object of Canning appears to have been to obtain some public pledge from the Government of the United States, ostensibly against the forcible

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<sup>130</sup> H. W. V. Temperley, "The Later American Policy of George Canning." *The American Historical Review* 11, no. 4 (1906): 781-782.

<sup>131</sup> May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine*, 199.

interference of the Holy Alliance between Spain and South America: but really, or especially against the acquisition to the United States themselves of any part of the Spanish-American possessions.”<sup>132</sup> On this point, Adams also recorded Calhoun’s response in his diary, writing that:

Mr. Calhoun inclined to giving a discretionary power to Mr. Rush to join in a declaration against the interference of the Holy Allies, if necessary, even if it should pledge us not to take Cuba or the province of Texas; because the power of Great Britain being greater than ours to seize upon them, we should get the advantage of obtaining from her the same declaration we should make ourselves ... I thought the cases not parallel. We have no intention of seizing either Texas or Cuba. But the inhabitants of either or both may exercise their primitive rights, and solicit a union with us. They will certainly do no such thing to Great Britain. By joining with her, therefore, in her proposed declaration, we give her a substantial and perhaps inconvenient pledge against ourselves, and really obtain nothing in return. Without entering now into the enquiry of the expediency of our annexing Texas or Cuba to our Union, we should at least keep ourselves free to act as emergencies may arise, and not tie ourselves down to any principle which might immediately afterwards be brought to bear against ourselves.<sup>133</sup>

Still, Adams seriously questioned Calhoun’s eagerness to accept a British proposal that would have sacrificed territories which Calhoun desired, such as Cuba or Texas. Indeed, in a letter to Andrew Jackson, Calhoun had once wrote:

I entirely agree with you, as to the importance of Cuba to our country. It is, in my opinion, not only the first commercial and military position in the world, but is the Key stone of our Union. No American statesman ought ever to withdraw his eye from it; and the greatest calamity ought to be endured by us, rather than it should pass into the hands of England. That she desires it, and would seize it, if a fair opportunity presented itself, I cannot doubt; and that, such an event would endanger our union, is to me very manifest ... Should our relation with Spain end in a rupture, we ought to be prepared immediately, at the very commencement of the hostilities, to seize on it, and to hold it for ever ... I think there are strong reasons, why we ought, at first, to limit our operations to Florida, and rest there for the present, unless Spain should choose to come to a rupture with us; or that the designs of England on (it,) Cuba should become sufficiently manifest.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Adams and LaFeber, *John Quincy Adams and American Continental Empire*, 101.

<sup>133</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848. Volume VI* (United States: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1874), 178.

<sup>134</sup> Andrew Jackson, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume IV, 1816-1820*, eds. Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and George H. Hoemann (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 352.

On the goal of the eventual U.S. acquisition of Cuba, Adams and Calhoun were, at the time, of one accord. Concerning the future acquisition of Cuba, Adams had previously stated to Calhoun his opinion that it was “scarcely possible to resist the conviction that the annexation of Cuba to our federal republic will be indispensable to the continuance and integrity of the Union itself ... Cuba, [if] forcibly disjoined from its own unnatural connection with Spain, and incapable of self-support, can gravitate only towards the North American Union, which by the same law of nature cannot cast her off from its bosom.”<sup>135</sup> Calhoun had long wanted the United States to acquire Cuba as “two dangers to be averted by that event; one that the island should fall into the hands of Great Britain; the other, that it should be revolutionized by negroes.”<sup>136</sup> That Cuba should ultimately become part of the Union and under no circumstances should it ever fall into the hands of Great Britain was a widely held desire among American statesmen. In his conversations with Calhoun, Adams touched upon an important scenario regarding Texas that would happen nearly two decades later: the contingency that Texas would voluntarily want to become part of the Union, and, furthermore, that the United States must be free to act in just such an emergency.

In the first book of his two-volume biography on John Quincy Adams, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy*, Samuel Flagg Bemis wrote that in refusing Canning’s proposal, “John Quincy Adams did not want to bind the United States categorically against its Manifest Destiny.”<sup>137</sup> Also, Bemis would go on to say that the Monroe Doctrine “was inseparable from the continental expansion of the United States. It was the voice of Manifest Destiny.”<sup>138</sup> Bemis briefly explained in the footnotes of the second volume of Adams’ biography,

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<sup>135</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Writings of John Quincy Adams, Volume VII* (United States: Macmillan, 1917), 373.

<sup>136</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs: Volume VI*, 70-72.

<sup>137</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1949), 384.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 407.



*John Quincy Adams and the Union*, why he chose to use the words Manifest Destiny to refer to U.S. expansionism before the origin of the actual phrase by John O’Sullivan in 1845, noting that historian John C. Parish, in his lecture “*The Emergence of the Idea of Manifest Destiny*,” had recognized Continentalism as one and the same with that later movement.<sup>139</sup> In an episode revealing the full scope of John Quincy Adams’ “Continentalism,” Adams recalled a conversation that he had had with Monroe’s Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford in 1819, where the latter relayed a discussion with South Carolina Representative William Lowndes that people in England and France thought Americans were an “ambitious and encroaching people.”<sup>140</sup> Adams responded to this statement by sarcastically noting that:

Great Britain, after vilifying us twenty years as a mean, low-minded, peddling nation, having no generous ambitions and no God but gold, had now changed her tone, and was endeavoring to alarm the world at the gigantic grasp of our ambition. Spain was doing the same; and Europe, who, even since the commencement of our Government under the present Constitution, had seen those nations intriguing with the Indians and negotiating to bound us by the Ohio, had first been startled by our acquisition of Louisiana, and now by our pretension to extend to the South Sea ... Nothing that we could say or do would remove this impression until the world shall be familiarized with the idea of considering our proper dominion to be the continent of North America. From the time when we became an independent people it was as much a law of nature that this should become our pretension as that the Mississippi should flow to the sea. Spain had possessions upon our southern and Great Britain upon our northern border ... Most of the Spanish territory which had been in our neighborhood had already become our own by the most unexceptionable of all acquisitions— fair purchase for a valuable consideration. This rendered it still more unavoidable that the remainder of the continent should ultimately be ours. But it is very lately that we have distinctly seen this ourselves; very lately that we have avowed the pretension of extending to the South Sea; and until Europe shall find it a settled geographical element that the United States and North America are identical, any effort on our part to reason the world out of a belief that we are ambitious will have no other effect than to convince them that we add to our ambition hypocrisy.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1956), 357.

<sup>140</sup> John Quincy Adams and Charles Francis Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848. Vol. 4* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1875), 437-439.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 437-439.

Regardless of Adams nondenial of personally entertaining a broad vision of national expansion, some may suggest that the Monroe Doctrine did not actually accomplish anything substantial. However, as historian Samuel Flagg Bemis astutely noted in his book *The Latin American Policy of the United States*, although:

it is true that the Doctrine had no real force behind it. It was only a pronouncement, if you please, but it contained powerful words nevertheless, words that both served the immediate interests of the United States and exalted for the whole Hemisphere the ideals of independence and the sovereignty of the people. The immediate service to the New World of the Monroe Doctrine at the time of its origin was not preventing European intervention against the independence of an American state but in galvanizing the preponderant *republican character* of the new states at the outset. In doing this it was loyal to the ideology of the Anglo-American Revolution and the French Revolution, both of which were anathema to the Holy Alliance and to Tory England. It would be a long time, if ever, before the United States would be in a position alone to make good all these words in the face of any conceivable challenge, but they did honor as they were uttered to the statesman who formulated them, to the President who spoke them, to the republic which sponsored them, and to the New World which listened.<sup>142</sup>

However, in the end, the British finally relented and acknowledged the independence of the new Latin American republics because they ultimately coveted their commerce and did not want to press the issue of their form of government any further. In the decades that followed, Jacksonian Democrats would call for the re-Annexation of Texas and its reunion with the United States, thus accusing John Quincy Adams of giving that territory away as a result of the Adams–Onis Treaty of 1819. One such Jacksonian Democrat to make this accusation was James Knox Polk, who would later ascend to the Presidency of the United States in his own right, bolstered by the enthusiasm of many Americans for the expansionist program contained within the Democrat Party platform of the 1844 election campaign. Polk’s firm stance was in stark contrast to the indecisive position taken by then Whig candidate Henry Clay, who feared the reaction of

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<sup>142</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Latin American Policy of the United States: An Historical Interpretation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 71.

abolitionist-leaning figures like John Quincy Adams to the possible Annexation of Texas. As such, the campaign slogans for the Election of 1844 demanded the “re-Occupation of Oregon,” the “re-Annexation of Texas,” and “54’40 or Fight!” [the northern boundary of the Oregon Country].<sup>143</sup>

These slogans alluded to the idea that Texas had originally been included within the territory acquired by the United States from France in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, as well as America’s “clear and unquestionable” claim to the Oregon Country, according to Polk. Jacksonian Democrats, therefore, demanded that the United States insist on annexing Texas to the Rio Grande, arguing that the Rio Grande had always been the proper boundary between New France [Louisiana] and New Spain, believing that there was a significant amount of evidence to support this claim. In fact, prior to selling Louisiana to the United States, Napoleon tasked General Victor Collot with commanding the Army of Occupation to take control of Louisiana, and after appointing Collot as the Captain-General of New France, Napoleon informed Collot that the Louisiana Country stretched from the Mississippi River to the Rio Grande and the Continental Divide, though Talleyrand later deceptively told his American counterparts that he did not know the exact western boundary of Louisiana.<sup>144</sup>

However, later on, the Spanish government attempted to push the western boundary of Louisiana east from the Rio Grande to a river in Louisiana called the Arroyo Hondo, before finally agreeing to the Sabine River in 1819 when the Adams–Onís treaty was signed. Although Democrats found no fault in Adams’ success in acquiring Florida and securing the southern frontier of the United States, they never ceased to remind Adams that they believed he lost Texas for the Union. Still, the historical records have demonstrated that during the “Era of Good Feeling,”

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<sup>143</sup> Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 229-230.

<sup>144</sup> Fleming, *The Louisiana Purchase*, 127.

John Quincy Adams championed expansionism as fervently as Jacksonian Democrats would a generation later, even despite his personally held aversion to slavery. Also, many Northern Democrats who disliked slavery and Southern Democrats who supported the institution promoted Continentalist expansion during the Polk administration, most often for reasons of national security, but sometimes, they settled for less-than-ideal treaties when national security and the international situation required it. In examining the text of the Adams–Onís Treaty, it clearly stated, “The United States hereby cede to His Catholic Majesty, and renounce forever, all their rights, claims, and pretensions to the Territories lying West and South of the above described Line”; that is, the United States ceded its claims to any territory West of the Louisiana border with Texas, thus implying that some valid claim may have existed.<sup>145</sup>

As to his opinion of the treaty itself, Adams concluded:

In the negotiations with Spain we had a just claim to the Mississippi and its waters, and our citizens had a fair though very precarious claim to indemnities. We had a mere color of claim to the Rio del Norte [Rio Grande], no claim to a line beyond the Rocky Mountains, and none to Florida, which we very much wanted. The treaty gives us the Mississippi and all its waters—gives us Florida—gives us an acknowledged line to the South Sea [Pacific Ocean], and seventeen degrees of latitude upon its shores—gives our citizens five millions of dollars of indemnity—and barely gives up to Spain the colorable claim from the Sabine to the Rio del Norte [Rio Grande].<sup>146</sup>

When U.S. Representative from Kentucky David Trimble encouraged Secretary of State John Quincy Adams to set aside the Adams–Onís Treaty of 1819 and instead demand the diplomatic recognition of the rebelling Latin American colonies from Spain and insist upon the Rio Grande as the western boundary of the United States, Adams replied to Trimble that he “had no doubt that if the treaty should be set aside we should ultimately obtain more territory than it

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<sup>145</sup> Justin Harvey Smith, *The Annexation of Texas* (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1911), 5-6.

<sup>146</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848. Volume V* (United States: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1874), 67-69.

would secure to us, but we should get the same territory with the treaty sooner than we should want; and even now I thought the greatest danger of this Union was in the overgrown extent of its territory, combining with the slavery question ... Since the Missouri Debate, I considered the continuance of the Union for any length of time as very precarious, and entertained serious doubts whether Louisiana and slavery would not ultimately break us up.”<sup>147</sup> In another place, Adams wrote, “I have favored this Missouri compromise, believing it to be all that could be effected under the present Constitution, and from extreme unwillingness to put the Union at hazard.”<sup>148</sup> If true, Adams’ statements reveal that concern over the expansion of slavery hindered greater U.S. gains. Still, despite its unpopularity at the time it was signed, historian Samuel Flagg Bemis wrote:

The Transcontinental Treaty of 1819, if not an absolutely perfect triumph, was the greatest diplomatic victory ever won by an American Secretary of State. If Adams had gathered in Texas he would have made a perfect score. The archives in Madrid reveal that Onís had instructions to yield Texas, as well as the Floridas, if necessary to get a treaty. If President Monroe and the Cabinet had supported him in the last ditch of the negotiations, Adams would have stuck it out for Texas too, but Monroe was content with less. Indeed, if the Texas question had been settled then and there, a later distressing chapter of Latin American relations could have been avoided to a large extent.<sup>149</sup>

Therefore, according to Bemis, Adams could have gotten Texas if he had pressed Onís on the issue, but he decided not to after consulting with Monroe’s Cabinet, at which point Adams yielded the territory west of the Sabine River to Spain. In a curious epilogue to Adams’ role in losing Texas for the Union in 1819, upon becoming President of the United States in 1825, John Quincy Adams sought to “rectify” the border that he had previously agreed upon in the Adams–Onís Treaty of 1819 with Spain. Meanwhile, on February 24, 1821, only a couple of days after the Adams–Onís Treaty went into effect (February 22, 1821), Mexican revolutionaries calling

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<sup>147</sup> John Quincy Adams and Charles Francis Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*. Vol. 5 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1875), 67-69.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>149</sup> Bemis, *The Latin American Policy of the United States*, 37.

themselves the “Army of the Three Guarantees” issued their Plan of Iguala, effectively declaring Mexican independence from Spain and, thus, making the Sabine River the new border between the United States and Empire of Mexico. In 1827, President John Quincy Adams instructed his Secretary of State Henry Clay, who had previously attacked the Adams–Onís Treaty for not including Texas, to send an offer to Mexico through the first United States Minister to Mexico, Joel R. Poinsett, to purchase Texas.<sup>150</sup>

Poinsett allegedly had instructions to offer Mexico a million dollars for a new border at the Rio Grande or, alternatively, \$500,000 for a boundary at the Colorado River, which flows through central Texas past modern-day Austin before draining downstream into the Gulf of Mexico. The proposed new boundary would have run in a geographic line from the source of either river to meet the border agreed to in the Adams–Onís Treaty of 1819. What is interesting about Clay’s and ostensibly John Quincy Adams’ reasoning is the strategic concerns they expressed over having the Sabine River as a boundary between the United States and Mexico.<sup>151</sup> Clay’s diplomatic instructions to Poinsett read as follows:

Some difficulties may possibly hereafter arise between the two countries from the line thus agreed upon, against which it would be desirable now to guard, if practicable; and as the government of Mexico may be supposed not to have any disinclination to the fixation of a new line which would prevent those difficulties, the President wishes you to sound it on that subject; and to avail yourself of a favorable disposition, if you should find it, to effect that object. The line of the Sabine approaches our great western mart nearer than could be wished. Perhaps the Mexican government may not be unwilling to establish that of the Rio Brassos de Dios, or the Rio Colorado, or the Snow Mountains, or the Rio del Norte in lieu of it. By the agreed line, portions of both the Red River and branches of the Arkansas are thrown on the Mexican side, and the navigation of both of these rivers, as well as that of the Sabine, is made common to the respective inhabitants of the two countries. When the countries adjacent to those waters shall become thickly

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 75-76.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*.

inhabited, collisions and misunderstandings may arise from the community thus established, in the use of their navigation, which it would be well now to prevent.<sup>152</sup>

Similarly, in another dispatch to Poinsett on March 15, 1827, Henry Clay also wrote:

The fixation of a line of boundary of the United States on the side of Mexico, should be such as to secure, not merely certainty and apparent safety in the respective limits of the two countries, but the consciousness of freedom from all danger of attack on either side, and the removal of all motives for such attack. That of the Sabine brings Mexico nearer our great commercial capital than is desirable; and although we now are, and for a long time may remain, perfectly satisfied with the justice and moderation of our neighbor, still it would be better for both parties that neither should feel that he is any condition of exposure on the remote contingency of an alteration in existing friendly sentiments.<sup>153</sup>

In conclusion, those advocating for U.S. expansion regarding Florida and potentially Cuba between 1808 and 1823 followed much of the same reasoning of earlier arguments in connection to the debates over the status of territories such as Louisiana, the Mississippi Valley, or the Trans-Allegheny West. That is, American policymakers feared that the territories adjacent to the Union could be used by hostile foreign powers to stir up Indian nations bordering on or within the United States, as well as to support separatist movements on the periphery of the country. Therefore, the Monroe Doctrine faced down the potential threat of a Bourbon monarchy on the borders of the United States because, if Great Britain could be persuaded to allow the Holy Alliance to partition Latin America, the possibility that France might establish itself in Mexico presented a clear and present danger to the security New Orleans and integrity of the Union. Also, American policymakers could not have predicted whether or not the British could be bought off by the Holy Alliance with the offer of Cuba as an incentive, given their real prior interest in that territory, and, in doing so, possibly threaten the security of the United States by placing the Royal Navy in a key position to block U.S. maritime access to its own Gulf Coast from Cuba.

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<sup>152</sup> William R. Manning, "Texas and the Boundary Issue, 1822-1829." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (1914): 223-224.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 235-236.

## Chapter 4: Texas, Insurrections, Indian Uprisings, and Slave Rebellions

The major security challenges to the United States after the Monroe Doctrine had been issued in 1823 gradually shifted from international rivals to domestic threats thought to be within or on the periphery of the nation. As the Monroe Doctrine and its *de facto* enforcement by the Royal Navy effectively eliminated European powers other than Great Britain as major security challenges to the United States, at the same time, British threats to the integrity of the Union worsened in part because of the rise of immediate abolitionism in Great Britain and the northern parts of the Union. These trends only served to exacerbate racial tensions in the United States and worsen the partisan and sectional divide in the country by increasing suspicions and encouraging “slave power” conspiracies among Northerners, whom Democrats believed wanted to conciliate and emulate the British. Some Whigs and most Democrats, especially those devoted to the politics of Andrew Jackson, came to believe that Texan annexation and western expansion was the ideal way to remove potential British threats. These statesmen were not motivated by slavery profiteering but instead by a desire to avoid a “balance of power” system in North America that would only come to favor Britain over time, eventually endangering all sections of the Union if war with Britain finally broke out. In truth, their chief goal was to secure the U.S. frontier and avert the possibility of disunion. However, on internal threats to the Union, James Madison wrote:

Next to the case of the Black race within our bosom, that of the Red on our borders, is the problem most baffling to the policy of our Country. In estimating the susceptibilities of the Indian character, and devising the treatment best suited to it, it might be well to know more than we do, of what relates to the Red race in the regions south of us. Examples have there been furnished of gradations from the most savage state to the advanced one in Mexico and Peru ... And with respect to the inferior tribes adjoining a White population, or comprehended within its limits, their actual condition, and the policy influencing it, is still less known to us. More



light on the subject could not but be acceptable, where a single ray might not be without its use.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in the eyes of many Americans, the presence of slavery in the South and a large Indian population on the western frontier of the Union presented two great vulnerabilities to U.S. national security, vulnerabilities that might be exploited by Great Britain in a future war. Madison was not alone in his thinking, for as early as May 1819, Andrew Jackson was concerned about the Indian population on the western frontier, writing in a military dispatch, “The British Traders will no doubt excite the Indians to hostility they ought in my opinion to be hung, where ever they are found among the Indian Tribes within our Territory a few examples would be sufficient and the Commanding Officer of the Troops is the proper authority to judge of their Guilt and Order their execution. But the over cautious policy of the Executive, has directed that they only be arrested and reported to him ... This instead of puting down the influence of British emmissaries I fear will have a different effect.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, a decade later in 1829, Jackson remarked, “To keep peace on our Borders, the priviledge of British Traders, entering our Territory & trading with The Indians ought to be done away.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, first as a general and then as President, Jackson recognized the threat that American Indians, with British prodding, might pose to the security of the U.S. frontier.

These suspicions were not unjustified. Sir James Kempt, the chief British administrator in Lower Canada or modern-day Quebec, admitted the British practice of giving presents to Indians visiting from the United States was a kind of defensive insurance, remarking in 1828, “There is little doubt that by a continuance of kindness they [the Indians from the United States] will be

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<sup>1</sup> “James Madison to Thomas L. McKenney, February 10, 1826,” in *The Papers of James Madison, Retirement Series, Vol. 3, 1 March 1823–24 February 1826*, eds. David B. Mattern, J. C. A. Stagg, Mary Parke Johnson, and Katherine E. Harbury (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 685–686.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Jackson, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume IV, 1816-1820*, eds. Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and George H. Hoemann (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 298.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Jackson, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VII, 1829*, eds. Daniel Feller, Harold D. Moser, Laura-Eve Moss, and Thomas Coens (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 192.

disposed again to take up the Tomahawk when required by King George.”<sup>4</sup> That the Indians knew full well the expectations the British had for them, the Winnebago Indian Chief Four Legs told the British Indian agent Thomas Anderson, “I speak with tears in my eyes [and] I am anxious indeed to hear from My Great Father [King George] ...” with Anderson summarizing the conversation as a pledge that the Indians stood ready and “they would not hesitate to attack their vaunting enemy [the Americans].” The chief understood that such an attack would “involve most of the western tribes on their side [and] they would immediately commence a massacre on the unprotected inhabitants of the extensive American Frontier, which would probably end in the [Indian] nations being restored to their rights of territory.” Four Legs also let it be known to Anderson that he fully understood that the Indians might “soon be called upon by his English Fathers to raise his war club against these Americans.”<sup>5</sup> As can be seen, Four Legs made it perfectly clear that his tribe stood ready to do the bidding of the British authorities stationed in Canada.

Despite assurances made by the Indian leaders Black Hawk, Quashquame, and other Sauk chiefs to U.S. General Edmund P. Gaines and the signing of an agreement in which they promised their peoples would remain beyond the Mississippi in the west and sever ties with the British in Canada, the Sauk chief Neapope went to Fort Malden to meet with the British and returned with word (or his understanding) that the British and the other Illinois tribes would support an Indian uprising against the U.S. In April 1832, Black Hawk and his British Band were ready to act. As Jackson described the Black Hawk War in his Fourth Annual Message to Congress, “The hostile incursions of the Sac and Fox Indians necessarily led to the interposition of the government ... After a harassing warfare, prolonged by the nature of the country and by the difficulty of procuring subsistence, the Indians were entirely defeated, and the disaffected band dispersed or destroyed ...

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<sup>4</sup> Kerry A. Trask, *Black Hawk: The Battle for the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 128.

<sup>5</sup> Trask, *Black Hawk*, 132.

Severe as is the lesson to the Indians, it was rendered necessary by their unprovoked aggressions, and it is to be hoped that its impression will be permanent and salutary.”<sup>6</sup> Although the Black Hawk War of 1832 was put down, the proximity in time to the slave rebellion of Nat Turner in Southampton, Virginia, the year before no doubt left an indelible mark on the mind of Andrew Jackson during his time as president, especially given the expectations of slaves like those involved in the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy that “the English were to come & help them” and “that the Americans could do nothing against the English.”<sup>7</sup>

Another potential threat to the integrity and stability of the Union could be found in the Mexican province of Coahuila-Texas, which was rapidly filling with Americans. In Mexico, British Minister Henry George Ward did his best to stir up the suspicions of Mexican officials against the United States and American intentions toward Texas. Historian J. Fred Rippy even argued that Henry Ward’s activities may have inadvertently set in motion the crackdown on the rights of Texan settlers that eventually led to the Texan Revolution of 1836.<sup>8</sup> Although Jackson removed the unpopular U.S. Minister to Mexico, Joel Poinsett, after the Mexican government requested his recall, Jackson’s own attempts to purchase Texas did little to calm Mexican fears of U.S. expansion west of the Sabine River. In August 1829, Jackson dispatched his special diplomatic representative to Mexico, Anthony Butler, to offer the Mexican government \$5 million to purchase the province of Texas. Butler was made Charge D’Affaires and did much to personally fan the flames of the president’s interest in Texas. According to Historian John M. Belohlavek, Jackson believed that acquiring Texas “would secure New Orleans, the Mississippi River, and the

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Jackson, *Fourth Annual Message, December 04, 1832*. Library of Congress. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/maj025322/>.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 349.

<sup>8</sup> Rippy, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain*, 99-104.

western frontier; gain land for Indian removal or perhaps as an area for ‘free people of color’ to settle; and obtain a ‘natural boundary’ with Mexico.”<sup>9</sup>

However, just as his predecessor John Quincy Adams’ efforts came to naught, Jackson’s attempt to purchase Texas also went nowhere. The British, however, became deeply concerned over American intentions toward Texas, so much so that, in March 1830, Secretary of State Martin Van Buren had to reassure the British Minister in Washington, Charles Vaughan, that the United States had no territorial aspirations for Mexican territory. Because newspapers had already reported that the purpose of Butler’s mission to Mexico was to purchase Texas, Vaughan was probably not convinced by Van Buren’s denials.<sup>10</sup> Even worse for U.S. interests in Mexico, in December 1829, the short-lived pro-American Mexican President Vicente Guerrero was overthrown in a conservative coup in Mexico City while he was away leading his army in Southern Mexico. The coup was led by General Bustamante, whose pro-British foreign minister, Luis Alaman, wanted Mexico to become a British protectorate and potentially replace the Mexican Republic’s government with a non-Bourbon monarchy.<sup>11</sup> In May 1829, Jackson instructed, “Early attention ... be paid to the boundary between the U[nited] States and Mexico—The line must be altered as by it part of our citizens are thrown into the Province of Texas.”<sup>12</sup> For Jackson, the issue of the U.S.–Mexican boundary took on added importance because of the increasing potential for conflict with Mexico over its growing population of Americans.

Mexican attitudes toward the United States did not improve, even after the signing of a commercial treaty and a boundary treaty recognizing the Sabine River as the border, thus

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<sup>9</sup> John M. Belohlavek, *“Let the Eagle Soar!” The Foreign Policy of Andrew Jackson* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 218.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 219-220.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>12</sup> “Andrew Jackson Note from May, 21, 1829,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VII, 1829*, eds. Daniel Feller, Harold D. Moser, Laura-Eve Moss, and Thomas Coens (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 193.

reaffirming the Adams–Onís Treaty agreed to with Spain. However, Jackson still held out hope of purchasing Texas, even after the Senate ratified the treaty with Mexico in April 1832. The fear of how an independent Texas might be exploited by foreign powers, given its nearness to the city of New Orleans, only increased Jackson’s desire to purchase the province, as he wrote in June 1829:

I have long since been aware of the importance of Texas to the United States, and of the real necessity of extending our boundary west of the Sabine as far west as the sandy desert, which is a good natural boundary ... I hope we may be able to obtain an extension of our Southwestern limits as defined by the late Treaty with Spain, so important to the safety of Neworleans—How infatuated must have been our councils who gave up the rich country of Texas, for the Floridas, when the latter could have been obtained for the sum we paid for it in mon[e]y—It surely must have been with the view to keep the political ascendancy in the north, and east, & cripple the rising greatness of the west— I shall keep my eye on this object, & the first propitious moment make the attempt to regain the Territory as far south & west, as the great Desert.<sup>13</sup>

Jackson’s reasoning was not new. John Quincy Adams, whom he criticized for giving up Texas during the Monroe Administration, also considered the U.S.–Mexican border and its nearness to New Orleans as a clear and present danger to the Union when taken in combination with European projects to establish a monarchy in Mexico. Jackson’s concern over the safety of New Orleans was clearly connected to the United States’ control of the Mississippi River and its tributaries. For example, on August 1829, President Jackson wrote to his Secretary of State, Martin Van Buren, about a potential U.S. purchase of Texas, stating, “To obtain it [a border] to the west of the Nueces to the grand prairie or desert, I would go as far as five millions rather than leave a foreign power in possession of heads of our leading branches of the great Mississippi on its west, as it appears, and has always so appeared to me, that the whole of the western branches of the M[ississippi] was necessary for the security of the great emporium of the west, Neworleans, and

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<sup>13</sup> “Andrew Jackson to John Overton, June 8, 1829,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VII, 1829*, eds. Daniel Feller, Harold D. Moser, Laura-Eve Moss, and Thomas Coens (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 270.

that the god of the universe had intended this great valley to belong to one nation.”<sup>14</sup> As previous generations of American statesmen knew, the country that controlled the Mississippi held the key to the trade and possibly even the loyalty of the western regions of the United States, as the intrigues of James Wilkinson with Spain and Aaron Burr with England perfectly demonstrate.

In his instructions to U.S. Minister to Mexico Joel Poinsett, Jackson argued that:

The line agreed upon in the Spanish Treaty with the U[nited] States, leaves New Orleans unprotected in a state of War. Its defences can be turned by the approaches to the Mississippi thro[ugh] the La Fourche and other bayous to the west. To counteract the evils growing out of the surrender of that part of Louisiana west of the Sabine, and East of the Rio del Norte or Grand river, it is proposed to open a negotiation for the retrocession of the same ... In the present state of that frontier, many of our citizens being already on the Spanish side of the line, and near whom will be gradually concentrated the most of our Indian tribes, it is easy to perceive that the causes of collision with Mexican authorities, will be constantly increasing, and if they are not obviated in a short time by the purchase of the Territory as far as the desert west of the Neusis, our national safety must pay for it hereafter an immense price, peaceably or forcibly.<sup>15</sup>

Here, Jackson has identified the strategic vulnerability of New Orleans, the status of Americans living in Texas, and the presence of various hostile Indian tribes on the western frontier of the Union as unresolved issues that might lead to a future conflict between the United States and Mexico. Around this time, Andrew Jackson also wrote to Martin Van Buren concerning the purchase of Texas:

Now is the time for the extension of the western boundary of Louisiana as far as the western side of the river Nuesis [Nueces], making the large desert the boundary. This desert is from one to one Hundred and fifty miles wide, and extends north beyond the Rocky Mountains, and will add to Louisiana and Arkansas all the country watered by the Red River. The intervening country on the Gulf will afford a dense population, sufficient for its protection in the worst of times ... This cession will unite the Gulf with the Pacific. It will give to the western border the power to

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<sup>14</sup> “Andrew Jackson to Martin Van Buren. August 12, 1829,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VII, 1829*, eds. Daniel Feller, Harold D. Moser, Laura-Eve Moss, and Thomas Coens (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 363.

<sup>15</sup> “Andrew Jackson’s Notes for Instructions to Joel Robert Poinsett,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VII, 1829*, eds. Daniel Feller, Harold D. Moser, Laura-Eve Moss, and Thomas Coens (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 364-365.

defend itself against a greater force than will probably ever be brought against it. The wants and habits of the people who will be settled upon it will be similar to those of the people of Louisiana, whose trade and intercourse with the Atlantic states is so necessary and advantageous to both that it may be regarded as one of the strongest bonds of our union. It will besides cut off forever the communication between Canada and the Gulf, and diminish in this respect the motives for the occupation of Cuba, which no doubt the British Gov[ernment] at present cherishes.<sup>16</sup>

From these words, it is clear that Jackson was greatly concerned that the British might include Texas in a strategy to encircle the United States. Once again, Jackson believed that a new boundary was important in preventing a future conflict with Mexico, or as he explained to U.S. Charge D’Affaires in Mexico Anthony Butler on October 7, 1830:

You may with all the frankness of a soldier urge the policy of adopting the Grand Prarie [Desert], as a permanent boundary between us, as a source of lasting peace and harmony, for I say to you confidentially, whenever the present boundary is run and our western Citizens find the imposition that has been practiced upon them, no power can restrain them, and they will be sufficiently numerous to declare themselves independent and maintain it ... Our future peace with Mexico depends upon extending our boundary farther west. And if you cannot get it to the grand prairie, obtain to the *Brasos* or another point giving for it in proportion to the extent, in equal ration to the amount, authorized by your instructions. But candour dictates that the fact should be disclosed that the Government possessing the Mississippi at some day possess all its *tributary streams*. Therefore the grand prairie including this would be a boundary that would give permanent peace to the two Republics:— Our right by the Louisiana Treaty, being once complete to all this boundary and more.— The citizens of the U[nited] States will never be contented until this boundary is acquired, when they become informed it was wantonly given away to keep down the prosperity and growing political influence of the west.— These hints will bring to your view the importance of obtaining this boundary as the future peace and harmony of the two Republics mainly depend upon it.<sup>17</sup>

With much apprehension and again regarding Texas, Jackson also observed that “great exertions which are now making to fill that country with emigrants from all countries and climes,

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<sup>16</sup> “Andrew Jackson to Martin Van Buren. August 14, 1829,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VII, 1829*, eds. Daniel Feller, Harold D. Moser, Laura-Eve Moss, and Thomas Coens (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 370-371.

<sup>17</sup> “Andrew Jackson to Anthony Butler, October 7, 1830,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VIII, 1830*, eds. Daniel Feller, Thomas Coens, and Laura-Eve Moss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 545-546.

by those who hold, or rather pretending to hold, grants for land in Texas, under the Mexican Government, is conclusive to my mind that if the boundary between us, is not soon established, that portion of her territory (Texas) must be lost to her for ever.”<sup>18</sup> Jackson noted a rumor that “it is hinted that if the United States will not purchase Texas application is to be made to England.”<sup>19</sup> The prospect that Texas might soon be filled with immigrants from Great Britain or elsewhere in Europe with no ties or loyalty to the United States was deeply concerning to Andrew Jackson. Jackson soon after wrote Butler, alluding to the “problem of neighborhood” by stating, “*As you are aware of the great importance of the cession of Texas to us in maintaining future peace and good neighborhood between the United States and Mexico I have only to add in relation to this subject generally that I hope you will urge it at as early a day as you can with propriety and a prospect of success.*”<sup>20</sup> Although a generation removed from the authors of *The Federalist Papers*, Andrew Jackson echoed their language on potential rivalries between bordering nations.

Regarding the issue of Texas being used as a potential base of operations from which to incite Indian uprisings on the western frontier of the United States, Jackson wrote Butler on February 25, 1832, “I have again to repeat my request that you push with all your zeal the negotiation of a new boundary ... and if you can, extend it to the Desert ... a government composed of all kindred and tongues on our borders, plundering, and murdering, our good citizens at will, and exciting the Indians to make war upon us, and on our borders; This may compel us, in self

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<sup>18</sup> “Andrew Jackson to Anthony Butler, August 24, 1831,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume IX, 1831*, eds. Daniel Feller, Laura-Eve Moss, Thomas Coens, and Erik B. Alexander (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 518.

<sup>19</sup> “Andrew Jackson to Anthony Butler, August 24, 1831,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume IX, 1831*, eds. Daniel Feller, Laura-Eve Moss, Thomas Coens, and Erik B. Alexander (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 518.

<sup>20</sup> “Andrew Jackson to Anthony Butler, December 9, 1831,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume IX, 1831*, eds. Daniel Feller, Laura-Eve Moss, Thomas Coens, and Erik B. Alexander (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 766.



defence to seize that country by force and establish a regular Government, *there*, over it ...”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, Jackson suggested that the United States might be compelled to seize Texas for reasons of national security. Arguing for a desert boundary between the United States and Mexico, Jackson again wrote Butler on March 6, 1832, insisting, “In relation to the negotiation for an extension of our boundary ... It is our wish to go as far West as the Grand Desert, or if that is unpracticable as far as can be obtained.”<sup>22</sup> Of note here is the lack of any discussion of the extension of the institution of slavery as a motive for expansion.

Still, Jackson continued to press his demands, reminding Butler on November 27, 1833, “You are authorised to give five millions of dollars for the cession of Texas as far west as the grand desert ... if you cannot make a boundery by treaty with the Mexican Government, write us that we may make the necessary communication through you that we will be compelled to run the line as we believe is right and take possession of the country east of the West fork of the Sabine as defined by the treaty with Spain.”<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, encouraging U.S. action to purchase Texas, Sam Houston appealed to Jackson on February 13, 1833, noting, “Mexico is powerless and penniless, to all intents and purposes. Her want of money taken in connexion with the course which Texas must and will adopt will render a transfer of Texas inevitable to some power and if the United States, does not press for it, England will most assuredly obtain it ... England is pressing her suit for it, but its citizens will resist, if any transfer should be made, of them to any power but the United States.”<sup>24</sup> However, Butler would be recalled after the breakdown of negotiations between the

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<sup>21</sup> “Andrew Jackson to Anthony Butler, February 25, 1832,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume X, 1832*, eds. Daniel Feller, Thomas Coens, and Laura-Eve Moss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2016), 124.

<sup>22</sup> “Andrew Jackson to Anthony Butler, March 6, 1832,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume X, 1832*, eds. Daniel Feller, Thomas Coens, and Laura-Eve Moss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2016), 151-152.

<sup>23</sup> “Andrew Jackson to Anthony Butler, November 27, 1833,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume XI, 1833* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2019), 781-782.

<sup>24</sup> “Samuel Houston to Andrew Jackson, February 13, 1833,” in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume XI, 1833* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2019), 110.

United States and Mexico over Texas. Of note, in his failed negotiations to purchase Texas, Butler had even attempted to acquire San Francisco from Mexico for \$500,000.<sup>25</sup>

By the time Butler was finally recalled, the Texan War for Independence was already underway. Texas declared its independence from Mexico on March 2, 1836, and after the massacres at Goliad and the Alamo, General Santa Anna was defeated by the Texans at the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836. In the Treaty of Velasco on May 14, 1836, Santa Anna agreed to the Rio Grande as the border between Texas and Mexico. However, as the new Mexican government refused to accept Santa Anna's peace with Texas, Americans, such as the influential Democrat lawyer and legal jurist John Catron, were concerned that Mexico might now become a British protectorate in its weakened state. Catron wrote Jackson:

If this war continues between Mexico and Texas for one year more, that army from the west, the valley of the Mp'i [Mississippi], will march upon the City of Mexico. That power will call to its aid England of course, and of course, England will do in Mexico as she has done in India, govern it, and govern the Gulf of Mexico, and mouth of the Mp'i [Mississippi] ... No European power should be permitted to gain a footing in Mexico. This feeble and worthless people is our safest neighbour ... This foreign Gov[ernmen]t [Mexico] is too near the Mississippi, our boundary must be pushed westward if possible.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, even the potential of a British presence in Mexico, let alone in Texas, was deeply disconcerting to American statesmen. Meanwhile, Santa Anna arrived in Washington in January 1837 on probation from Texan custody, where he gave assurances to the Jackson Administration that he would honor his agreements with the Texan government. However, when Santa Anna returned home to Mexico in March 1837, he promptly repudiated his guarantees to Texas and went back on his word to Jackson and the U.S. government. On February 2, 1837, Brigadier General Benjamin C. Howard relayed a message from the "Father of Texas," Stephen Austin, who called

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<sup>25</sup> Belohlavek, *"Let the Eagle Soar!"* 229-230.

<sup>26</sup> "John Catron to Andrew Jackson, June 8, 1836," in *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson: Volume V* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1931), 402.

on Jackson to finally recognize Texan independence before he left office. Austin wrote, “*If the U.S. does not now accept the proposition [of being the first to recognize Texan Independence], it may be forever lost to her*” and concluded that “there is no doubt, if the Independence of Texas be not acknowledged by the U[nited] States, an effort will be made by Texas to Great Britain to have the Independence of Texas acknowledged by her, giving and securing to Great Britain as a consideration, exclusive commercial benefits.”<sup>27</sup> Jackson was so concerned over Texas that he even stated that the U.S. might be compelled to “in self-defense to seize that country by force and establish a regular government over it” if it should become a haven for “scoundrels and rogues.”<sup>28</sup> Still more concerning was the prospect that Texas might become a barrier to U.S. expansion.<sup>29</sup>

Still, Jackson indicated that he might recognize Texan independence if Congress supported the move, but he recommended to the Texan government that they include California in their boundary claims to gain support from New England commercial interests.<sup>30</sup> In early 1836, influential Texan William H. Wharton wrote, “Gen[era]l. Jackson says that Texas must claim the Californias on the Pacific in order to paralyze the opposition of the North and East to Annexation. That the fishing interest of the North and East wish a harbour on the Pacific; that this claim of the Californias will give it to them, and will diminish their opposition to annexation. He is very earnest and anxious on this point of claiming the Californias and says we must not consent to less.”<sup>31</sup> Also, the Texan Minister to the U.S., Memucan Hunt, noted in April 1838, that:

The Government of the United States, is very desirous, I have no doubt to procure the Bay of St. Francisco, on the Pacific, and I apprehended ... that Mr. Forsyth’s apparently anxious desire to make the line the whole distance to the Pacific ... As a separated Power, the splendid harbours on the South Sea or Pacific Ocean, will

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<sup>27</sup> “Benjamin C. Howard to Andrew Jackson, February 2, 1837,” in *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson: Volume V* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1931), 457.

<sup>28</sup> Belohlavek, “*Let the Eagle Soar!*” 224.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 235.

<sup>30</sup> Bemis, *Diplomatic History of the United States*, 225-226.

<sup>31</sup> Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 47.

be indispensable for us, and apart from the great increase of territory by an extension of the line, the possession of the harbour of St. [San] Francisco alone is amply sufficient, for any increased difficulties or expense, should there be any in regard to a claim of territory to the Pacific, in a treaty of Peace with Mexico.<sup>32</sup>

Such a concession to the North in terms of expansion lends considerable weight to the non-sectional motivation of Jacksonian Democrats. However, as Congress deadlocked over recognition, Jackson became increasingly apprehensive over British ascendancy south of the Rio Grande and worried that Mexico might become a British protectorate, giving the Royal Navy still greater control over the Gulf of Mexico, even fearing that Mexico might try to recruit Great Britain in an antislavery crusade against Texas. U.S. Secretary of State John Forsyth responded to these rumors by invoking the Monroe Doctrine without directly naming it<sup>33</sup> and warning Lord Palmerston that the United States would not tolerate British interference in the domestic affairs of Texas.<sup>34</sup> Finally, on March 1, 1837, the U.S. Senate resolved that the Independence of Texas should be recognized and that diplomatic relations should be officially established. On March 2, 1837, Congress appropriated money to support a diplomatic presence in Texas whenever the president determined that Texas was, in fact, an independent state.<sup>35</sup> Concerned that Texas might fall under the influence of Great Britain, Jackson appointed a Charge D'Affaires to Texas on March 3, 1837, thereby granting official recognition to the Lone Star Republic.<sup>36</sup>

Acting on a September 1836 vote in favor of annexing their country to the United States by the representatives of Texas, Texan Minister to the United States, Memucan Hunt, formally presented Texas' offer to join the United States in August 1837. Despite the sympathy of

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<sup>32</sup> William Campbell Binkley, *The Expansionist Movement in Texas, 1836-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1925), 33.

<sup>33</sup> Belohlavek, "Let the Eagle Soar!" 235

<sup>34</sup> Bemis, *Diplomatic History of the United States*, 225-226.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 225-226.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.

Jacksonian Democrats in favor of the Annexation of Texas, the Van Buren Administration dashed their hopes for annexation by claiming that existing treaties between the U.S. and Mexico prevented this, angering many pro-expansion Democrats. Furthermore, after the application of the Republic of Texas for admission to the Union was ignored, Texan President Sam Houston withdrew his country's petition to become a part of the United States in October 1838, and this decision was later officially affirmed by the Texan Senate in January 1839. Spurned by the United States' rejection of annexation, Texas then embarked on its own short career of expansionism. Relations between the United States and Texas remained amicable yet quiet under Van Buren Administration, Harrison Administration, and most of the Tyler Administration, having only a failed commercial treaty to show for all the diplomatic efforts aimed at the Lone Star Republic since 1837, until Daniel Webster stepped down as Secretary of State in May 1843.<sup>37</sup>

However, other international events took center stage in the late 1830s and early 1840s on the United States' border with British North America. Beginning in 1837, a series of rebellions broke out in Upper Canada (1837) and Lower Canada (1837–1838), encouraged by U.S. soldiers of fortune and filibusterers. Organized in so-called "Hunter's Lodges" to provide aid and comfort to the Canadian rebels, these groups eventually provoked an international incident when an American vessel, the *Caroline*, was seized and burned by British colonial troops. Also, on the Maine–New Brunswick border, American and Canadian lumberjacks nearly initiated a shooting war between the United States and Great Britain in 1838–1839 called the Aroostook War. On both occasions, the U.S. government dispatched General Winfield Scott to diffuse the very delicate international crisis. However, in the end, Democrat President Martin Van Buren resisted the bellicose calls for retaliation over the Caroline Affair, and Whig President John Tyler signed the

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<sup>37</sup> Belohlavek, "Let the Eagle Soar!", 237.

Webster–Ashburton Treaty of 1842, finally settling the northeast boundary dispute. Still, these tense years in Anglo-American relations caused great anxiety for military leaders like career military man U.S. General Thomas Sidney Jesup, who noted the strategic disadvantage that British North America placed upon the Union, writing of those territories, that:

Bearing heavily upon our flank and rear; and the influence which [they] are capable of exercising over the Indians upon our western frontier and the Texan and Mexican states render their geographical position a most powerful check upon us. If she retain these colonies [British North America] she may add the force of Texas and Mexico to her own. These states can never possess naval power; they must therefore rely on alliances with some great maritime power for the protection of their valuable and growing commerce. We have adopted the maxim, whether wisely or not time must determine, of non-interference, under any circumstances, with the affairs of other nations. That protection then which they would gladly receive from us but which we are precluded by our settled policy from affording them, Great Britain will readily extend to them and in a war with us, they will be so much added to her force on the weakest flank of our country. Her colonies, therefore, and their consequent influence are a guarantee to her against our commercial, maritime, and political ascendancy, so long as she holds them.<sup>38</sup>

As an independent Texas continued to remain a key point of vulnerability to U.S. national security, it reentered the national conversation in April 1842 when a Whig representative from Virginia, Henry Wise, delivered a speech in Congress on the future of Texas. An account of Henry Wise’s speech appeared in an issue of the *National Intelligencer*, in which the author described Wise’s belief in “the possibility that the Mexican arms might drive back the slaves of Texas beyond the Sabine upon Louisiana and Arkansas” and that the:

English papers openly advanced the doctrine that it was the aim and policy of Great Britain to make what she was pleased to denominate *the insolvent nations* pay their debts to her by the cession of territory. Thus Spain must surrender Cuba, and Mexico must surrender Texas and California. He referred to the British command of the Gulf of Mexico, and the possibility of her rendering that sea a *mare clausum* to the people of the valley of the Mississippi. And it was a part of the same policy that she should keep increasing the debt of Mexico, by affording to her the means of invading Texas and the United States, and thus ultimately force her to give up

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<sup>38</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 55.

California. The gentleman had stated that it was the design of the President to accomplish the Annexation of Texas, if possible.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, Henry Wise's speech in Congress revived American fears over the potential encirclement of the United States by the British Empire and a tilting of the "balance of power" in North America in favor of Great Britain. Interestingly, over a decade earlier, a British MP named Sir Robert Wilson fueled American suspicions in a speech to the British Parliament on May 20, 1830, in which he noted that the following was occurring in Texas, where:

American squatters, who carried slaves along with them, had declared that they would not obey the Mexican law—they regarded themselves as independent, in fact, and declared that if the Mexican government sought to enforce it they would call on the government of the United States to protect them ... This state of things could not be allowed to continue with any advantage to this country. It gave encouragement to the United States to interfere with these new States of America. It encouraged disorder in Texas, and destroyed that balance of power among the American States, which was as necessary in America as in Europe. It was of great consequence to this country [Great Britain] to observe, that the United States were slowly acquiring the coasts on both sides of the Gulf of Mexico, and by and by our ships would be unable to enter that gulf without passing under the guns of the United States. The balance of power there would be destroyed ... All these things could be foreseen, and it was time for this country to take steps to put an end to a state of hostility leading to the subversion of our best interests. We ought now to disperse that cloud, which might ultimately burst in a storm to our injury or ruin.<sup>40</sup>

As demonstrated by these words, the British considered Texas to be a strategically important territory because of its lengthy coastline on the Gulf of Mexico. However, in June 1843, during his second term as Texan President, Sam Houston proclaimed an armistice between Texas and Mexico, and for a short time, it seemed like Texas might carve out a separate existence from the United States. Then, in August 1843, rumors of a British plot to abolitionize Texas began to trickle in from the U.S. diplomatic corps abroad. Tyler's confidante in London, Duff Green, sent

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<sup>39</sup> "Henry Wise, Speech in the House of Representatives, April 13, 1842," in Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 193-194.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Curson Hansard and William Cobbett, *The Parliamentary Debates* (United Kingdom: R. Bagshaw, 1830), 899-900.

a letter revealing the supposed plot to John C. Calhoun, U.S. Secretary of State Abel Upshur, and President Tyler. The letter read, in part, as follows:

I learn, from a source entitled to the fullest confidence, that there is now here a Mr. Andrews, deputed by the abolitionists of Texas, to negotiate with the British Government. That he has seen Lord Aberdeen, and submitted his *proje[c]t* for the abolition of slavery in Texas; which is, that there shall be organized a company in England, who shall advance a sum sufficient to pay for the slaves now in Texas, and receive in payment Texas lands; that the sum thus advanced shall be paid over as an indemnity for the abolition of slavery; and I am authorized by the Texan minister to say to you, that Lord Aberdeen has agreed that the British Government will guaranty the payment of the interest on this loan, upon condition that the Texan Government will abolish slavery.<sup>41</sup>

Naturally, the revelation of an alleged British plot to abolitionize Texas caused a firestorm in the Tyler Administration. Even before the Upshur letter, Duff Green was suspicious of British activities, stating to President Tyler that “England must see that she will then have to encounter the manufactures and commerce of the United States so that to make all the other powers dependent on her East Indian colonies, she must destroy the culture of cotton in the United States ... by rendering her own supply of the raw material cheaper than that furnished to our manufactures, she gains, not all she wants, but much. And she believes she will gain this by abolishing slavery in the United States, or by rendering it so dangerous to hold slaves as to diminish its profits. ...” Green also accused the British of attempting to “revolutionize Cuba and make it a black colony of England. The effect of this on our southern states is obvious.”<sup>42</sup> The “obvious” result implied by Green was the encouragement of a slave insurrection moving across the straits of Florida to the black belt or crescent of slavery along the Piedmont and Coastal South.

In another letter to Tyler, Green wrote, “If it be true that Sir Robert Peel is endeavoring to foster abolition in the North by opening a trade to the Northern States through Canada, which he

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<sup>41</sup> “Abel Upshur to W.S. Murphy, August 8, 1843,” in Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> “Duff Green to John Tyler, January 24, 1842,” *Ibid*, 188.



denies to the Southern States, and is stimulating rebellion and servile war in the Southern States by purchasing and emancipating the slaves of Texas, then there could be but one opinion as to what it becomes the American government to do.”<sup>43</sup> To Green, the answer was simple: annexation now or eventual war. Green also predicted that if slavery was abolished in Texas, “The consequence will be that Texas must become a depot for runaway slaves and a border war will soon commence. A part of the plan is Texas shall be placed under the protection of England and will then become the point from whence she will operate on these runaway negroes and the Indians on the Western border. ...”<sup>44</sup> Green also asked, “What will she [Great Britain] not give to abolish slave labor in the United States, when she believes that the effort to do so will array the North against the South and end in the dissolution of our nation?”<sup>45</sup> Green then noted that Great Britain “is not in a condition now to risk an open rupture on the question of abolition, but if you wait until she shall have planted herself and her allies in Texas she will then bid you defiance. She will then endeavor to accomplish a dissolution of the Union at any cost ... and will then seek a dissolution of the Union as the best means of destroying the manufactures of New England.”<sup>46</sup>

From these observations by Green, it can be argued that the origin of the national appeal for U.S. Annexation of Texas found its inspiration in Green’s early communications with Tyler. Green also eagerly reported rumors that “Lord Aberdeen had been reported to have given assurances to Lord Brougham in the House of Lords and to the Anti-Slavery Convention that this Government would exert its influence to abolish slavery in Texas ...” and also that:

this could not fail to alarm and greatly to excite the whole Southern Country ... the effect of abolishing slavery in Texas would be to establish a place of refuge for runaway slaves, and robbers—that the inevitable consequence would be a war and the conquest of Texas by the United States, for that after the declaration by Lord

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<sup>43</sup> “Duff Green to John Tyler, May 31, 1843,” *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>44</sup> “Duff Green to John Tyler, July 3, 1843,” *Ibid*, 221.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 222.

<sup>46</sup> “Duff Green to Abel Upshur, August 3, 1843,” *Ibid*, 224.

Aberdeen, Lord Brougham and Lord Morpeth, that the Slave may commit murder, theft, and robbery is such offence be necessary to his escape, he could not expect the Southern States to permit such a refuge to be established—altho[ugh] it might be under the Auspices of the British Gov[ernmen]t.<sup>47</sup>

However, Green was not alone in his concerns over British designs on Texas. Democrat and former Whig representative from Virginia Thomas Walker Gilmer wrote to the Baltimore *Republican and Argus* newspaper about Texas:

England, whose possessions and jurisdiction extend over so large a portion of the globe, whose influence is felt every where, will either possess or control Texas, if it does not come under the jurisdiction of the United States ... Having acquired Louisiana and Florida, we have an interest and a frontier on the Gulf of Mexico and along our interior to the Pacific, which will not permit us to close our eyes or fold our arms with indifference to the events which a few years may disclose in that quarter. We have already had one question of boundary with Texas ... There are numerous tribes of Indians along both frontiers which can easily become the cause or the instruments of border wars. Our own population is pressing onward to the Pacific. No power can restrain it. The pioneer from our Atlantic sea board, will soon kindle his fires and erect his cabin beyond the Rocky mountains and on the Gulf of California.<sup>48</sup>

Like many Americans with which Gilmer was a contemporary, these warnings about the apparent threat to national security were also accompanied by a strong belief in the future fate of America, a theme that would often be repeated by the strongest advocates of Manifest Destiny. In the spring and summer of 1843, Gilmer distributed a second letter, this time to the editor of the *Niles' Register*, which would also be reprinted in several places. In this letter, Gilmer responded to the anti-annexationist sentiments of John Quincy Adams, now an anti-Tyler Whig, and his allies in Congress by accusing them of “fostering unnatural and dangerous jealousies among the people of the States already in the Union ...” and then added:

I spoke of slavery as a subject of great delicacy in all its relations, but I had reference to the attempts of a few of our countrymen, aided by foreign emissaries, to dissolve our Union, and not, as these gentlemen have imagined, to any scheme for aggrandizing the South. I did not speak of annexation as calculated to give any

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<sup>47</sup> “Duff Green to John Tyler, August 29, 1843,” *Ibid*, 227-228.

<sup>48</sup> “Thomas Walker Gilmer to the Baltimore Republican and Argus, January 10, 1843,” *Ibid*, 203-204.

ascendancy to slavery in our councils, but as capable of harmonizing national discord, which some agitators, in conjunction with certain British agents at home and abroad, have long sought to inflame. I referred to the unsettled questions of jurisdiction and boundary between the United States to oppose the acquisition of Texas or California, especially since the results of British valor and diplomacy in China, results which I believe Mr. Adams either anticipated or desired some time since.<sup>49</sup>

Here, Gilmer less than politely implied that John Quincy Adams, now in the abolitionist phase of his career, and his allies in Congress were unwittingly, at the least, seditiously, at the worst, helping to aid the British Empire's foreign policy objectives. This aspect of the annexation debate centered around Democrats' criticism of John Quincy Adams and his late opposition to the Annexation of Texas. To these statesmen, Adam's opposition was hypocritical given his administration's own attempt to purchase Texas. For example, as early as October 1838, influential Democrat Francis P. Blair wrote the following to his friend Andrew Jackson:

As to the negotiations of Clay and Adams to recover Texas from Mexico ... [there is] ample evidence to convict Adams of the grossest inconsistency. His arguments now against the acquisition will be confronted by his acts as President, and what in his speech during the last year of your presidency, he declared to have been his sentiments while secretary of state ... he declared on the floor of the House, that he was opposed to the cession of Texas to Spain, but that he was overruled by Mr. Monroe and his counsellors ... His subsequent solicitude to recover the lost Territory when President would seem to give countenance to this, but now all his arguments go to shew that he is hostile to the re-annexation of Texas on the ground that it would add to the slave holding section of the union, an objection which shews that his real motives of conduct throughout, are as old in origin, as the date of the Louisiana admission, when the whole federal party opposed it, on the ground that the admission of this southern Territory, was calculated to add to the political weight of the southern portion of the Union. This is now the true cause of the northern outcry against the admission of Texas.<sup>50</sup>

Hence, by 1843, Adams' former support for the Annexation of Texas was already well known to the American public. At this time, Duff Green embarked on an editorial letter-writing

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<sup>49</sup> "Thomas Walker Gilmer to the Editor, Niles' Register, Charlottesville, May 15, 1843," Ibid, 213-214.

<sup>50</sup> "Francis P. Blair to Andrew Jackson, October 19, 1838," in *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson: Volume V* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1931), 567-568.

campaign calling on Democrats and all patriotically minded Americans to support the Annexation of Texas. In a letter to the *Boston Post* dated September 18, 1843, Green wrote:

If we are to have war with England it will be because we have first permitted her to re-establish herself in Texas—to have converted that Republic into a refuge for robbers and runaway slaves, and because she will believe that the abolitionists of the north will unite with her in a war upon the territories and property of the south, and thus accomplish her great purpose of universal dominion over the white man, under the pretence of emancipating the black ... Let us be true to ourselves—let us demonstrate that there is no foundation for Sir Robert Peel’s belief, that Mr. Adams and his co-conspirators can dissolve the union or abolish slavery, and the good sense of this great people will coerce this government [Great Britain] into making arrangements with us, that will so much identify their interests with ours as to terminate forever the intrigues which now threaten to disturb our peace.<sup>51</sup>

Green was much less charitable than Gilmer had been, even going as far as to accuse Adams and others of conspiring to destroy the Union. Other papers such as the *Madisonian* printed an editorial on October 30, 1843, warning that British “philanthropy, like that of Mr. John Quincy Adams, is eager to precipitate the country into the horrors of a civil and servile war.”<sup>52</sup> On November 15, 1843, the *Madisonian* observed that:

the progress of Great Britain to almost universal domination has been the effect of a systematic plan of national aggrandizement, persevering, inexorably pursued ... This systematic and selfish policy of Great Britain is the real and governing motive in all her intercourse with foreign nations; and in nothing will it appear more obvious to those who choose to reflect upon it than in the active part which she has taken as a nation and among nations, on the subject of negro slavery ... She must have a rational purpose and object; and every thing tends to show that her object is to attack the existence of our Government, and our Union, through the institution of slavery in the Southern States ...<sup>53</sup>

The editorial also stated that “she would probably have very little reluctance in promoting dissensions or civil war among ourselves.”<sup>54</sup> Accusing the British government of attempting to

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<sup>51</sup> “Duff Green to the Boston Post, London, September 18, 1843,” in Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 233.

<sup>52</sup> “*Madisonian*, October 31, 1843,” *Ibid*, 247.

<sup>53</sup> “*Madisonian*, November 15, 1843,” *Ibid*, 249.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.

foment a civil war in the United States between North and South as a less costly means of destroying the Union than a full-scale war, the *Madisonian* continued this argument on November 16, 1843, when it wrote the following:

It is urged, by those who are anxious to exculpate the British Government from the imputation of selfish or sinister designs, in its persevering and systematic agitation of the subject of negro slavery, that it is a philanthropic movement, forced on the Government by public opinion at home ... the policy of the British Government does not lie so near the surface. It was well aware that Texas, as a province of Mexico, could not subserve its purpose. It was well aware that our Government, in conformity with its well-known public declaration [The Monroe Doctrine], would regard as a belligerent act, any attempt on the part of a European Government to acquire a new colony on our Continent, and in our vicinity, whether for the philanthropic purpose of establishing an asylum for free persons of color, or for any other purpose. Texas, therefore, as a part of Mexico, could not peaceably come into the possession, or under the controlling influence, of Great Britain; but detached from Mexico, and recognized as an independent State, her Government might be worked upon, and her population become alienated from the citizens of the United States by a show of friendship and partiality from the powerful Government of Great Britain. From a natural ally, of the Southern portion at least, of the United States, she might by an adroit policy, aided by the jealousies and disputes likely soon to arise between conterminous independent States, be converted into an enemy.<sup>55</sup>

As the new year came, on January 6, 1844, Virginia Democrat and legal jurist Henry St. George Tucker Sr. wrote Thomas Walker Gilmer, warning of the dangers of the potential breakup of the Union:

If then the Southern states cannot emancipate, what will they do if the Northern states should ... succeed in procuring an amendment providing for universal emancipation? They must separate, and if they separate, or if, as you say Mr. Adams suggests, the North will separate if the proposed amendment *cannot* pass, then will come 'the hardest send off.' The union must be dissolved. And what will succeed to brotherhood? *Unconquerable hatred*. A barrier must be drawn around the Southern states for the exclusion from their boundaries of Northern emissaries and abolitionists, of wretches who will come with fair faces and base hearts, to sow the seeds of insurrection among the Southern slaves ... Nay more—if Mr. Adams and his constituents take to their bosoms our slaves, women and all, they must and will throw us into the arms of England. So far from tariffs to protect Northern manufacturers, English goods will be admitted on the most favourable terms, and Northern goods totally excluded. Will this bring about war with those who are now

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<sup>55</sup> "Madisonian, November 16, 1843," Ibid, 250-251.

our brethren? If so, and we should find ourselves too weak, what will be the natural consequence? I shudder to look forward to it. England—the only party who will have gained by the feud, will be our ally, or theirs, and thus these fatal measures must inevitably lead to unnatural quarrels between brethren, and a scarcely less hateful union with our former foes!<sup>56</sup>

After the revelation of the supposed British abolitionist plot by Duff Green, Abel Upshur wrote to Calhoun, “Ought we not move immediately for the admission of Texas into the Union as a slave holding State? Should not the South *demand* it, as indispensable to their security ... To admit Texas as a non-slave holding State, or to permit her to remain an independent and sovereign non-slave holding state, will be fatal to the Union, and ruinous to the whole country... To the South, it is a question of safety. ...”<sup>57</sup> Calhoun replied to Upshur:

You do not ... attach too much importance to the designs of Great Britain in Texas. That she is using all her diplomatick arts and influence to abolish slavery there, with the intention of abolishing it in the United States ... That her object is power and monopoly, and abolition but the pretext, I hold to be not less clear ... No nation, in ancient, or modern time, ever pursued dominion and commercial monopoly more perseveringly and vehemently than she has ... If she can carry out her schemes in Texas, and through them her designs against the Southern States, it would prove the profoundest and most successful stroke of policy she ever made; and would go far towards giving her the exclusive control of the cotton trade ... The danger is great and menacing, involving in its consequences the safety of the Union and the very existence of the South ...<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, on British intentions, both Upshur and Calhoun could agree regarding abolition and, with it, the possible dissolution of the Union. Also around this time, Calhoun wrote to Upshur on Great Britain’s attempt to abolitionize Texas, asserting, “Connected with this subject, Cuba deserves attention. Great Britain is at work there, as well as in Texas; and both are equally important to our safety.”<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, Abel Upshur continued his diplomatic offensive to facilitate the U.S. Annexation of Texas and to pre-empt any British schemes concerning that

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<sup>56</sup> “Henry St. George Tucker to Thomas Walker Gilmer, January 6, 1844,” *Ibid*, 267.

<sup>57</sup> “Abel Upshur to John C. Calhoun, August 14, 1843,” *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>58</sup> “John C. Calhoun to Abel Upshur, August 27, 1843,” *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

country. His efforts proceeded apace until his untimely death as a result of the explosion of the *USS Princeton* in February 1844. In the wake of Upshur's death, John C. Calhoun was appointed the new Secretary of State by President John Tyler and continued on with the work that Upshur had begun in his negotiations with the Texan government in January 1844, efforts that ultimately ended with the successful conclusion of a treaty for Texan annexation on April 12, 1844. Later, Calhoun wrote to U.S. Senator from Alabama William R. King, explaining his concerns and the need for the United States to annex Texas:

It is impossible to cast a look at the map of the United States and Texas, and to note the long, artificial, and inconvenient line which divides them ... without coming to the conclusion that it is their destiny to be united, and, of course, that annexation is merely a question of *time* and *mode* ... but if it be opposed by foreign interference, a new direction would be given to our energy, much less favorable to harmony with our neighbors and to the general peace of the world ... But, to descend to particulars, it is certain, that while England, like France, desires the independence of Texas, with the view to commercial connexions, it is not less so that one of the leading motives of England for desiring it is the hope that, through her diplomacy and influence, negro slavery may be abolished there, and ultimately, by consequence, in the United States and throughout the entire continent ... is manifest from the declaration of the abolition party and societies, both in this country and England. In fact, there is good reason to believe that the scheme of abolishing it in Texas, with the view to its abolition in the United States and over the continent, originated with the prominent members of the party in the United States, and was first broached by them in the so-called world's convention, held in London in the year 1840, and through its agency brought to the notice of the British Government.<sup>60</sup>

So concerned was Calhoun over the British encouragement of abolition in Texas that he felt compelled to send an imprudent letter to the British Minister to the United States, Richard Pakenham on April 18, 1844. In this letter, Calhoun communicated the following to Pakenham:

[The] concern the president [Tyler] regards the avowal of Lord Aberdeen of the desire of Great Britain to see slavery abolished in Texas, and, as he infers, is endeavoring, through her diplomacy, to accomplish it by making the abolition of slavery one of the conditions on which Mexico should acknowledge her independence. It has confirmed his previous impressions as to the policy of Great Britain in reference to Texas, and made it his duty to examine with much care and solicitude what would be its effects on the prosperity and safety of the United

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<sup>60</sup> "John C. Calhoun to William R. King, August 12, 1844," *Ibid*, 281-283.

States, should she succeed in her endeavors. The investigation has resulted in the settled conviction that it would be difficult for Texas, in her actual condition, to resist what she desires, without supposing the influence and exertions of Great Britain would be extended beyond the limits assigned by Lord Aberdeen; and that, if Texas could not resist the consummation of the object of her desire, would endanger both the safety and prosperity of the Union. Under this conviction, it is felt to be the imperious duty of the federal government, the common representative and protector of the states of the Union, to adopt, in self-defense, the most effectual measures to defeat it.<sup>61</sup>

In doing so, Calhoun had inadvertently laid bare to the British government his concern over Texas remaining an independent state and the role that the fear of abolitionism played in his thinking. By linking the abolition debate to the Annexation of Texas, Calhoun's letter drew unwanted attention to the slavery question in relation to the annexation struggle while providing much inspiration to Northern abolitionists who believed in a "slave power" conspiracy. Also around this time, Green wrote to Whig U.S. Senator from North Carolina Willie P. Magnum concerning reports from the World Anti-Slavery Convention, where Lewis Tappan of New York had declared, "I invoke *the British nation to aid in the emancipation of slaves on the American continent!*"<sup>62</sup> and John Quincy Adams had reportedly said that:

it was the duty of the British Government to exert their influence to abolishing slavery in Texas, as a means of abolishing it in the United States, and speaking of the Annexation ... The last hope of the slave will be extinguished if this union be effected. If, however, Texas is made a free State—and I do not believe it can be done without the interposition of this [the English] nation—an everlasting barrier will be erected to the extension of this system. *Slavery will die out* and then we will come to London, or invite you to come to America to hold another World's Convention to celebrate.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> "John C. Calhoun to Richard Pakenham, 18 April 1844," in *The Works of John C. Calhoun, vol. 5: Reports and Public Letters of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Richard K. Crallé (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1859), 333-339.

<sup>62</sup> "Duff Green to Willie P. Magnum, May 8, 1844," *Ibid*, 277.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 277-278.



Thus, Duff Green sincerely believed that John Quincy Adams and his fellow abolitionists in the United States acted as *de facto* as agents of the British Empire. Similarly, Green also informed Calhoun on June 17, 1844, of his conviction of the following:

I have expressed the opinion that Gen[era]l Santa Anna would rather see Texas in the hands of G[reat] B[ritain] than of the U.S. The reasons for this opinion are plain and powerful ... They serve each other, and the interests of G[reat] B[ritain] is on his side ... Naturally enough then he leans to the side of English interest. At the same time, he hates our Gov[ernment]t. and our people. The disgrace and misfortunes of San Jacinto he can neither forget nor forgive[n]; and he would gladly see G[reat] B[ritain] encircle us on every side, & strangle our growing commerce and power in her strong embrace ... I informed you in my last dispatch that a special messenger had been sent to England in the last Havana packet. Immediately afterwards, it was rumoured that he had been sent to offer to England the sale of Texas ... It may then be that Santa Anna expects, by a rapid movement with a large army, to overrun Texas; & hold it some 60 or 90 days, & then by a hasty transfer, sell it to England, before the Texans shall be able to rally and drive him back. That this is Santa Anna's expectation, I have little doubt. That England would accept such a proposition, with the certainty of a war with the U.S. as the consequence, is more questionable, and I, for one, can not believe that she would. Certain I am, however, that the desire of the British Legation here, now is, not for the independence of Texas, but for her subjugation.<sup>64</sup>

These suspicions were not altogether unfounded because British Minister in Mexico Charles Bankhead recalled a conversation that he had had with Santa Anna concerning Texas on June 29, 1844. Bankhead said that Santa Anna:

was determined to reconquer the territory [Texas]; he deprecated the recent conduct of the United States executive and eulogized Great Britain ... The question of whether England and France would aide Mexico was raised. Santa Anna said the United States will take Texas; that this question was not truly 'confined to Texas but that it embraced a future attempt at occupation of New Mexico and California ... Santa Anna said he intends to reconquer Texas which he could effect 'provided the United States did not lend their assistance to prevent it'; that being accomplished, Mexico intended to propose to several powers of Europe to colonize the territory from their respective states, under the protection of Mexico thus furnishing a strong barrier against the attempts of the United States.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> "Duff Green to John C. Calhoun, 17 June 1844," in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun: Volume 19* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 102-103.

<sup>65</sup> Foreign Office 50/174 From Mr. Bankhead. 1844, May-Jun. 299-304 Bankhead to Aberdeen. Number 44. Mexico. June 29, 1844.

Although Santa Anna did not propose an outright transfer of Texas to the British Empire, he did suggest colonizing Texas with European immigrants with no ties to the United States as a means of establishing a neutral buffer territory against future U.S. expansion into New Mexico and California. Also around this time, Calhoun's former political rival, Andrew Jackson, similarly raised the alarm of what Texas in British hands might mean to the Union, and slavery was only a minor consideration when compared to that of general national security. For example, in March 1844, Jackson warned his fellow Americans:

The present golden moment to obtain Texas must not be lost, or Texas must, from necessity, be thrown into the arms of England, and be forever lost to the United States— England in possession of Texas, or in strict alliance, offensive and defensive, and contending for California. How easy would it be for Great Britain to interpose a force sufficient to prevent emigration to California from the United States, and supply her garrison from Texas! Every *real American*, when they view this, with the danger to New Orleans from British arms from Texas, must unite, heart and hand, in the annexation of Texas to the United States. It will be a strong iron hoop around our Union, and a bulwark against all foreign invasion or aggression. I say, again, let not this opportunity slip to regain Texas, or it may elude our grasp forever, or cost us oceans of blood and millions of money to free us from the evils that may be brought upon us.<sup>66</sup>

In another letter, Jackson described what the British might do during a Texas-based land invasion of the United States, declaring that:

Great Britain has already made treaties with Texas ... May she not enter into an alliance with Texas? And reserving ... the northwestern boundary question as a cause of war with us, whenever she chooses to declare it, let us suppose that as an ally with Texas, we are to fight her? Predatory to such a movement, she sends her 20,000 and 30,000 men to Texas; organizes them on the Sabine, where her supplies and arms can be concentrated before we have even notice of her intentions; makes a lodgement on the Mississippi; excites the negroes to insurrection; the lower country falls and with it New Orleans, and a servile war rages through the whole South and West. In the mean while she is also moving an army along the upper western frontier from Canada, which in cooperation with the army from Texas, spreads ruin and havoc from the [Great] Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. Who can

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<sup>66</sup> David A. Copeland, *The Antebellum Era: Primary Documents on Events from 1820 to 1860* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 186.

estimate the national loss we may sustain, before such a movement could be repelled with such force as we could organize on short notice?<sup>67</sup>

Faced with the perilous prospect of a British foothold on the continent so close to the Mississippi River and the slaveholding South, this scenario raised all the familiar concerns of servile “insurrections” or slave rebellions. Jackson then turned to the security of the western frontier and the common fear of a general Indian uprising instigated by British agents. Chiding some Northern politicians for their naïve opposition to the Annexation of Texas, Jackson lamented:

Texas in the hands of Great Britain, added to the danger of British influence upon our Western Indians, on the event of war, and the dreadful scenes apprehended from a servile war, with the Indians combined, on our South and West, —the feelings of the West might have been well judged of on this Subject ... if her offer is now rejected, Texas is lost to the United States forever, until regained at the point of the Bayonet. That her depressed situation, will, from necessity, compel her to seek relief by engagements with some foreign power— *that will be England* ... The Safety of the Republic being the supreme law—and believing that the annexation of Texas is es[s]ential to the Safety of the Republic—and the key to that safety, being offered in peace to us by an independent nation, it is believed it ought to be speedily received, the door locked fast against all future dangers, and our glorious Union preserved and the harmony and the prosperity of the whole Union restored. *The Union must be preserved* ...<sup>68</sup>

Portraying the failure to annex Texas as nothing less than the death knell of the Union, Jackson pleaded with his countrymen to carry through with the last object of his earthly desire and career as a statesman.

In his final public appeal to the nation on the Annexation of Texas, Jackson wrote, “Now when we can obtain that country which once belonged to us, so essential to the security of New Orleans, and the whole western portion of our Union, can there be an American, or a patriot who will not unite, and rejoice in this annexation, so essential to our security, and growing greatness, in every way that the subject can be viewed ... the Senator who votes against the ratification of

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<sup>67</sup> James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson: VIII* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 658-660.

<sup>68</sup> “Letters of Gideon J. Pillow to James K. Polk, 1844.” *The American Historical Review* 11, no. 4 (1906): 833-834. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1832231>.

the Treaty, must be a traitor to the best interest of our beloved country, whatever pretext he may attempt to shield himself under.”<sup>69</sup> The apprehension of what might happen if the U.S. did not annex Texas was shared across party lines, as Southern Whig and President John Tyler warned of the possible encirclement of the United States by the British Empire. In his Presidential Message of April 22, 1844, Tyler argued that “Texas will seek for the friendship of others. In contemplating such a contingency, it cannot be overlooked that the United States are already almost surrounded by the possessions of European Powers. The Canadas, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, the islands in the American seas, with Texas, trammled by treaties of alliance, or of a commercial character, differing in policy from that of the United States, would complete the circle.”<sup>70</sup>

Likewise, Duff Green drew a similar, yet more terrifying, picture by claiming that the British sought to encircle the United States with their presence in Canada and British naval power along its coasts and in the Caribbean, with Mexico and potentially Texas as satellites; this accomplished their noose of strangulation around American commerce, which would mean barriers to U.S. expansion would then be complete.<sup>71</sup> Green also claimed that Great Britain was now pushing abolition in Texas and the United States to even the economic playing field by lowering America to post-abolition British levels of productivity. Furthermore, Green also asserted that Great Britain wanted to abolitionize Texas to make it a refuge for escaped slaves from the Southern States and, in doing so, potentially encourage a Santo Domingo–style slave rebellion.<sup>72</sup> Influential Democrat and U.S. Senator from Mississippi Robert J. Walker, originally from

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<sup>69</sup> “Andrew Jackson to William B. Lewis, May 3, 1844,” in Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 78.

<sup>70</sup> John Tyler, “President John Tyler’s Message to the United States Senate, April 22, 1844,” in *Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America* (United States: Order of the Senate of the United States, 1887), 259.

<sup>71</sup> Frederick Merk, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) 23.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 21-23.

Pennsylvania, echoed the sentiments of these other men in his famous “safety valve” speech to Congress, in which he attempted to garner national support for the Annexation of Texas:

In truth, Texas is nearly as indispensable for the safe and permanent occupation of Oregon, as it is for the security of New Orleans and the Gulf. The only remaining objection is the question of slavery. And we have a question which is to curtail the limits of the republic—to threaten its existence—to recall our commerce and expel our manufactures from bays and rivers that once were all our own—to strike down the flag of the Union, as it advances towards our ancient boundary—to surrender a mighty territory, and invite to its occupancy the deadliest (in truth, the only) foes this government has ever encountered? Is anti-slavery to do all this? And is it so to endanger New Orleans, and the valley and commerce and outlet of the West, that we would hold them, not by our own strength, but by the slender tenure of the will and mercy of Great Britain? If anti-slavery can effect all this, may God, in his infinite mercy, save and perpetuate this Union; for the efforts of man would be feeble and impotent. The avowed object of this party is the immediate abolition of slavery. For this, they traverse sea and land; for this, they hold conventions in the capital of England; and there they brood over schemes of abolition, in association with British societies; there they join in denunciations of their countrymen, until their hearts are filled with treason; and they return home, Americans in name, but Englishmen in feelings and principles. Let us all, then, feel and know, whether we live North and South, that this party, if not vanquished, must overthrow the government, and dissolve the Union. This party propose[s] the immediate abolition of slavery throughout the Union.<sup>73</sup>

After discussing the economic effects of abolition with the driving down of the wages of Northern workers because of competition from newly freed slaves, Walker went on to describe what he believed would be the unintended social consequences of immediate abolition: a large and sudden population of free blacks able to move throughout the Union. Walker claimed that with little means to support themselves, they would flood shelters and insane asylums, thereby overwhelming the social safety nets of the North. Walker then provided his solution of using Texas as a “safety valve” to “diffuse” the free black and slave populations of the United States by depositing them into Mexico, Central, and South America. As Walker attempted to convince

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<sup>73</sup> “Robert Walker to the People of Carroll County, Kentucky, January 8, 1844,” in Frederick Merk, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration*, 231.

Northerners that the Annexation of Texas would be to their own benefit as well, his reasoning quickly shifted to the common appeal of the national security of the whole Union:

The reannexation of Texas would strengthen and fortify the whole Union, and antedate the period when our own country would be the first and greatest of all the powers of the earth. To the South and Southwest it would give it peace and security ... As a commercial dependency, Texas would be almost as much under the control of England, and in the event of war between that nation and this, the interests of Texas would all be on the side of England. It would be the interest of Texas, in the event of such a war, to aid England to seize New Orleans, or at least in blockading the mouth of the Mississippi, so as to exclude the cotton of the West from a foreign market, and leave to *Texas* almost the entire monopoly. Even if Texas were neutral, certainly our power would not be as strong in the gulf for the defence of New Orleans, and the mouth of the Mississippi, as if we owned and commanded all the streams which emptied into it—as if their people were our countrymen, and all the rivers and harbors and coast of Texas were our own.<sup>74</sup>

Walker also contended that even if Texas attempted to remain neutral in a war, the British would disregard such neutrality and launch an invasion of the United States through Texan territory, just as they had once used neutral Spanish Florida during the War of 1812. Walker further predicted that the British:

Would land suddenly at any point of the coast of Texas, and move along the Sabine, in the Territory of Texas, to the great bend, where it approaches within about one hundred miles of the Mississippi; and the intermediate territory being but thinly settled, she could advance rapidly across, seize the passage of the Mississippi, and cut off all communication from above, and descend upon New Orleans. Or she might proceed a little further, through the territory of Texas to Red river, the southern bank of which is within the limits of Texas, and equip her expedition; then by water descend the Red river, exciting a servile insurrection, and seize the Mississippi at the mouth of Red river. All these movements she might and would make through Texas. In this way she would seize and fortify her position on the Mississippi, and New Orleans must fall, if cut off from all communication from above. But, even if she only retained the single point on the Mississippi, it would as effectually command its outlet, and arrest its commerce ascending or descending, as if possessed of New Orleans. Whatever point she seized on the Mississippi, there she would entrench and fortify, and tens of thousands of lives, and hundreds of millions of dollars, would be required in driving her from this position. All this would be prevented by the reannexation of Texas. The Sabine and Red river would

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 235-236.

then be all our own, and no such movement, could be made for the seizure of the Mississippi.<sup>75</sup>

After addressing the prospect of a slave rebellion precipitated by a British invasion of the Gulf Coast, Walker then went on to discuss the prospect of an Indian uprising on the frontiers of both Texas and the United States:

Nor should it be forgotten that, when she [Britain] reached the Red river, and at a navigable point upon its southern bank in Texas, whom her gold, and her intrigues and promises would, as they have always done, incite to the work of death and desolation. If we desire to know what she would do under such circumstances, let us look back to Hampton and the Raisin, and they will answer the question. If for no other reason, the fact that for many hundred miles you have placed these Indians on the borders of Texas, separated only by the Red river, and on the frontiers of Louisiana and Arkansas, demands that, as an act of justice to these States, and as essential for their security and that of the Mississippi, you should have the possession of Texas. Our boundary and limits will always be incomplete, without the possession of Texas; and without it the great valley and its mightiest streams will remain forever dismembered and mutilated. Now, if we can acquire it, we should accomplish the object, for, in all probability, the opportunity, now neglected, will be lost forever ... I have shown that, in the event of a war with England, Texas, if we repelled her from our embrace, would become a complete dependency of England, alienated from us in feeling, in trade and intercourse, and identified in all with England. But would it rest here? No. Texas would first become a dependency, and then, in fact, a colony of England; and her arms, and ships, and power, would be thus transported to the mouth of the Mississippi.<sup>76</sup>

Senator Walker then made an impassioned personal plea to the people of the United States:

In the North, the flag of England waves from the Atlantic to the Pacific over a region much more extensive than our own; and if it must float also for several thousand miles upon the banks of the tributaries of the great Mississippi, and along the gulf, from the Sabine to the Del Norte, we will be surrounded on all sides by England in America. In the gulf, her supremacy would be clear and absolute; and in the great interior, she would hang on the rear of Louisiana and Arkansas, and within two days march of the Mississippi, while her forts would stand, and her flag would wave, for more than a thousand miles, on the banks of the Arkansas, the Sabine, and Red river, and in immediate contact with sixty thousand Indian warriors of our own, and half as many more of what would then be British Indians, within the present limits of Texas. If any doubt her course as to the Indians, let them refer to her policy in this respect during the revolution and the last war, and they will find that the savage has always been her favorite ally, and that she has shed more

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 237.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 237.

American blood, by the aid of the tomahawk and scalping-knife, than she ever did in the field of fair and open conflict ... And when Texas, by the refusal of reannexation, shall have fallen into the arms of England, and the American people shall behold the result ... who would place England at New Orleans or the mouth of the Mississippi? Who would place England on the banks of the Sabine, the Arkansas, and Red river? Who would place England along the coasts, and bays, and harbors, and in the great interior of Texas, and see her become a British colony, or—what is the same to us—a British commercial dependency? Could Texas be a power friendly to us, even if not a British colony? Would our refusal of reannexation secure her friendship? Would her rivalry in our great staple insure her good will? Would the monopoly of her trade by England increase her attachment to ourselves? No! Let reannexation be now finally refused, and she becomes a foreign and a hostile power, with all her interests antagonistical to our own. Indeed, all history tells us that there is no friendship between foreign and contiguous nations, presenting so many points of collision, so many jarring interests, and such a rivalry in the sale and production of the same great staple.<sup>77</sup>

After appealing to Americans' common understanding of the "problem of neighborhood" and a "balance of power," Walker went on to state elsewhere that "England, as she always heretofore has done in the case of neutrals, would seize upon her soil, her coast, her harbours, her rivers, and our and her Indians, in her invasion of the valley of the West; and the only certain measure of defence and protection is the reannexation of Texas ... To refuse the reannexation, is to refuse the defence of the West."<sup>78</sup> In his conclusion, Walker declared:

I shall persevere in the use of all honorable means to accomplish this great measure, so well calculated to advance the interests and secure the perpetuity of the American Union. That Union, and all its parts ... I love with the intensity of filial affection; and never could my heart conceive, or my hand be raised to execute, any project which could effect its overthrow. I have ever regarded the dissolution of this Union as a calamity equal to a second fall of mankind—not, it is true, introducing, like the first, sin and death into the world, but greatly augmenting all their direful influences. Such an event it would not be my wish to survive, to behold or participate in the scenes which would follow; and, among the reasons which induce me to advocate so warmly the reannexation of Texas, is the deep conviction, long entertained, that this great measure is essential to the security of the South, the defence of the West, and highly conducive to the welfare and perpetuity of the whole Union.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 238-239.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 240.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 245-246.



In another place, Walker added to these sentiments, stating:

I wish to see British intrigues and British influence forever expelled from the republic of Texas, and the ever glorious ensign of my beloved country unfolded throughout its borders. Such a result would indeed be great and glorious; it would be hailed with rejoicing from the St. Croix to the Del Norte; the swelling heart of every unprejudiced and true American would beat with joy, and England would feel as she did when her armies surrendered at Yorktown, and the forces of Pakenham retired discomfited from the plains of Orleans. But should it be otherwise—should the treaty fail, and Texas be lost to the Union—great will be the joy of England; for it will be a British triumph, achieved in the American Capitol, and by the votes of American senators.<sup>80</sup>

However, despite Walker's best efforts, the Treaty of Annexation ultimately failed to pass, due largely to Northern Whig opposition, and it was tabled in June 1844, leaving the Texas annexation question to become an issue for the fall presidential election. The British, for their part, would have wished to have seen anti-annexationist candidates at the top of the tickets of both the Whig and Democrat parties, but after the failure of Martin Van Buren to secure the Democrat Party's nomination for president, Henry Clay became their last hope to prevent the Annexation of Texas through U.S. domestic politics. After the failure of the Texan Treaty of Annexation to the United States in the late spring and early summer of 1844, the British drew back their diplomatic pressure campaign on Texas to prevent any potential backlash in the United States against Henry Clay's candidacy and the Whig Party's electoral chances. Around this time, British Ambassador to the United States Richard Pakenham warned Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen, with more than a small measure of political calculation, that:

It is scarcely necessary for us to remark that, by the rejection of the late Treaty the question of the annexation of Texas must not be considered as disposed of. On the contrary it must be looked upon as the question which at this moment most engages the attention of the American People, and which will form one of the most prominent Subjects of agitation and excitement during the approaching election to the Presidency. In fact it may be said that both questions will be tried at one and the same time: that is to say, if the feeling in favour of annexation should predominate, Mr. Polk, who stands upon that interest, and who has moreover the support of the

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<sup>80</sup> Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 80.

democratic party, except where anti-annexation feelings may operate against him, will be elected. If happily the party opposed to annexation should prevail, Mr. Clay, who has taken a stand in opposition to that measure, will be the man; in which case, although the project must not even then be thought of as abandoned or defeated, there would at least be a prospect of its being discussed with the calmness and dignity required by its importance, and by the interest which other powers are justly entitled to take in it. According to this view of the question it seems to us, My Lord, that the Gov[ernmen]ts. of England and France have everything to gain by the success of Mr. Clay: and accordingly that whatever might in any way unfavorably affect his prospects ought by all means to be avoided.<sup>81</sup>

Aberdeen also wrote to the British Ambassador to France, Henry Wellesley, 1st Baron Cowley, concerning Pakenham's conversation with his French counterpart, Louis Adolphe Aimé Fourier:

he [Pakenham] and his French Colleague are decidedly of opinion that any ostensible interference at this moment, on the part of Foreign Gov[ernmen]ts, and especially the English Gov[ernmen]t, in the Texian annexation Question, so far from advancing the object which we have in view, namely the prevention of the incorporation of Texas with the United States, would directly tend to defeat that object by throwing additional weight into the scale of Mr. Tyler or Mr. Polk, the Annexation Candidates for the Presidency, and proportionately diminishing Mr. Clay's chances of Election to the Presidential Chair. H[is] M[ajesty's] Gov[ernmen]t feel that this is at the present moment a very important consideration; and they are consequently disposed to defer, at all events until a more fitting season, the execution of their projected measure of combined interposition with Mexico and Texas on the basis of the joint guarantee of the Independence of Texas and the frontiers of Mexico by Great Britain and France.<sup>82</sup>

Despite British hopes and a close election, the pro-annexationist candidate, Democrat James K. Polk from Tennessee, won and was elected on a platform of the "re-Annexation of Texas" and the "re-Occupation of Oregon." After the contest, incumbent President John Tyler cited the results of Polk's election as evidence of a mandate by the American people in favor of the long-delayed Annexation of Texas:

The decision of the people and the States on this great and interesting subject has been decisively manifested. The question of annexation has been presently nakedly

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<sup>81</sup> Ephraim D. Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1978), 178.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 181-182.

to their consideration. By the treaty itself all collateral and incidental issues which were calculated to divide and distract the public councils were carefully avoided. These were left to the wisdom of the future to determine. It presented, I repeat, the isolated question of annexation, and in that form it has been submitted to the ordeal of public sentiment. A controlling majority of the people and a large majority of the States have declared in favor of immediate annexation. Instructions have thus come up to both branches of Congress from their respective constituents in terms the most emphatic. It is the will of both the people and the States that Texas shall be annexed to the Union promptly and immediately. It may be hoped that in carrying into execution and public will, thus declared, all collateral issues may be avoided.<sup>83</sup>

With these words, Tyler embarked on a last-ditch attempt to bring Texas into the Union but warned those who opposed the Annexation of Texas that they were threatening the stability of the country by doing so. Around this time, the Tyler Administration let the Mexican government know that, in no uncertain terms, any attempt to invade Texas while the question of annexation was still pending would be viewed as an act of hostility not only against Texas, but against the United States as well. As newly appointed U.S. Minister to Mexico William Shannon wrote to the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations, Manuel C. Rejon, on October 14, 1844, “The government of Mexico may delude itself by its fictions, but it cannot delude the rest of the world. It will be held responsible ... Such are the views entertained by the President of the United States in regard to the proposed invasion while the question of annexation is pending, and of the barbarous and bloody manner in which it is proclaimed it will be conducted; and, in conformity to his instructions, the undersigned solemnly protests against both, as highly injurious and offensive to the United States.”<sup>84</sup> Therefore, Mexico was warned not to attempt a conquest of Texas while the U.S. debated the issue of annexation or else face a potential war with both Texas and the United States, thus effectively making Texas an American protectorate.

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<sup>83</sup> “President Tyler to the Congress of the United States, December 3, 1844,” in Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 101-102.

<sup>84</sup> “Wilson Shannon to M.C. Rejon, October 14, 1844,” *Ibid*, 106.

Meanwhile, serious British interest in Texas began around the year 1840, as attested to by a document written by General James Hamilton Jr., a disgruntled South Carolinian who became one of Texas' leading figures. Hamilton's memorandum, which was forwarded by British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston to Richard Pakenham, stated the reasons why Great Britain should recognize Texan independence: 1) the desire to establish profitable commerce with that region, 2) an alternative source of cotton in the case of war or embargoes between the United States and Great Britain, 3) the eventual restoration of peace between Texas and Mexico, 5) Texas agreeing to assume and pay off a part of Mexico's debt to Great Britain, and 6) a further restraint on future U.S. expansion.<sup>85</sup> Contained in the report were also the likely outcomes of a failure to recognize the independence of Texas: 1) a potential Texan naval blockade of the Mexican coast or, at the very least, the harassment of Mexico's foreign trade by Texas, 2) continued Texan attempts to revolutionize the Northern provinces of Mexico by providing aid to movements such as the Republic of the Rio Grande, 3) punitive Texan tariffs on British goods for the nonrecognition of Texas by Great Britain, and 4) the possibility that some other European power might gain a more favorable commercial agreement than the British, despite the belief that an economic relationship between Texas and Great Britain was a more natural connection than other potential relationships, such as one between the Republic of Texas and the Kingdom of France.<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, after British recognition of Texas had been achieved, British Charge D'Affaires in Texas Charles Elliot listed his view of objectives in that country and a possible future convention of the Texan government, writing, "My scheme supposes another Convention in this Country, -Slavery to be abolished; the entire abolition of political disabilities upon people of

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<sup>85</sup> Ephraim D. Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas*, 53-54.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 53-54.

Colour, *perfectly free trade* to be declared to be a fundamental principle. ...”<sup>87</sup> The British desire to see Texas remain independent and abolitionized can best be summarized by the British Colonial Secretary in the Windward Islands, Francis C. Sheridan, who wrote the Acting Private Secretary of Governor MacGregor in Barbados, Joseph Garraway, on July 12, 1840, insisting that “England would derive in a few years from Texas a full supply of Cotton for her manufactures, equal if not superior to that now obtained from Louisiana, and Mississippi and if some slight and marked preference were given to her produce in England, the Planter and Labourer now working their nearly worn out land in the States would be found cultivating the Virgin Soil of Texas, and I really believe that twenty years would not pass away, before England (if necessary) might exclude every Bale of Cotton made in the [United] States.”<sup>88</sup>

Future British special agent in Texas, William Kennedy, went even further, warning Lord Aberdeen on October 20, 1841, about the “balance of power” in North America and the need for having a British diplomatic presence in Texas:

A new revolution has broken out in Mexico—Military Associations, for the purpose of overthrowing British rule and influence in North America, have been formed, from Maine to Missouri—the planters of Cuba are growing impatient of British interference in the Slave Trade—these matters—which necessarily fall under Your Lordship’s Cognizance—may, I humbly conceive, be referred to in support of my opinion that the interests of this Country [Great Britain] require the early presence of an Agent in Texas. I believe there are few among the great party leaders in the United States who do not look to the speedy extension of the Federal Union from Hudson’s Bay to the Rio Grande and the Gulf of California with the Island of Cuba as an insular appendage ... I wrote for the purpose of awakening attention to the subject of American encroachment in that quarter, being thoroughly convinced that, unless English influence be employed in raising up a stable independent power on the South-Western and North Western frontiers of the Union, a very few years will suffice to place the whole of the territory they covet under the Sovereignty of the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>88</sup> “Francis C. Sheridan to Joseph Garraway, July 12, 1840,” in Ephraim D. Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas, 1838-1846* (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1917), 26.

United States. There lies the danger to the Maritime and Commercial supremacy of Great Britain.<sup>89</sup>

To Britons such as William Kennedy, the rapid expansion of the United States required an answer from Great Britain, and an independent Texas with a strong connection to the British Empire was a potential answer to America's rising power. Similarly, concerned Englishman Charles Power wrote to the French Representative in Texas, Monsieur Le Comte de Saligny, urging France to take joint action with Great Britain in preventing Texas from becoming part of the United States because Annexation of Texas would in time:

lead on to a constant state of quarrel on the frontier, and ultimately to the March of the Anglo-Saxon race to the conquest of the South American Continent. You know enough of the composition of the people to know and feel that the European Gov[ernmen]ts. ought not to allow the race to travel beyond its present limit, for travel they will with their energy and the sooner some arrangement of Meditation for this Country, with a guarantee of those powers United States, France, and England, in meditating a peace with Mexico the better, by this means the onward march may be arrested some 50 or 60 years and a good and lucrative trade carried on by them in the introduction of their manufactures: Every day is bringing the U[nited] States in competition with us in manufactures of every description, and latterly the improvement is astonishing. The possession then of this Market, would afford them an increased stimulus to the export of their products and drive us completely out of Market ... Let the United States on[ce] possess this Country [Texas] and where is She to stop, 10 years will prove it to us in Europe, whereas 10 years hence by a determination that Mexico should recognize that you have a Country exporting as much Cotton as Alabama now does or nearly ½ the amount of American cotton which are consumed in England.<sup>90</sup>

On using Texas as a barrier to U.S. expansion, British Charge D'Affaires Charles Elliot expressed his hope that "Texas, with a free population would of course have been an object of great dislike and suspicion to the South Western States of America, and therefore an effectual barrier between them and Mexico. And it is manifestly the permanent interest of this Country [Texas] to cultivate more intimate and friendly relations with the people and things Westward of

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<sup>89</sup> "William Kennedy to Lord Aberdeen, October 20, 1841," Ibid, 45-46.

<sup>90</sup> "Charles Power to Comte de Saligny, June 20, 1842," Ibid, 72-74.

the Rio Grande, than with those East of the Sabine. ...”<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Elliot predicted that, with the firm establishment of an independent Texas, “the power of the United States on this Continent would be gradually balanced, and yet without motive for collision; Indeed it seems possible enough that the North Eastern States would not be disturbed to see the power of the South and West effectually limited, and a bound marked, beyond which Slavery could not advance.”<sup>92</sup> Elliot also told Lord Aberdeen that it “would be a wise and great policy to put peace between them [Texas and Mexico], starting this Country [Texas] upon principles that would gradually detach her from the United States connexion, and bind her to the Countries South West of Her, enduringly— Reflection strengthens me in the persuasion that such a combination is practicable ... it is a policy recommended by very high considerations.”<sup>93</sup>

After discussing the need to establish Texas as a barrier to U.S. expansion and maintain a “balance” in North America, Elliot wrote to the British Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Henry Unwin Addington, that he did not “believe that the Government and people of the United States have just or Moderate purposes with respect to Mexico. To put Texas between them ... is the best barrier that I believe the nature of circumstances offers against the consequences and encroachments in my mind deliberately intended” and that “Texas, differently established would put an end to all combination of that kind, and be a very helpful weight in the preservation of peace, and a just balance of power on this Continent. I cannot help thinking that money lent to put an end to Slavery in a South West direction in America, and to give a place and a voice to the Coloured races, would render as profitable returns as money spent for fortresses and Military works on the Northern frontier of the United States ...” and in doing so “Texas would be

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<sup>91</sup> “Charles Elliot to H.U. Addington, November 15, 1842,” Ibid, 127-128.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>93</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, November 15, 1842,” Ibid, 141.

effectually separated from the United States of the Union, and a liberal Commercial policy would as effectually detach it from the N.E. States infected by a spirit of Commercial hostility to Great Britain, and this last principle efficaciously worked out would soon relax the self injurious fiscal system of Mexico.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, Elliot encouraged a British policy that would free Texas from its economic system of slavery, a strategy he believed could be a substitute for costly military expenditures by exploiting a key vulnerability on America’s borders.

Around this time, Elliot also took exception to U.S. President John Tyler’s December 6, 1842, Message to Congress, in which Tyler alluded to the Monroe Doctrine in declaring, “With the other powers of Europe our [U.S.] relations continue on the most amicable footing ... Carefully abstaining from interference in all questions exclusively referring themselves to the political interests of Europe, we may be permitted to hope an equal exemption from the interference of European Governments in what relates to the States of the American continent.”<sup>95</sup> On December 28, 1842, British Charge D’Affaires to Texas Charles Elliot sarcastically responded to Tyler’s message, blasting the Americans for their supposed hypocrisy:

I presume that this means that United States politicians and financiers dislike disturbance on the little Island, forming the Continent of North and South America. But it is possible that this pretension of United States policy may not be equally acceptable to all “the States of the American Continent.” There is room to suspect that some of the States of the American Continent have no particular confidence in Washington[’s] purposes, and no desire to cast off all other friendship in peace, or alliances in War ... When I read this announcement drumming us all off this Continent, from the Artic to the Antartic, I could not but pull back to what had been said some distance up the stream of small print ... It seems then that there is no objection to as much of United States influence on the Continent of Europe, as may serve to draw one half of it upon our backs in that contingency of deepest interest,-

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<sup>94</sup> “Charles Elliot to H.U. Addington, December 16, 1842,” *Ibid*, 143-144.

<sup>95</sup> John Tyler, *State of the Union Address to the Congress of the United States, December 6, 1842*.  
<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/john-tyler/state-of-the-union-1842.php>



war between the United States and Great Britain, but Great Britain must pretend to no influence on the *Continent* of America.<sup>96</sup>

Still, Elliot believed that Mexico could stave off a crisis with the United States, asserting:

it is in General Santa Ana's power, by speedy, wise, and liberal arrangements with Texas, upon the basis of its independence, pretty rapidly to detach it from its intimate connexion with the people and things East of the Sabine [the United States], to the great increase and security of the just and powerful influence of his own Country on this Continent. With a comprehensive policy on his part, steadily directed to these ends, Texas would settle to a considerable extent by emigration from England, Germany, and France; And a people will be placed between the United States and Mexico ... whose interest it will be not merely to maintain a Neutral attitude, in the event of dispute with that Country ... but rather to lean to the side of Mexico. For independent Texas will be in many respects a rival producing Country with [the] United States ... Be assured that the adjustment of this question on this basis of the independence of Texas, is ill liked in the United States, particularly through the help of our own and other European Governments.<sup>97</sup>

This suggestion to encourage European immigration to Texas to detach the loyalties of Texans from the United States would resurface in Santa Anna's own writings several years later. Elliot also wrote Aberdeen of another potential benefit of abolition in Texas, stating, "One great practical advantage of the proposal of Mexico to acknowledge the Independence of Texas upon the condition to which Your Lordship has adverted, would be the indisposition of the Slave holders of the United States to bring any more of their people into this Country with the prospect of that conclusion before them. ..."<sup>98</sup> Elliot later noted, "The mere announcement of their [Mexico's] just and honorable determination that a land which was free under their rule should not be turned into a Pen of Slaves for the convenience of persons possessing such property in the exhausted Slave States of the North American Union would of itself be a very important step towards the establishment and security of the due and needful weight of Mexico in the affairs of this Continent

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<sup>96</sup> "Charles Elliot to H.U. Addington, December 28, 1842," in Ephraim D. Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas*, 145-146.

<sup>97</sup> "Charles Elliot to Percy W. Doyle, June 21, 1843," *Ibid*, 225-226.

<sup>98</sup> "Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, [uncertain date]," *Ibid*, 266.

... Such a policy on the part of Mexico in the present emergency will have the effect of turning ... disaster into safety and advantage, interposing more effectual barriers against encroaching purposes from the other side of the 'Sabine' [i.e., the United States], than the best lines of military defence, maintained in strong force, and the most effectual manner."<sup>99</sup> Explaining that barring slavery in Texas would dissuade further immigration from the Southern United States, Elliot suggested that this would clear the way for European immigrants with no ties to the Union.

The realization of such a plan would have been welcomed by British citizens living in Texas who were there carrying on the merchant trade. For example, British agent William Kennedy wrote a letter to Lord Aberdeen on July 8, 1844, which included a memorial written by concerned British foreign nationals in Texas. The letter stated that these memorialists:

cannot but view the projected measure of Annexation as wholly inconsistent with the treaty obligations to which Great Britain and the Republic of Texas are mutually covenanting and assenting parties ... at variance with their Mercantile Interests, and as they believe, with the interests of England and all other Manufacturing Countries of Europe. That being likewise impressed with the Conviction, that the incorporation of Texas with the Federal Union would ultimately give to the United States the power to establish a Monopoly of North American Commerce, and transfer to them a complete ascendancy in the Affairs of this Continent.—Your Memorialists humbly hope that Her Majesty's Gov[ernmen]t will adopt such Measures as they, in their Wisdom may deem most expedient to bring about an early and honourable Settlement of the difficulties existing between Mexico and Texas and to guard against the accomplishments of any project inconsistent with the Political Independence of the Republic [of Texas] and the treaty Stipulations existing between her and G[rea]t Britain.<sup>100</sup>

However, Lord Aberdeen anticipated the memorialists' words with actions when he authorized an offer to the Mexican representative in London, Tomas Murphy, in which Aberdeen expressed his desire to see Mexico acknowledge the independence of Texas. Aberdeen offered that, if Mexico would "concede this point [on Texan independence], England... will oppose the

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<sup>99</sup> "Charles Elliot to Percy W. Doyle, October 10, 1843," *Ibid*, 268.

<sup>100</sup> "Ruthven and Others [Memorialists] to Aberdeen, July 8, 1844," *Ibid*, 345-346.

annexation of Texas [by the United States] and moreover he [Aberdeen] would endeavour that France and England will unite in guaranteeing not only the independence of Texas, but also the boundary of Mexico. On the other hand should Mexico persist in declining to recognize Texas, the intentions of England to prevent the annexation of that country to the United States might not be put in execution.”<sup>101</sup> When Aberdeen was warned that the United States would not give up trying to annex Texas, he allegedly responded by asserting that if Great Britain and France were united on Texan Independence, “it would matter little to England whether the American Government should be willing to drop this question or not, and that should it be necessary, she [Great Britain] would go to the last extremity in support of her opposition to the annexation; but that for this purpose it was essential that Mexico be disposed to acknowledge the independence of Texas.”<sup>102</sup>

Thus, Aberdeen was humored by the prospect of confronting the U.S. with an Anglo-French alliance to maintain the “balance of power” in North America, even if it meant war. Early twentieth-century U.S. historian Justin Harvey Smith would write of this document, which later became known as the “Murphy Memorandum,” that it was “perfectly clear that Great Britain was so anxious to prevent annexation that she stood ready, if supported [by France] as her minister indicated, to undertake a war in order to establish at the Sabine [River] a perpetual barrier against us [the United States]. That such was the meaning of the Murphy Memorandum and also of the Diplomatic Act is already evident enough, and the close concert between the two powers [Great Britain and France] makes the French government a full accessory in this design. ...”<sup>103</sup> However, as Smith pointed out, the British also warned that Mexican intransigence would “paralyse the

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<sup>101</sup> Justin H. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas*, 389-390.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 389-390.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 394.

exertions by which Great Britain and France were prepared to uphold the Independence of Texas against the encroachments of the United States, even at the risk of a collision with that Power.”<sup>104</sup>

Still, even so, British officials remained concerned that Mexico might attempt to reconquer Texas, as British Minister in Mexico Bankhead wrote to Aberdeen, “If the President [of Mexico], contrary to our hopes and belief, were to take the rash step of invading Texas with a view to its forcible reconquest, and if, by so doing, he should find himself involved in difficulties with other Countries [meaning the United States], he must not look for the support of Great Britain in aiding him to extricate himself from those difficulties.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, there were clearly defined limits to British or even French willingness to go to war to guarantee Mexico’s borders. Eventually, the Mexican government realized that it risked losing British and French support if it persisted in its obstinacy regarding Texan independence. However, in agreeing to the prospect of recognizing the independence of its former province of Texas, Mexico demanded that certain conditions be met by the British and French mediators. To accomplish this end, Bankhead drafted a plan whereby Mexico would recognize the independence of Texas in exchange for several guarantees from Great Britain and possibly even France. The drafted document dated November 29, 1844, asserted:

[the] Points on the settlement of which the Mexican Government might agree to grant the Independence of Texas, in compliance with the wish indicated by Her Majesty’s Government. 1<sup>st</sup>. Mexico will yield the Territory which is now occupied by the so called Republick of Texas, that is from the Rio Colorado to the Sabine and would at the same time mark out the Boundaries of the Interior Part of the Country. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Mexico by way of compensation demands an indemnity for the Territory so yielded- The guarantee of England and France united, that under no pretext whatever shall the Texans ever pass the Boundaries marked out. The same nations shall also guarantee to Mexico the Californias, New Mexico and other points of the Northern frontier bordering on the United States, according to a Treaty to be drawn up for that purpose. If the United States carry into effect the annexation of Texas, to the North American Union, England and France will assist Mexico in the contest which may be thereby brought on always under the supposition that

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 394.

<sup>105</sup> “Aberdeen to Bankhead, September 30, 1844,” in Ephraim D. Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas*, 186.

Mexico shall have carried into effect the Recognition mentioned in Article I. 3<sup>rd</sup>. Until an answer shall have been received from England, which is requested to be sent with the least possible delay, Mexico will suspend all hostilities against Texas. 4<sup>th</sup>. The English Cabinet can either give her Minister here [power], or send a Commissioner charged with full powers, to treat upon the above Points and conclude the Negotiation.<sup>106</sup>

Therefore, as the document clearly indicates, some members of the British government were willing to risk war with the United States to prevent the U.S. Annexation of Texas. However, the renewed attempts by the Tyler Administration around this time to annex Texas caught the attention of some of these same British officials, with Lord Aberdeen writing the following to the British representative in Paris, Henry Wellesley, 1st Baron Cowley:

It is true that no direct mention is there made either of Great Britain or of France; and it is also true that, in noticing the possibility of interference on the part of other great and powerful Nations, in the affairs of the neighboring Republics, the President appears to have alluded solely to Great Britain. At the same time, it is sufficiently evident that the future annexation of Texas to the United States is contemplated by the President and considering that France as well as Great Britain has recognized the Independence of Texas, and entered into a Treaty with that Republic, and that the Interests of the two countries in that part of America are, in all respects, the same, H[er].M[ajesty]'s Gov[ernmen]t presume that the Government of France would not any more than that of Great Britain, look with indifference upon any measure, by which Texas should cease to exist as a separate and independent State. I have to desire that Y.E. [Your Excellency] will ascertain from M[onsieur]. Guizot [the French Minister] whether the views of H[er]M[ajesty]'s Gov[ernmen]t on this subject are shared by the Government of France; and, if so, you will propose that the Representatives of the two Gov[ernmen]ts, at Washington and in Texas, should be instructed to hold the same language, depreciating all interference on the part of the United States in the affairs of Texas, or the adoption of any measure leading to the destruction of the separate existence of that State; at the same time, warning the Texian Gov[ernmen]t not to furnish the United States with any just cause of complaint, and encouraging them to look to the preservation of their independence, as the best security for their ultimate prosperity, both political and commercial.<sup>107</sup>

Lord Cowley responded to Aberdeen's suggestion that the French should be made to see their interest in keeping Texas out of the United States by replying:

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 188-189.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 158-159.

It was apparent, the King [of France] observed, from the [American] President's Message, that it was in serious contemplation to add Texas to the Union: That, in his [the King's] opinion, this ought to be opposed, for it would be for the advantage of all Maritime States, for France and Great Britain in particular, that the Independence of Texas should be maintained, and that a barrier should thus be opposed to the encroachments of the United States, whose object was not only to take possession of Texas, but at some future period to make that Province a stepping stone to Mexico. His Majesty added that he had desired M[onsieur]. Guizot to instruct the French Ambassador in London to communicate with Your Lordship on this subject, which he considered to be one of no slight importance. M[onsieur]. Guizot, upon my communicating to him Your Lordship's Despatch and its Enclosures, fully concurred in Your Lordship's opinion as to the course to be pursued with the Gov[ernment]. of the United States ... Guizot was of opinion that it was of importance that the designs of the Gov[ernment]. of the United States with respect to Texas, should be prevented.<sup>108</sup>

After receiving an encouraging reply from the French government, Lord Aberdeen set his plan into motion by instructing Lord Cowley:

You will therein see that we have submitted a proposition to the French Gov[ernment] for a joint operation on the part of Great Britain and France in order to induce Mexico to acknowledge the independence of Texas, on a guarantee being jointly given by us that that independence shall be respected by other Nations, and that the Mexico-Texian boundary shall be secured from further encroachment. Should France assent to this proposal, we propose to send out forthwith a fit person to Texas, in the unavoidable absence of Captain Elliot, who will be instructed to ascertain as accurately as he may be able the state of publick opinion and feeling with respect to the projected annexation of Texas to the United States, under the security of the joint guarantee above described. If, as we were led to believe the publick feeling, under such a security for the future peace of the Country, should be in favour of independence, we shall then take measures forthwith for operating directly and officially upon the Mexican Gov[ernment]. which we shall hope to find amenable to our views, as eminently advantageous to that Republick. Should they, however, refuse their assent, or still demur to the acknowledgement of Texas, it will be for England and France to take such further measures for attaining the desired object as they may deem expedient.<sup>109</sup>

Regarding this proposed guarantee by Great Britain and France to Mexico, the British Ambassador to the United States, Richard Pakenham, wrote to Aberdeen about potentially including the Americans in a tripartite agreement guaranteeing the independence of Texas, which

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 159-160.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 171.

Pakenham proposed might be used to pledge the United States against annexing Texas in the future. As Pakenham suggested, “Provision ought to be made from the beginning to allow the U[nited] States to become a party to the engagement; and that the engagement ought ... to have the appearance of a self-restricting engagement ...” and “if England and France should unite in determining to secure the Independence of Texas, without the consent and concurrence of this Country [the United States] ... Texas would be immediately annexed and occupied, leaving it to the Guaranteeing Powers to carry out the objects of the agreement as best they might.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, Pakenham attempted to warn Aberdeen that a failure to include the United States in such an agreement might increase the probability of war with the Americans over Texas.

By late 1844, the British Minister in Mexico, Charles Bankhead, continued to plead with the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, to offer British territorial guarantees to Mexico in any future treaty settlement between Texas and Mexico, writing that “the Californias, New Mexico, and other parts of the Northern Frontier shall equally be guaranteed to Mexico [these], are, of course, entirely for Your Lordship and H.[is] M.[ajesty] Gov[ernmen]t to deliberate upon, as also that part of the second proposition which relates to the Assistance of the two Great Powers, in case the U[nited] States should endeavor to carry into effect the Scheme of Annexation.”<sup>111</sup> The draft agreement sent by Bankhead to Aberdeen also included a provision stating that “the Guarantee of England and France united, that under no pretext whatever shall the Texans ever pass the Boundaries marked out. The same Nations shall the guarantee to Mexico the Californias, New Mexico, and the other points of the Northern Frontier bordering on the U[nited] States, according to a Treaty to be drawn up for that purpose If the U[nited] States carry into effect the Annexation

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 179-180.

<sup>111</sup> “Charles Bankhead to Lord Aberdeen, November 29, 1844,” in Ephraim D. Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas*, 435.

of Texas to the N[orth] American Union, England and France will assist Mexico in the Contest which may be thereby brought on.”<sup>112</sup> However, this continuous prodding by Bankhead to take the United States to the brink of war over Texas went nowhere.

As details of the proposed guarantees which Mexico required of Great Britain and France trickled into French Minister Guizot’s office, some hesitancy began to take hold in the French government. Recalling his most recent interview with Guizot, Cowley wrote Aberdeen:

Generally speaking (M. Guizot continued) England having large possessions in America, has a greater interest than France in the question of Texian Independence. I said that, this question being one of interest to both Gov[ernmen]ts, since both had recognized the Independence of Texas, he would no doubt act in concert with us in any negotiation with the Mexican Gov[ernmen]t. for the purpose of obtaining from them the acknowledgement of that Independence.—”Undoubtedly,” he answered, “we will both use our best efforts for that purpose, and will even refuse to recognize the annexation of Texas to the United States; but, as a Question of Peace or War, I am not prepared to say that its junction with the American States is of sufficient importance to us to justify our having recourse to arms in order to prevent it.”<sup>113</sup>

Therefore, as demonstrated by this exchange, the first cracks in the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale began to appear; despite British efforts to form a coalition to counter U.S. expansion and maintain a “balance of power” in North America, when confronted with the prospect of war with the United States over Texas, the French government blinked.

Furthermore, this new hesitancy by the French government to back the requested territorial guarantees to Mexico now appeared to sway Lord Aberdeen. Aberdeen soon informed Minister Bankhead on December 31, 1844, that:

you will also again clearly explain to the Mexican Gov[ernmen]t that they must not count upon the assistance of G[rea]t Britain, whose friendly advice they have constantly neglected in enabling them to resist any attack which may at any time, now or hereafter, be made upon Mexico by the U.[nited] States, since they will have willfully exposed themselves to such attacks by omitting to make a friend and dependent of Texas while it was yet time. You will further state that the conduct

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 436.

<sup>113</sup> Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas*, 190-191.



pursued by the Mexican Gov[ernmen]t must effectually paralyse the exertions by which G[rea]t Britain and France were prepared to uphold the Independence of Texas against the encroachments of the U[nited] States, even at the risk of a collision with that Power, with which it is the desire and Interest of both to remain on terms of friendship.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, in the wake of the change in French policy toward Texas and Mexico, Aberdeen wrote Elliot, backtracking on British support:

These Papers will put you in possession of the line of conduct which Her Majesty's Government have pursued and intend to pursue both with regard to Mexico and to the United States, with reference to Texas. That line of conduct may be summed up in a few words. It is to urge Mexico by every available argument, and in every practicable manner, to recognize without delay the Independence of Texas, as the only rational course to be taken for securing the real Interest of Mexico, to which Country the Annexation of Texas to the United States would be ruinous; while, on the other hand, we have carefully abstained from any ostensible Act which could inflame the wild and dangerous spirit which, partly for national, but more for party purposes, has been roused and sustained by demagogues in the United States, in favour of the Annexation of Texas, and which wanted but the evidence of active interference on the part of Great Britain to be kindled at once into a flame. This policy we propose still to pursue, because, under present circumstances, and until we can see our way more clearly with reference to the intentions of Mexico, as well as to those of the United States, under the altered circumstances which the Election of a new President may exhibit, we think a passive course, or rather a course of observation, the most prudent, and the least likely to involve us in difficulties with Mexico or with the United States.<sup>115</sup>

However, Mexican obstinacy continued to frustrate British designs. Special agent William Kennedy previously warned Aberdeen on August 14, 1844, that a rumored Mexican invasion of Texas "will greatly facilitate the designs of the United States, and will go a good way towards placing the settlement of the affairs of this Country beyond the reach of diplomacy."<sup>116</sup> Kennedy also later observed in a note to Aberdeen on September 23, 1844, that "whatever professions may put forth by American Statesmen of the East, or the West, the North, or the South, it ought not to

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 193-194.

<sup>116</sup> "William Kennedy to Lord Aberdeen, August 14, 1844," in Ephraim D. Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas*, 354.

be forgotten that, for *forty years*, the heads of each party have laboured in turn to extend the South-western flank of the Republic towards the Rio Grande. It is a Stake worth playing for, and, in the estimation of General Jackson, even at the cost of War.”<sup>117</sup> On December 5, 1844, Kennedy again wrote Aberdeen, stating, “The American imagination eagerly anticipates the day, predicted by Humboldt, when the products of European industry should be excluded from this Continent.—It takes at times even a more self-exalting range, and, by means of Settlements on the North Western Shores of the Pacific, dreams of creating a commercial dominion in India and China.”<sup>118</sup>

As the year 1845 approached, British officials wrote with a growing sense of urgency at the building momentum toward the U.S. Annexation of Texas and the resulting march of American power. Kennedy soon after reported to Aberdeen that the Americans no longer feared French opposition to the Annexation of Texas, but instead, they believed on good authority that although “the French Government is not indifferent to the destinies of this Continent” some Americans still “allege that His Majesty the King of France has declared that there will be no interference, as regards the question of Annexation.”<sup>119</sup> William Kennedy’s fears were seemingly confirmed when Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, the Commissioner General of the Adelsverein Movement to settle a German immigrant colony in Texas, wrote that he had recently had a conversation with an American in which he recalled, “I remembered having heard, before I left Europe, that this could be a case of war between the European power [France] and the United States— On that point, he told me, I was mistaken, because the United States had received notice from France, that this Power would not interfere at all in the question.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> “William Kennedy to Lord Aberdeen, September 23, 1844,” Ibid, 364-365.

<sup>118</sup> “William Kennedy to Lord Aberdeen, December 5, 1844,” Ibid, 381.

<sup>119</sup> “William Kennedy to Lord Aberdeen, December 5, 1844,” Ibid, 382.

<sup>120</sup> “Prince of Solms to William Kennedy, December 3, 1844,” Ibid, 387.

Dismayed by this news, the prince asserted, “The Rio Grande as the frontier between the United States and Mexico, will not long prevent the ‘go-a-head Yankee nation’ from trying to possess the rich Mines of Chichuahua ... Knowing the character of the Americans, and their contempt of every European power, one cannot be surprised at any mad, or desperate thing that may come on. Whether the design indicated happen in a few months, or in a few years, can it be indifferent to England, —nay to any European Nation? —And if not, how can it be prevented.”<sup>121</sup> As if to answer his own query, the prince also suggested that a German Army with “English arms ... would do as well to stop American encroachment towards the South.”<sup>122</sup> Meanwhile, the general Indian uprising of which Andrew Jackson warned about on several occasions was explored as a real military option by some Britons should war between the United States and Great Britain break out. On the opening of an Indian front against the United States, English intriguer and adventurer Thaddeus di Lusignan asserted on May 6, 1844, to British Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Henry Unwin Addington, that:

I have lived among the Indians, I feel as they do,—and that feeling is bitter hatred against the dishonest population which is daily intruding into the very heart of our hunting grounds. If in the course of events the Foreign Office should require an exact Statistic of the hostile Indian population upon the borders of the States, from the Mouth of the Sabine river to the great Dahcotah’s tribes, I could furnish one quite correct, tog[e]ther with an insight of the underhand policy of the *Mormons* with the Ioway tribes. The combined Indian Nations, could they but receive powder and flints from the Canadian Military Posts, would soon Master the Country West of the Mississippi. They can appreciate to its real value the boasted power of the United States. They have Witnessed the Black Hawk expedition (1832) and also the Florida War. They are not to be imposed upon by the Indian Agents ... they are now aware of their strength.<sup>123</sup>

Also, seemingly in confirmation of Jackson’s fear that the British might try to encourage a slave revolt in the United States and be welcomed as liberators by slaves, such sentiments could

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 389.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 390.

<sup>123</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, December 10, 1844,” Ibid, 318.

be found in the writings of antislavery advocates and former slaves like Frederick Douglass who wrote of his “reason to love England” and gave assurances to a British audience that “in the event of a British Army landing in the States and offering liberty to the slaves, they would rally round the British at the first tap of the drum” and if the United States declared war on Great Britain, they had “3 millions of slaves in their bosom, [who were] only looking for the first favorable opportunity of lifting their arms in open rebellion.” Furthermore, Douglas called the United States the “great lie before the world” while also stating, “I have no country” or “What country have I?” and “I would rather be in London than Washington.”<sup>124</sup> Also, during the height of the Oregon Crisis, abolitionist Israel Lewis published a tract called *Crisis in North America? Slavery, War, Balance of Power and Oregon*, in which he stated that free blacks and slaves would rally to the British flag in case of war between the United States and Great Britain. Such statements only seemed to validate the concerns held by many Americans, such as Jackson, who believed that a servile insurrection might occur during the next Anglo-American War.

Indeed, the British Consul in Havana, David Turnbull, an avowed abolitionist himself, was expelled from Cuba in 1842 and convicted *in absentia* for plotting what became known as the “La Escalera Conspiracy” through his agent Francis Ross Conking and for attempting to encourage a slave rebellion in the hopes of abolitionizing Spanish Cuba. The British Foreign Office had little reason to doubt Turnbull’s involvement, with foreign officer Joseph Bidwell writing, “There is no Evidence to prove that Mr. David Turnbull was not cognizant of and did not encourage Mr. Conking in his Labours. It is believed that he did encourage the movement: Altho’ he denies it.”<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. government was not ignorant of these activities because agents such as U.S.

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<sup>124</sup> Gerald Horne, *Negro Comrades of the Crown: African Americans and the British Empire Fight the U.S. before Emancipation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>125</sup> Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988) 264.

Consul in Havana (1833–1841) Nicholas Trist reported on suspected British intrigues, writing about “a deep excitement [in Cuba among the Creoles] with a corresponding degree of alarm (which cannot fail to grow with every revolving day) in regard to the supposed designs of the British Government respecting the extention [*sic*] of its modern [abolitionist] Colonial System—for the West Indies—to this Island.”<sup>126</sup> When war threatened with the United States in the winter of 1846, Turnbull wrote Aberdeen, “If one or two of our West India Regiments, supported by a Haytian legion of some 10,000 men, and an adequate Steam Squadron ... were entrusted with the means of arming the two oppressed classes of the native inhabitants, [the slaves of Louisiana] the disaster of the last war at New Orleans [War of 1812] would in all probability be redressed.”<sup>127</sup>

However, there was one other destination in the Southern United States where American leaders feared a black liberation army might land other than Louisiana. The Second Seminole War (1835–1842) had only recently concluded just a few years earlier, and there was still a great fear that the Seminoles who remained in Florida might rise up again during a third Anglo-American War. For example, in the midst of the Second Seminole War, U.S. Brigadier General Thomas Sidney Jesup remarked, “This, you may be assured, is a negro, not an Indian war; and if it be not speedily put down, the south will feel the effects of it on their slave population before the end of next season.”<sup>128</sup> Also, Army Lieutenant John T. Sprague wrote, “We have spoken of Florida in relation to the abolition question ... already surrounded by negro communities, all of which, most probably, will, ere long, be reduced to the condition of St. Domingo. Its separation from the [British] Bahamas is so narrow and shoal, that fishing boats habitually cross over. The war which desolates the territory is carried on by negroes as well as Seminoles, and their number might be

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 184-185.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 248.

<sup>128</sup> Belko, *America's Hundred Years' War*, 193.

formidably increased by the accession of runaways from the Southern States and outlaws or emissaries from the West Indies.”<sup>129</sup>

Thus, Sprague believed that Florida was “peculiarly favorable to a marron war. The Abolitionists, we repeat, are alive to all their advantages. They have already established a nest or nursery in East Florida. ...” Sprague also added, “Constant communication is kept up with Hayti [Haiti], by a regular trading vessel. ...”<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, during the Anglo-American crisis over the Oregon Country, Governor General of British North America Charles Metcalfe wrote the Home Office with a detailed military strategy for a potential war with the United States. According to historian Kenneth Bourne in his book *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, Lord Aberdeen had finally come around to Metcalfe’s aggressive war planning by late 1845.<sup>131</sup> Metcalfe’s military strategy was described as follows:

The obvious course of proceeding would be to take possession of those States which lie between these Provinces [Canada] and the southern part of the Union, and especially of those on the sea coast, so as to keep our communication with our fleet and the Mother Country. As each State of the Union is a separate Sovereign State, it might be practicable to make Treaties of Peace, or armistices to last during the war, with each State separately, as we advanced; a course which would neutralize their hostility, and which they might prefer to our military occupation of their territory, when they found the rest of the Union unable to protect them. It might not be impossible, that this course would facilitate the separation between the Northern and Southern States of the Union, of which, the probability is contemplated, by many of the best portion of their inhabitants. When we had advanced sufficiently far, in sufficient force, to the Southward, the dread of an insurrection of the slaves in the Southern States would probably lead to a speedy peace; and if the war were nevertheless persisted in by the enemy, the reality of that insurrection might lead to the abolition of slavery in that country, as well as to a speedy termination of the war.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 149.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 141-142.

In conclusion, American statesmen such as Andrew Jackson, Robert J. Walker, and James K. Polk were well within their rights to speculate about possible British conduct in any potential future war between the United States and Great Britain. U.S. fears of a British invasion from Canada, the stirring up of a general Indian uprising along the western American frontier, the launching of an attack on New Orleans from Texas, the cutting off of the midwestern states from access to the Mississippi and the Gulf Coast, along with the inciting of a slave rebellion beginning in Louisiana or East Florida and then spreading throughout the South, and even an attempt to divide the Union by negotiating separate peace treaties with the states through which the British Army might march. All these suspicions were well founded if the actual words of British decision-makers and military officials are examined. To many Americans of this generation, the United States faced encirclement by the British Empire and a virtual war of terror on the American populace, with an independent Texas serving as the staging ground for British military power, thus rendering the security environment of the United States vulnerable to attack. To these Americans, an independent Texas posed a clear and present danger to the survival of the Union.

## Chapter 5: The Annexation of Texas and the Balance of Power

As John Tyler's Administration came to an end on March 4, 1845, it was left to the incoming Polk Administration to ensure the success of the prior presidents' "Joint Resolution" annexation strategy. Although Tyler signed the bill approving the "Joint Resolution for Annexing Texas to the United States" on March 1, 1845, there was still no guarantee that the people of Texas would agree to accept the terms contained in the bill for its admission to the Union. As James K. Polk took his oath of office to become President of the United States, the struggle to convince Texans to choose annexation to the United States over having Texas' permanent independence recognized by Mexico and guaranteed by Great Britain and France, had only just begun. Therefore, the task remained to Polk and his diplomatic corps at home and abroad to secure the Republic of Texas as an integral part of the Union against the intrigues of British agents and Foreign Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Thus, the year 1845 became a year of decision, and the choices made by the people of Texas throughout its duration not only held the fate of three nations in their hands, but if the foreign officers of the British Empire were to be believed, the peace of the whole civilized world hung in the balance as well.

However, even before the year 1844 came to an end, Lord Aberdeen wrote to British Charge D'Affaires in Texas Charles Elliot, summarizing the opinion of the British government with regard to the status of Texas as an independent state, "Our feelings ... are in no way changed with regard to the Independence of Texas. We consider that Independence of the highest importance for Mexico, for Texas herself, and ... for the United States, to which Country ... the possession of Texas, although it might at the present Moment satisfy the peculiar interests of the South, and gratify the national vanity of all the States, would scarcely fail ... to become a serious source of Contention between the Northern and the Southern States, and ... expose the whole



Confederation to great hazard.”<sup>1</sup> In another place Aberdeen wrote that he viewed “the annexation of Texas to the United States as an evil of the greatest magnitude to Mexico.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Aberdeen informed Bankhead in Mexico on December 31, 1844, that “once that nation [the United States] shall have obtained possession of Texas, from that moment H[er] M[ajesty’s] Gov[ernmen]t w[oul]d. consider the existence of the Republic of Mexico as seriously threatened ...” but cautioned, “You will also clearly explain to the Mexican Gov[ernmen]t that they must not count upon the assistance of Great Britain, whose friendly advices they have always constantly neglected.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, although members of the British government argued that the U.S. Annexation of Texas would be a catastrophe, Great Britain would not hazard a war to prevent it.

As Charles Elliot spent the greater part of the winter of 1844–1845 writing various letters attempting to refute John C. Calhoun’s characterizations of British motives in opposing the United States’ ongoing attempts to annex Texas, he also wrote to Lord Aberdeen on January 15, 1845, that “this Scheme of Annexation is founded on mixed feelings of ill will and envy against Great Britain, and a rapacious spirit against Mexico, and it may be, a dangerous purpose against the integrity of the present Union.”<sup>4</sup> A little over a week later, Aberdeen replied to Elliot on January 23, 1845, stating, “Again, as affecting other States, Her Majesty’s Government are of the opinion that the continuance of Texas as an Independent Power, under its own Laws and institutions, must conduce to a more even, and therefore a more permanent balance of interests on the North American Continent, and that its interposition between the United States and Mexico offers the

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<sup>1</sup> “Lord Aberdeen to Charles Elliot, December 31, 1844,” in Ephraim D. Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas*, 405-406.

<sup>2</sup> “Lord Aberdeen to Charles Bankhead, October 23, 1844,” in William Devereux Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1958), 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 68.

<sup>4</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, January 15, 1845,” in Ephraim D. Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas*, 420.

best chance of a preservation of friendly relations between those two Governments.”<sup>5</sup> Despite the stated concern for the well-being of the United States, the chief British fear was for the survival of Mexico without Texas serving as a buffer against the Americans. In early 1845, Lord Aberdeen tasked Charles Elliot with a last-ditch attempt to convince Mexico to recognize the independence of Texas and prevent its annexation by the United States.

Still, even as Elliot negotiated, Aberdeen remained noncommittal on the point of whether Great Britain would guarantee the territorial integrity of Mexico against the military power of the United States. In fact, Aberdeen informed the British representative in France, Lord Cowley, that:

Her Majesty’s Government ... do not conceive that they would be justified in exposing Great Britain to the serious risks of a war in seeking to establish that [Texan] independence ... Moreover H[er] M[ajesty]’s Gov[ernmen]t would not propose to enter into any guarantee whatever with respect to either of the States, whether to secure to Mexico the inviolability of Her frontier against Texas, or to secure to Texas its frontier against the United States or Mexico. In fact H[er] M[ajesty]’s Gov[ernmen]t would not be disposed to place themselves in any respect in a position which might give to Mexico or to Texas the power of hereafter calling upon Great Britain, as a matter of right, for her protection and succour against encroachment on the part of any other Powers, nor even of leading the Mexican Gov[ernmen]t to hope that such succour might be afforded ... They would merely wish to exert all the weight of their moral influence, added to that of France, in order to secure the present pacification and future stability both of Mexico and Texas.<sup>6</sup>

Compared with Aberdeen’s previous language, the change in tone is quite apparent, having shifted from forceful statements of protecting Mexico from the United States to promises of just moral influence only to oppose the U.S. Annexation of Texas, British rhetoric had indeed softened dramatically, most likely because of perceived French wavering. However, on the issue of French reluctance, Lord Cowley finally sent a favorable response on April 28, 1845, from the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Francois Guizot, to Aberdeen’s previous proposal for a drafted

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<sup>5</sup> “Lord Aberdeen to Charles Elliot, January 23, 1845,” *Ibid*, 430.

<sup>6</sup> Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas*, 204-205.

declaration backed by Great Britain and France. This proposal was then forwarded to Charles Elliot to present to the government of Texas in the spring of 1845.

The said declaration included a pledge that Great Britain and France and “their said Majesties engage to use their best exertions with a view to the restoration of Peace at the earliest possible period, and to the recognition of the Independence of the Republick of Texas by the Mexican Republick. And the president of the Republick of Texas has, on his part, authorized the Undersigned— to declare on the other hand that the independence of the Republick under its own separate and national Jurisdiction.”<sup>7</sup> In turn, Elliot wrote to Aberdeen on March 6, 1845, emphasizing the importance of two key provisions that Great Britain insisted be in any final peace treaty between the republics of Texas and Mexico, those being “1<sup>st</sup> That Mexico should at once propose the acknowledgement of the complete Independence of Texas” and “2<sup>nd</sup> That Texas upon her part would in that case stipulate in the treaty never to annex herself, or to become subject to any country whatever.”<sup>8</sup> In this case, the second provision was clearly aimed at preventing Texas’ annexation to the United States. As shown by these statements, the provision that Texas would promise not to annex itself to the United States in exchange for a recognition of Texan independence by Mexico was the primary goal of British foreign policy regarding those states.

To this end, the British Charge D’Affaires in Texas, Charles Elliot, worked with the Minister Plenipotentiary from the Republic of Texas to Great Britain, Ashbel Smith, to secure these provisions by crafting an instrument proposing a permanent peace between Texas and Mexico. The stipulations of the proposed peace treaty between those two nations read in part, “1<sup>st</sup> ... the Government of Texas pledges itself forthwith after the same shall be placed in the hands of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>8</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, March 6, 1845,” in Ephraim D. Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas*, 455.

the President to issue a Proclamation announcing the conclusion of the preliminaries of peace with the Republic of Mexico. 2<sup>nd</sup> Texas for a period of ninety days from the date of this Memorandum agrees not to accept any proposals, nor to enter into any negotiations to annex Herself to any other Country.”<sup>9</sup> A section describing the conditions of the proposed agreement then followed: “Conditions preliminary to a treaty of peace between Mexico and Texas. I. Mexico consents to acknowledge the Independence of Texas. II. Texas engages that she will stipulate in the Treaty not to annex herself or become subject to any Country whatever. III. Limits and other conditions to be matters of arrangement in the final treaty. IV. Texas will be willing to remit disputed points respecting territory and other matters to the arbitration of umpires.”<sup>10</sup> With these terms negotiated, the proposal would then be submitted to the people of Texas for a vote.

Regarding the Mexican boundary with Texas, Elliot suggested, “It would certainly be for the safety of Mexico to adhere to the line of the Nueces as the Western frontier of Texas, by reason of the desert nature of the Country between that river and the Rio Grande,”<sup>11</sup> but for commercial purposes, he advocated that the lower Rio Grande should be ceded to Texas. As for the future settlement of Texas, Elliot wrote that filling the country with immigrants from Great Britain, France, and elsewhere in Europe would be “the best guarantee for Mexico” and that Texas “upon an independent footing would rapidly fill up with a population not at all disposed to connect themselves in that way with the United States.”<sup>12</sup> However, Elliot warned Lord Aberdeen that “nothing could tend more to keep alive the feeling of hostile eagerness in the United States or here [Texas], in favour of Annexation, than the knowledge of the existence of any guarantees against it

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<sup>9</sup> Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas*, 210.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 210-211.

<sup>11</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, March 6, 1845,” in Ephraim D. Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas*, 456.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 457.

by the European Governments. The sounder policy in my humble judgement would be that all parties should be left free to act according to circumstances in the event of any breach of this condition upon the part of Texas.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, Elliot’s plans included European immigration to Texas along with secret defensive guarantees to both Mexico and Texas by Great Britain and France, guarantees that were, for all intents and purposes, aimed against encroachments by the U.S.

In the meantime, Charge D’Affaires Elliot continued to assure British Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen that if “the Mexican Government will adhere firmly to the determination only to conclude upon the condition that Texas is to remain an Independent Country ... I should see little reason to doubt that this question might be speedily and securely adjusted. Rapidity of action and liberality in point of terms from Mexico, have now become of indispensable necessity.”<sup>14</sup> In addition, around this time, the newly sworn-in President of the Republic of Texas and the leader of the pro-British, pro-Independence faction in that country, Anson Jones, informed Lord Aberdeen, that “having received certain information of a willingness on the part of Mexico to treat with Texas on the basis of independence, it has been thought best in order to take advantage of this favorable disposition on the part of the government of that Country [Mexico], that Capt[ain] Elliot should proceed without delay to the City of Mexico [Mexico City] to press this Matter to a conclusion with that government.”<sup>15</sup>

However, Charles Elliot would later write to Lord Aberdeen with great apprehension, noting on April 2, 1845, that “it was incumbent upon us to use every effort consistent with the object of our instructions to induce this Government [Texas] neither to assemble Congress, nor to entertain any Negotiation for Annexation, at all events for such a length of time as might enable

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 457-458.

<sup>14</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, March 22, 1845,” Ibid, 460-461.

<sup>15</sup> “Anson Jones to Lord Aberdeen, March 31, 1845,” Ibid, 461-462.

our Governments to determine the Government of Mexico to acknowledge the independence of this Country [Texas], or failing in those efforts to provide for the emergency in any equally effectual manner by diplomatic Act in Europe with the representatives of this Republic [Texas].”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Elliot continued, “We cannot but express the hope that within the period of 90 days our Governments will have either succeeded in disposing Mexico to acknowledge the independence of Texas, or have forwarded to this Country [Texas] such a formal declaration of their purpose to sustain it. ...”<sup>17</sup> Still, Elliot cautioned that the utmost secrecy must be kept and that “nothing that is so much mixed with securities and guarantees upon the part of the European Powers, Great Britain in particular, can be offered to this people [Texas], with the least hope of success, and the knowledge of these proposals of Mexico at the present moment would be decisive against the possibility of maintaining the Independence of the Country. They would light up a flame from one end of the North American Confederacy to the other.”<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, British Charge D’Affaires Charles Elliot was placed in the difficult position of not disturbing the chances for peace between Texas and Mexico while also keeping the Americans in the dark, lest they become aware of any further British meddling to prevent the Annexation of Texas to the United States. Despite British reluctance to offer Mexico any official territorial guarantees for fear of American retaliation, both Great Britain and France continued to use their diplomatic influence to prevent the Annexation of Texas to the United States. As a March 29th memorandum between the Texan Secretary of State, Ashbel Smith, and the Charge D’Affaires’ of both Great Britain and France stated, “the representatives of the two Powers invited the Government of Texas to accept the good offices of England and France for an early and honourable

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<sup>16</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, April 2, 1845,” *Ibid*, 463-464.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 465.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 466.

settlement of their difficulties with Mexico upon the basis of the acknowledgement of independence of Texas by that Republic ...”<sup>19</sup> and that, in exchange for this action, “Texas for a period of ninety days from the date of this Memorandum agrees not to accept any proposals, nor to enter into any negotiations to annex Herself to any other Country.”<sup>20</sup>

As the interested parties awaited a response to the memorandum, Bankhead wrote to Elliot with an update from Mexico on April 8, 1845, that “This Government [Mexico] is quite ready to receive proposals from Your quarter [Texas], upon the basis of absolute Independence ... that Texas would consent to bind herself to *remain* an independent State, would tend much to facilitate matters.— As to limits—that must be an after thought—the one thing needful appears to me to be the Acknowledgement of the Independence of Texas by Mexico—how far Great Britain and France will afterwards consent to guarantee the boundaries or other collateral points, it is for those Government to say—*We* can do nothing without Authority.”<sup>21</sup> As the Mexican government awaited further word from Texas, British officials observed the situation. Lord Aberdeen soon after explained the following to Charles Elliot on May 3, 1845, that:

In shaping our line of policy ... we have considered the Government and people of Texas to be upon the whole well disposed to maintain their independence, provided that independence were freely and immediately recognized by Mexico ... to state here succinctly the course of policy which Her Majesty’s Government have determined to adopt. It is simply to offer, in concert with France, to Mexico and to Texas, and through the channel of the English and French Diplomatick Agents in both those Countries, the joint mediation of England and France for the equitable settlement of differences and demarcation of Boundaries between the two Countries. The basis of that policy is the immediate and unfettered recognition of Texas by Mexico ... It is not however to be expected that Mexico will consent to acknowledge Texas without having taken good security for the establishment of the common frontier of the two Countries, in a manner conformable to right and justice, and such as shall offer every element of permanency and of security against future encroachment. With a view to ensure this essential object, the Government of Great Britain and France now come forward to offer to Mexico all the weight of their

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 470.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 471.

<sup>21</sup> “Charles Bankhead to Charles Elliot, April 8, 1845,” Ibid, 477.

united influence, provided She agrees to recognize the independence of Texas ... the question of Boundaries might be treated under the joint mediation of Great Britain and France ... the French Government concur generally in this plan ... it will be desirable that, in case Texas should accept our mediation for its Settlement, you should use every effort to impress on the Texian Government the good policy ... of moderating their pretensions with respect to their common boundary with Mexico. ...”<sup>22</sup>

In the previous statement, Aberdeen warned the Texans not to jeopardize a potential peace with Mexico by insisting upon the Rio Grande as their boundary with that country. Furthermore, on the issue of French support, Aberdeen wrote to Charles Elliot on May 3, 1845, notifying him of, “M[onsieur] Guizots Orders, by the French Ambassador at this Court, the concurrence of the French Government in the proposition submitted to them ... for bringing about by their united efforts, an adjustment of the difficulties between Mexico and Texas ... As the Declaration contains not[h]ing more than an engagement on the part of Great Britain and France to employ their best efforts to restore peace between Mexico and Texas, and to procure the recognition of the Texian Republick by Mexico ... with an engagement on the part of Texas to ... to maintain her Independence ...”<sup>23</sup> With French support for British policy at hand, Aberdeen accompanied this statement with a declaration announcing a negotiated peace between Texas and Mexico with all the agreed terms. The enclosed declaration of the agreement read as follows:

Her Majesty The Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and His Majesty the King of the French being strongly impressed with the importance of restoring Peace between the Republick of Texas as an Independent State under her own national Gov[ernmen]t.; Their said Majesties have respectively authorized the Undersigned Elliot Her Britannick Majesty’s [Charge D’Affaires] and—to declare that their said Majesties engage to use their best exertions with a view to the restoration of Peace at the earliest possible period, and to the recognition of the Independence of the Republick of Texas by the Mexican Republick. And the President of the Republick of Texas, has, on his part authorized the Undersigned to declare on the other hand that the Gov[ernmen]t of Texas will use every effort to

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<sup>22</sup> “Lord Aberdeen to Charles Elliot, May 3, 1845,” Ibid, 482-484.

<sup>23</sup> “Lord Aberdeen to Charles Elliot, May 3, 1845,” Ibid, 484-485.



maintain the independence of the Republick under its own separate and national Jurisdiction.<sup>24</sup>

Following this declaration, an enclosure dated May 20, 1845, from the British Minister in Mexico, Charles Bankhead, was sent to Lord Aberdeen, which finally contained the required assurances from the Mexican government affirming the preliminaries of a peace treaty mediated by Great Britain between Mexico and Texas, including the conditions that “1<sup>st</sup>. Mexico consents to acknowledge the Independence of Texas” and “2<sup>nd</sup>. Texas engages that She will stipulate in the Treaty, not to annex herself or become subject to any Country whatever.”<sup>25</sup> However, the declaration closed with the caveat: “It is understood that besides the four preliminary Articles proposed by Texas, there are other essential and important points which ought also to be included in the Negotiation and that if this Negotiation is not realized on account of circumstances, or because Texas influenced by the Law passed in the United States on Annexation, should consent thereto—either directly or indirectly, then the answer which under this date is given to Texas by the Undersigned Minister of Foreign Affairs shall be considered as null and void.”<sup>26</sup> This last statement made it very clear that Mexico would revoke its recognition of Texan independence if Texas chose annexation to the United States rather than its permanent independence and the ratification of the peace treaty between Texas and Mexico.

Around this time, Lord Aberdeen was warned by British special agent William Kennedy on May 21, 1845, of the consequences that would follow if Texas were annexed by the United States, noting, “It is authoritatively stated that, in completing Annexation, the United States will

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<sup>24</sup> “Captain Elliot [Enclosure] *Draft Declaration*” Ibid, 485-486.

<sup>25</sup> “Enclosure to Mr. Bankhead’s Despatch to Lord Aberdeen No. 148. Mexico 20<sup>th</sup> May 1845” Ibid, 489.

<sup>26</sup> “Enclosure to Mr. Bankhead’s Despatch to Lord Aberdeen No. 148. Mexico 20<sup>th</sup> May 1845 - Additional Declaration” Ibid, 490.

not be satisfied with less than the whole of territory claimed by Texas, —namely to the Rio Grande.”<sup>27</sup> Despite this, on June 12, 1845, Elliot optimistically wrote to Lord Aberdeen:

I cannot refrain from expressing the hope that the altered situation of Mexico, as respects the offer of a just settlement of this dispute will facilitate the preservation of peace in this question, and prevent the intended dismemberment of that Republic. Whatever of plea or pretext may be strained to vindicate the annexation of the Country in the actual occupation of the Texians to the United States and howsoever practicable or otherwise that may be, it seems totally impossible to divine the grounds which are to justify the seizure of an immense territory by the United States in which the Texans have never had a Settler. For surely not much more serious attention can be given to the present Texian legislative limitation, than to the Act passed through both Houses of Congress and vetoed by General Houston in his first administration, carrying the Western boundary of this Republic to the Shores of the Pacific! ... In every view that I have been able to take of this very serious question I cannot but think that the recent policy of Mexico, unfortunately tardy as it has been, has still materially and advantageously altered her Situation.<sup>28</sup>

As the question of what Texas would do—*independence or annexation*—was being closely followed by leaders on both sides of the Atlantic, Texan President Anson Jones wrote to the British Charge D’Affaires in Texas, Charles Elliot, “It strikes me that the question of Annexation or Independence will come up to be decided by the people of Texas only when the Vote is taken on the ratification of the Constitution which will be proposed by the Convention. This Vote will probably be taken in September or October next.”<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, on July 3, 1845, an apprehensive Aberdeen wrote to Elliot, explaining British conduct concerning Texas thus far, arguing that the Annexation of Texas by the United States would be bad not just for Mexico, here in removing a buffer between the United States and Mexico, but if he is to be believed, also for the Americans themselves. Clearly noting the rising sectional tensions that the question of annexation had aroused in the United States, Aberdeen noted:

We naturally desired to preserve the independence of Texas, with which State we had entered into engagements, and concluded Treaties, but we also considered that

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<sup>27</sup> “William Kennedy to Lord Aberdeen, May 21, 1845,” *Ibid*, 491.

<sup>28</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, June 12, 1845,” *Ibid*, 495-496.

<sup>29</sup> “Anson Jones to Charles Elliot, June 6, 1845,” *Ibid*, 497.

the welfare of Mexico required that She should, if possible, be preserved from immediate contact with the United States. We thought it probable that upon such separation the peace of the North American Continent, and therefore employed our efforts, but openly and fairly, to accomplish this object. We looked upon it's furtherance as no less desirable for the United States than for Mexico, since we do not believe that the aggrandizement of the United States will in any way contribute to their strength or to the advancement of the material interests of their people. On the contrary, we believe that such aggrandizement will be found to have a precisely opposite effect, and that it will eventually excite discord in the bosom of that great Country. But such dissension could scarcely fail to act injuriously upon British interests, considering the vast amount of British Capital which is engaged in Commerce with the United States. Our well understood national interests require that the United States should remain peaceful and united amongst themselves, but the system of extention of their territory which they are now pursuing seems to us to place their internal peace and union, as well as the peace of the whole Continent in jeopardy.<sup>30</sup>

However, much to the dismay of the British and French governments, events soon shifted course. On June 24, 1845, British special agent William Kennedy wrote Lord Aberdeen, "The Congress of Texas ... has passed a Joint Resolution accepting the proposition for Annexation submitted to the Texan government by the Government of the United States ... Another Joint Resolution has passed the Texan Congress, authorizing the introduction of United States troops into Texas. It is understood that Military occupation will be taken of the tract of Country lying between the Nueces and the Rio Grande; for the purpose of making the latter river the boundary between Mexico and Texas."<sup>31</sup> Then on July 30, 1845, Elliot notified Aberdeen, "An ordinance had been passed ... consenting upon the behalf of the people of Texas to the terms of Annexation proposed by the Government of the United States, and ... requesting the President of the United States on the behalf of the people of Texas to send troops forthwith to their frontier."<sup>32</sup> Finally on August 23, 1845, Kennedy wrote Aberdeen that he was "assured that General Taylor, the Officer in Command of the United States troops in Texas, has assumed a position of Corpus Christi, *West*

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<sup>30</sup> "Lord Aberdeen to Charles Elliot, July 3, 1845," Ibid, 509.

<sup>31</sup> "William Kennedy to Lord Aberdeen, June 24, 1845," Ibid, 506.

<sup>32</sup> "Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, July 30, 1845," Ibid, 527.

*of the river Nueces*, and according to accounts ... ‘was busily engaged in fortifying it’—The occupation of this position seemed to indicate a determination on the part of the United States to follow up the pretensions of Texas to the boundary of the Rio Grande ...’<sup>33</sup>

As the British-mediated peace between Texas and Mexico was decisively set aside by the people of Texas in favor of annexation and the Rio Grande for its boundary with Mexico, Elliot noted the following with melancholy to Aberdeen on July 28, 1845:

The want of conclusive proof in the sight of the people of Texas and of this Country, of the dispositions and ulterior purposes of Her Majesty’s Government had already furnished the advocates of Annexation with their most powerful means of sustaining it. I believed therefore that moderation on the part of Mexico, even at that late hour, and unequivocal evidence of the character and extent of the arrangement supported by Her Majesty’s and French Governments would deprive Annexation of the chief pretext which had given it so much strength here, fastening the Scheme without chance of evasion upon that mixture of Slave trade and the wrongful motives so little likely to find sympathy with the great body of the Nation in more sober moments, and a more perfect state of information than have hitherto had place.<sup>34</sup>

After lamenting the changing tide of opinion in the Republic of Texas in favor of annexation, Charles Elliot still clung to his belief that that situation might yet be salvaged:

Their late policy, tardy as it has been, will I hope go far to defeat the purposes of those parties in this Country who deliberately mean the forcible dismemberment of Mexico, and in the main have the effect of limiting any possibly sustainable pretensions of the persons settled in Texas to the alienation only, of the territory in their actual occupation; Or at the very utmost of the remainder of the territory constituting Texas, according to the former divisions of the Country, upon a condition which Mexico would have the clearest right to demand under the fundamental law applying to those regions of her domain, and an obligation of necessity to insist upon for the security of her frontier. I mean the condition that Slavery should never be introduced into the Ceded Country, and so brought contiguous with their own to the certainty of constant frontier dispute and raid arising out of the escape of Slaves, and the still worse evil of filling these lands with Settlers of the same kind as those who have already proved so dangerous to Mexico. The proposal of negotiations on this basis would I believe at once put an end to all risk of hostilities against Mexico by the United States, and either frustrate the

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<sup>33</sup> “William Kennedy to Aberdeen, August 23, 1845,” *Ibid*, 542.

<sup>34</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, July 28, 1845,” *Ibid*, 519.

scheme of Annexation entirely, or at least turn it to a more safe and honourable conclusion for all parties than it can otherwise reach.<sup>35</sup>

Although doubt now crept in, Elliot still wrote hopefully to Bankhead on August 8, 1845, “If Collision can be prevented between the forces of the United States and Mexico, (a circumstance, however, of which I am in great doubt, for I must admit my own impression that it is the deliberate purpose of the Government of the United States to induce hostilities and so carry all parties in this Country with them) it is by no means impossible that this whole scheme may still fail of realization.”<sup>36</sup> Still, on August 18, 1845, Elliot followed up with Aberdeen, suggesting that “with the attention of the Government of Mexico awakened to the unmistakable intentions of their neighbours, it is reasonable to hope that they will in due season adopt a surer mode of arresting the danger with which they are menaced than they unhappily pursued in Texas from the first moment that they permitted it to be settled by the Americans, till the last hours of it’s existence as a separate Country.”<sup>37</sup> As Elliot continued to hold on to his hope that the British-mediated peace treaty between Texas and Mexico might still be saved, international events proceeded apace with more momentum in favor of war than peace.

Elliot continued to raise alarm with anyone who would listen, even predicting the future ambitions of the United States in a letter from August 31, 1845, noting, “Amongst the impulses disposing the present Government of the United States to provoke hostilities with Mexico ... would be the desire of a pretext for taking sudden possession of San Francisco Bay; and it is sincerely to be hoped that the Government of Mexico may lose no time in shaping their policy with respect to that part of their territory on large and sound principles.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, on

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 520-521.

<sup>36</sup> “Charles Elliot to Charles Bankhead, August 8, 1845,” Ibid, 534.

<sup>37</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, August 12, 1845,” Ibid, 530.

<sup>38</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, August 31, 1845,” Ibid, 545.

September 13, 1845, Elliot wrote, "I cannot but think, that the advance of the American force within the territory which the Government of Texas in the preliminary conditions sent on to Mexico palpably admitted to be subject to Negotiation and compromise, affords conclusive proof that the Government of the United States desired to provoke hostilities by Mexico; probably with the view to the sudden seizure of certain positions on the Coast of California."<sup>39</sup> To compound British fears of Texas falling into American hands, Elliot added that war between Mexico and the United States over Texas would serve Americans interests by providing them with a pretext for conquering California. As events moved toward war, Elliot displayed an awareness of the vulnerability of the southern part of the United States, reporting to Aberdeen that:

the Governor of Louisiana has been called upon ... to reinforce the regular troops in Texas with drafts from the Militia of New Orleans ... The Militia best suited to such Service would be the hardy Yeomanry of the Western free States, not the unpractised youth of the Southern Cities ... if they are detached in force at this Season to the Coast of Texas, they will perish in great numbers, and with great rapidity. Neither can it fail to strike the most careless observer that with the regular force in advance, there is need for keeping the Militia at home, and prepared for Service, to guard against the contingency of negro movement, perfectly probable in the pursuit of a war with Mexico, undertaken mainly for the purpose of prolonging and extending the System of Slavery; a fact, of which it would be irrational to suppose that the Slave population of the United States is not quite aware.<sup>40</sup>

In these statements to Aberdeen, Elliot was privately raising the specter of a domestic slave rebellion, a scenario that other British officials had pointed to as a crucial weakness of the United States in any potential future conflict with Great Britain. By the fall of 1845, however, Elliot seemed to be in denial, reporting to Aberdeen in late September that the "Constitution and authorities of the Republic will therefore continue in force till the Measure of Annexation is completed in this Country; Neither can I dismiss the impression that the Government of Mexico

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<sup>39</sup> "Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, September 13, 1845," Ibid, 550.

<sup>40</sup> "Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, August 31, 1845," Ibid, 546.

has it in its power by very prompt and judicious proceedings, if not to defeat this plot, at all events to give it a shape and result that will materially mitigate its mischievous consequences.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Elliot wrote to Aberdeen of elections in Texas, saying, “I should say at the same time that they do furnish some slight evidence of recovering strength in the Anti-Annexation party in particular sections of the Country ... Late though it be, I still lean to the opinion that it is in the power of Mexico to give a shape to these affairs which would effectually break up the present Scheme of Annexation in the United States, and defeat the other dangerous designs with which She is menaced from this quarter.”<sup>42</sup> As these statements demonstrate, even at that late hour, Elliot was still hesitant to admit defeat.

With Charles Elliot’s hopes for Texas fading, he now complained to Aberdeen on November 14, 1845, about “the misrepresentation and indirect proceedings by which the people [of Texas] were beguiled and precipitated into a shameful measure of National annihilation” and suggested that an ulterior motive for the United States deciding to send military forces into Texas might be to suppress the pro-independence party, noting, “A state of actual war with Mexico would probably have that last effect; and a pretext for suddenly engaging the force in Texas in proceedings of still further aggression and invasion upon Mexico, rendering collision inevitable, could always be found at a short notice, in the event of any political pressure upon the administration here arising out of the renewed discussion of the principles and details of the present Scheme of Annexation, in the Congress of the United States” but even now still asserted “I think there may be some ground for the opinion that the Anti-Annexation party is rather recovering strength. ...” and Elliot still sincerely, if misguidedly, believed that “there is a respectable party in Texas cordially in favour of maintaining the Independence of the Republic, and some of the most

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<sup>41</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, September 29, 1845,” Ibid, 554.

<sup>42</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, October 6, 1845,” Ibid, 555-556.

influential persons in the Country are probably only waiting for a favorable opportunity, and some turn of the popular tide, to head the movement.”<sup>43</sup>

As late as November 26, 1845, Elliot still hoped for an independent Texas, arguing that “if the Government of Mexico will conduct their negotiations with the United States ... skillfully and temperately ... I believe that they may lay the foundations of a better balance of political power on this Continent, involving more of security to themselves and all the kindred races, South of them, than there appears to be otherwise much reason to hope for.”<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, on the motives behind a potential war with Mexico, William Kennedy speculated much the same as Elliot, writing to Aberdeen on December 20, 1845, “In a letter written by General Andrew Jackson, and published some months before his death, he observed—(on behalf of the American people)—’ We want Texas because we want California’—The Ex-President might have added,—’ And we want California because we desire to obtain Maritime ascendancy in the Pacific, with the advantageous consequent on an easy and comparatively speedy communication with India and China.”<sup>45</sup> Kennedy also added that “a Despatch [dispatch] addressed by Mr. Forsyth, Secretary of State of the United States, to Mr. Butler, American Charge d’ Affaires in Mexico, shows that, in the year 1835, Texas and California were associated as desirable acquisitions, in the policy of President Jackson’s administration.”<sup>46</sup> As Kennedy traced this expansionist American mood back to the year 1835, he also looked to the future. In the same letter from December 20, 1845, he predicted:

It may be inferred from the pertinacity displayed by American Statesmen in regard to the acquisition of Texas, that they are not likely to abandon any project which may promise an increase of the elements of National power. Such a project may be masked—or it may be allowed to slumber for a time—but it will not be lost sight of—much less abandoned. Intoxicated by the acquisition of Texas (the key stone of the North American System)—an acquisition made with an ease that astonished

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<sup>43</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, November 14, 1845,” *Ibid*, 558-559.

<sup>44</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, November 26, 1845,” *Ibid*, 561.

<sup>45</sup> “William Kennedy to Lord Aberdeen, December 20, 1845,” *Ibid*, 568.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 568.



even themselves, the United States have allowed free scope to the spirit of bold disclosure concerning schemes of prospective aggrandizement. Among their leading politicians, no one pretends to doubt that the Northern Confederacy is destined, and at no remote day, to be the ruling Power of the world—giving to other States the impress of Republican institutions.<sup>47</sup>

In discussing the United States' supposedly insatiable hunger for future growth, or as he called it, national "aggrandizement," William Kennedy accurately described the views of many Americans at the time on the subject of the expansion and the future destiny of America. Soon after this, Charge D'Affaires Elliot updated British Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen on December 24, 1845, about recent events regarding the pending U.S. Annexation of Texas, stating, "On my way through Washington yesterday where I had the pleasure of some conversation with Mr. Pakenham, I learnt that the resolutions annexing Texas to the United States had passed both Houses of Congress, and been approved by the President."<sup>48</sup> Elliot further confirmed to Aberdeen on January 5, 1846, that "the President of the United States had already signed the Annexation resolutions, and forwarded them to Texas by a Messenger."<sup>49</sup> Now looking back, Elliot lamented to Aberdeen on January 8, 1846, "Wrongful motives and intrigue have been imputed to the Governments of Great Britain and France and their Agents, in the affairs of Texas; with a force of assurance, which is certainly without parallel in the past, howsoever promising the future may be."<sup>50</sup> A defeated Elliot finally informed Aberdeen on January 13, 1846, that a "Messenger from the President of the United States with the Annexation resolutions duly passed and approved by that Legislature and Government also arrived here this Morning and I am informed by the President

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 569.

<sup>48</sup> "Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, December 24, 1845," Ibid, 572.

<sup>49</sup> "Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, January 5, 1846," Ibid, 575.

<sup>50</sup> "Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, January 8, 1846," Ibid, 579.

of Texas that the Legislature of the Proposed State will be assembled on the 16<sup>th</sup> Proximo, when the Government of the Republic will be dissolved.”<sup>51</sup>

In his final analysis, Charles Elliot wrote to Lord Aberdeen on January 18, 1846, that, in hindsight, the Annexation of Texas “is the success of an unscrupulous intrigue, set on foot in the United States for certain personal objects ... The opinion of very distinguished persons in the United States has strengthened my own belief that the measure is in a high degree dangerous to the integrity of that Confederacy. ...”<sup>52</sup> Elliot also predicted that, “When the people of Texas too, become restored to a sober sense of what is past and gone, it may occur to them that the Agents of Great Britain and France never forget that they were sent to the Government they had chosen, and not to operate upon the passions or prejudices of the unreflecting, or to practice upon leading men in the Country by indirect means, and offers of high place and station, present and prospective.”<sup>53</sup> Elliot further suggested that “it seems highly probable that a very large part of the people of the Union will determine in no long lapse of time, that a great impulse to the internal Slave trade, and a vast extension of the principle of Slave representation in the Councils of the Nation, are not blessings to the Union, but danger and shame.”<sup>54</sup> However, to the end, Elliot absolved himself of any improper behavior regarding his alleged intrigues in the Republic of Texas.

As almost a postscript to the whole affair, Aberdeen informed Elliot on April 3, 1846, that “having announced to Her Majesty’s Government that the Government of the Republic of Texas as an independent State would be dissolved ... I have to state to you that Her Majesty’s Government consider your functions as Her Majesty’s Charge d’Affaires and Consul General to the Republic of Texas to have ceased by the fact of the Dissolution of the independence of that

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<sup>51</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, January 13, 1846,” *Ibid*, 581.

<sup>52</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, January 18, 1846,” *Ibid*, 585.

<sup>53</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, January 20, 1846,” *Ibid*, 588.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 588.

State.”<sup>55</sup> On April 25, 1846, Elliot bitterly noted, “The sacrifices of the separate existence, and independence of Texas are ... not a warrant for the invasion and further spoilation of Mexico by another power, and still less a discharge of the obligations and liens upon territory as completely free of control by Texas as the Coast of California.”<sup>56</sup> For his part, William Kennedy reflected on the failure of British policy concerning Texas and Mexico to British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston, writing on March 27, 1847, “We might have prevented Annexation—such at least is my opinion—without a war—not having done so, we must prepare for its consequences—Aggression against British North America it seems not too much to anticipate as among probable Contingencies, should the general state of affairs be favourable, and an American Army amounting to fifty or sixty thousand men return home flushed with the subjugation of Mexico.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, many Britons like William Kennedy believed that the Americans, emboldened by their recent acquisitions and a likely defeat of Mexico, would soon turn their hungry gaze upon British Canada.

From an American perspective, European interference in the question of the United States’ Annexation of Texas did not go unnoticed. Even before the incoming Polk Administration took office, private citizens and members of the U.S. diplomatic corps abroad informed the new president about the ongoing European opposition to the acquisition of Texas by the American people. For example, the former Chief Clerk for the State Department under Martin Van Buren, Jacob L. Martin, wrote to Polk from France on January 25, 1845, “You will have seen by the papers what has been done here on the subject of Texas. This government [France] may have been disposed to act with England, but the prudence of the King and above all the anti English feelings of the people, are an effectual check to this tendency. All I fear is that France will join the efforts

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<sup>55</sup> “Lord Aberdeen to Charles Elliot, April 3, 1846,” *Ibid*, 612.

<sup>56</sup> “Charles Elliot to Lord Aberdeen, April 25, 1846,” *Ibid*, 617.

<sup>57</sup> “William Kennedy to Lord Palmerston, March 27, 1847,” *Ibid*, 622.

of England to indispose Texas herself to annexation. This is the quarter from which there is most to be apprehended; not war from this hemisphere, but European intrigue & influence upon the councils of Texas herself.”<sup>58</sup> Martin’s comment suggests that U.S. officials suspected that, if the British were inclined to prevent the American Annexation of Texas, they would not attempt to do so alone but would most likely act in concert with the government of France.

As his inauguration approached, Polk also received reports from Americans living in Texas, such as General James Hamilton Jr. who wrote to the president elect on February 23, 1845:

I have thought before you went into power, it might not be unimportant to have the advices from that Country [Texas] posted up to the period of my departure. Frequent intercourse with the Executive of that country & the officers of his Cabinet & still more intimate and frequent with Capt[ain] Elliot the British Charge D’Affairs, enable me to express some confidence in opinions ... I believe if the annexation of Texas to the United States is not consummated by the Autumn, that I entertain little doubt ... the Independence of Texas will be guaranteed by the former [the British] together with a definitive Peace with Mexico. In fact Capt[ain] Elliot told me ... before he left London he felt satisfied these terms could be *immediately* obtained ... Should therefore the Measure [of Annexation] be lost at the present session, I tell you candidly and sincerely that I believe its final success will depend on your reassembling Congress without delay and keeping the matter at *white heat* still on the anvil.<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, even before Polk was sworn in as President of the United States, he was well aware of British intrigues with members of the Texan government. Finally, when he delivered his inaugural address, noting the work of the previous Tyler Administration in its negotiations with Texas, Polk took a firm stand on annexation by declaring:

I regard the question of annexation as belonging exclusively to the United States and Texas. They are independent powers competent to contract, and foreign nations have no right to interfere with them or to take exceptions to their reunion ... To Texas the reunion is important, because the strong protecting arm of our Government would be extended over her, and the vast resources of her fertile soil

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<sup>58</sup> “Jacob L. Martin to James K. Polk, January 25, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 72.

<sup>59</sup> “James Hamilton Jr. to James K. Polk, February 23, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 129-130.

and genial climate would be speedily developed, while the safety of New Orleans and of our whole southwestern frontier against hostile aggression, as well as the interests of the whole Union, would be promoted by it ... None can fail to see the danger to our safety and future peace if Texas remains an independent state or becomes an ally or dependency of some foreign nation more powerful than herself. Is there one among our citizens who would not prefer perpetual peace with Texas to occasional wars, which so often occur between bordering independent nations? Is there one who would not prefer free intercourse with her to high duties on all our products and manufactures which enter her ports or cross her frontiers? Is there one who would not prefer an unrestricted communication with her citizens to the frontier obstructions which must occur if she remains out of the Union?<sup>60</sup>

However, by mid-March 1845, Polk began receiving regular reports and updates from Andrew Jackson Donelson, the United States Charge D'Affaires in Texas and the nephew of Polk's political mentor Andrew Jackson. For instance, A. J. Donelson wrote to Polk on March 18, 1845, "Whatever may be the disposition of the existing Government, after it is placed in possession of the recent act of our Congress, I cannot doubt that of the people of Texas. They anxiously desire annexation, and I feel no doubt of the result whenever the question is submitted to them. But much may depend on the shape in which it may be presented to them, and hence it is important to secure the assent of their President to the measure which will be presented to them either directly or through their agents. ..." Furthermore, Donelson predicted that "the great measures of your administration are now the reduction of the Tariff of 42, and the occupation of Oregon, after the annexation of Texas."<sup>61</sup> On the following day, Donelson again wrote to Polk, "When the measure is once before the people its friends can assail British intrigue and interference and appeal with confidence to the friendship of the United States ... It is on the people of Texas, as on those of the United States, that we must rely to defeat the intrigues of the British, and the interests of scrip-

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<sup>60</sup> James K. Polk, *Inaugural Address*, March 4, 1845. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/pin1603/>.

<sup>61</sup> "A.J. Donelson to James K. Polk, March 18, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 205-207.

holding speculators.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, Donelson believed that the patriotism of the American people who settled in Texas would ultimately triumph over British schemes to keep Texas out of the Union.

Other American statesmen at that time were also aware of the British attempts to prevent the U.S. Annexation of Texas. For instance, influential Arkansas Democrat Archibald Yell wrote to Polk from Texas on March 23, 1845, “The ‘Galveston News’ however is advocating the annexation, upon the lines of the Resolution and it charges upon the other papers a British interference, which I have no doubt is true as Holy Writ. That influence must be over come, and put down, and it can be done by the potential arm of the people. Public oppinion [opinion] must & will prevail.”<sup>63</sup> Yell again wrote Polk on March 26, 1845, “The rumor here i[s] that the B[ritish] minister has the notice of the Mixican [Mexican] recognition of the independence of Texas, and that that will, be followed up by a very liberal proposition on behalf of the British gover[n]m[en]t in a commercial treaty etc., etc., all of which may or may not be true ... Our friends here [in Texas] are poor & have already exhausted their means and there is no money in the country except what is brought here by the Brittish party.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, according to Yell, the U.S. Annexation of Texas hung by a thread because of the strength of the pro-British faction over the pro-American faction.

However, other Americans, such as prominent Whig and Wisconsin Territorial Governor Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, were more optimistic and even looked to a future of U.S. expansion after Texas, writing to Polk on March 30, 1845:

When the annexation of Texas shall have been perfected, there will remain one other thing which, in my judgement, ought to be done, namely, the purchase of Upper California from the western boundary of Texas, on the 37<sup>th</sup> parallel of latitude, to the Pacific Ocean. This would include the harbor of San Francisco,

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<sup>62</sup> “A.J. Donelson to James K. Polk, March 19, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 207-208.

<sup>63</sup> “Archibald Yell to James K. Polk, March 23, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 227.

<sup>64</sup> “Archibald Yell to James K. Polk, March 26, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 236-237.

which is said to be, the best in the world, and which is so much needed for our whalers, and our trade in those seas ... and thus open a direct trade to China & the East Indies ... the greater necessity of that of San Francisco, not only for our convenience, but to keep it out of the hands of a Foreign power ... The territory, thus to be acquired, would be north of what is called the "Missouri Compromise line," (36° 30') and whenever it should come into the Union, it would come as a free state. This *prospect* would go far towards reconciling, at the North, the opposition to Texas ... I have long been of the opinion that the annexation of Texas instead of increasing will tend to diminish slavery, and the purchase of Upper California would tend to allay all excitement on relation to it. A liberal price might well be paid for it; and it could be paid by offering, in whole or in part, as the case might be, the amount due from Mexico to our citizens, and which may, perhaps, be the only mode in which it can ever be paid. This purchase would reach to latitude 42°, the Southern boundary of Oregon, and then, with the settlement of our northern boundary with the British Government, and extending with Texas to the Rio del Norte, we should want no more Territory. The question of Territory would be forever settled at the South, and the time is, probably, far distant when such an extension will be agitated at the North, unless in case of war, with Great Britain. Then the annexation of Canada may be agitated.<sup>65</sup>

As evidenced by Tallmadge's comments, British officials were not entirely unreasonable to fear that their North American colonies might be imperiled by U.S. expansion should the Americans succeed in acquiring Texas and California. Meanwhile, in the first few months after his inauguration, Polk was bombarded with letters of concern over the status of the Republic of Texas. For example, Jacob Martin wrote to Polk again on April 16, 1845:

I seize a moment before the departure of the steamer to congratulate you upon the auspicious commencement of your presidential career and to say what pride & pleasure were felt by the friends of American republicanism when they read your able & patriotic message. .. It has however raised a storm in England which nobody anticipated. Ill will at the success of the annexation bill was the true cause of this hostile demonstration ... The declaration of the Ministers were not so hostile as the unanimous acclamations with which they were received in Parliament, & the offensive and defying tone of the public press. Depend upon it there is much ill will against us in England, which has been growing for years. Our silent growth & formidable future excite the jealousy if not the fears of our old enemy, who would gladly check our progress by any means which would not cripple herself too much ... The rejected Texan minister here Gen[eral] Terrill, a worthy man but a decided opponent of annexation, thinks that if Mexico declares war upon us it is an undoubted indication that she is stimulated thereto & will be secretly supported by

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<sup>65</sup> "Nathaniel P. Tallmadge to James K. Polk, March 30, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 244.

England. As he was in frequent cordial consultation with Lord Aberdeen, & evidently expects anxiously some decisive action on the part of Mexico, I think it is well for me to call your attention to the circumstance especially as the English papers speak of our folly in inviting a war with Mexico & England together. The French people sympathize with us but the gov[ernmen]t does not. Louis Phillipe is devoted to England, though he is anxious to preserve peace & will do any thing in his power to prevent hostilities.<sup>66</sup>

As Martin updated Polk on the French government's position on Texan annexation to the United States, Polk also engaged in a regular correspondence with former President Andrew Jackson. Polk wrote Jackson on April 27, 1845:

Much of my time has been occupied recently in relation to our Foreign affairs. The arrogant tone of defiance, and of menace held by the British Press, and Ministry on receiving my inaugural address, has not disturbed my nerves. My position upon the Oregon and Texas questions will be firmly and boldly, but at the same time, prudently maintained. I have no fear of War, but if contrary to my present impressions it should be forced upon us, because we assert and maintain our just rights, let it come. You may rely upon it we will not recede, from our ground ... the intrigues and influence of the British and French ministers in Texas, have had some effect, upon the Executive Government, and upon other leading men ... The policy of President Jones, is ... to delay action, until the British Government can consummate their plans ... We adopt your motto, to ask from other nations nothing but what is right, and submit nothing which is wrong.<sup>67</sup>

Polk followed this by assuring Jackson of his readiness to thwart Mexican aggression, even as he informed Jackson of ongoing British and French intrigues. Meanwhile, on May 5, 1845, Archibald Yell wrote Polk with a report on his and Donelson's activities in Texas, noting, "The intercision [intercession?] or interfearence [interference] of the British govern[men]t may induce them [the Texans] to take the alternative, *Independence*, rather than annexation ..." however "nothing but a Providential interfearence can prevent Annexation ..." and "All dissensions and opposition in Texas will now cease and nothing can make a change but a proposition more

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<sup>66</sup> "Jacob L. Martin to James K. Polk, April 16, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 296-298.

<sup>67</sup> "James K. Polk to Andrew Jackson, April 27, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 321-322.



favorable from some foreign gover[n]m[en]t, which is neither to be feared or antiseptated [anticipated].”<sup>68</sup> Soon after this update, Polk instructed Charge D’Affaires, A. J. Donelson, to give Texans various assurances should they join the Union. In a letter dated May 6, 1845, Polk wrote:

I have no hesitation in expressing to you the confident opinion, that if Texas shall accept the proposition as made to her, and thus puts the reunion between the two countries beyond danger, that the U[nited] States, will afterwards, adopt such measures, as will meet all her just wishes. Her extensive domain is valuable, and may be purchased at a price, which will enable her to pay all her debts, and take her stand in our Union unembarrassed ... Every day adds to the strength of the policy of annexation in the United States ... We desire most anxiously that she will accept the offer as made to her ... I hope her people and her government will not hesitate ... The English policy is undoubtedly to procure delay, from the Texian government, in their action on our proposition, with a view to induce Texas to decline, but with the ultimate object of making Texas in truth and in fact a dependency of her own ... it will undoubtedly be the object of the British Minister to interpose any obstacle, and hold out any inducement which may produce delay, and gain time, with a view to defeat the object which we have so much at heart, both on account of Texas and of our own country.<sup>69</sup>

However, despite Polk’s assurances to Houston and the people of Texas, on May 17, 1845, Jacob L. Martin complained to Polk in a letter written from abroad, warning of British determination to prevent the Annexation of Texas to the United States:

From what we see in the papers, we are not a little uneasy about Texas. Every day’s delay increases the danger. It is now obvious, what I always believed, that the principal persons in the government of Texas are hostile to annexation and will leave nothing untried to prevent it. Conversations with the late Charge, General Terrell, convinced me, that he looked earnestly to England for means to prevent a measure [the Annexation of Texas to the United States] to which he is fanatically hostile ... I trust that the people will promptly teach these men, that they are their servants not their rulers. The threats of Mexico give us very little uneasiness, unless they are significant of the hostility of England. Mexico will hardly venture to engage us single handed, and if she did, the contest would be ludicrous. To revert to the Texas question, it makes me indignant to see our government accused in the English papers of a rapacious desire to rob Mexico, of one of her fairest provinces, at the very time when it is admitted that England and perhaps France, are willing to guarantee the independence of Texas, provided she consents to maintain her

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<sup>68</sup> “Archibald Yell to James K. Polk, May 5, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 346-347.

<sup>69</sup> “James K. Polk to A.J. Donelson, May 6, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 350-352.

separate existence, which would certainly be robbing Mexico just as effectually of Texas, as the annexation. The true objection is not taking Texas from Mexico, but adding it to the U[nited] States. The plan of Jones is obviously by any subterfuge and pretext to stave off annexation, in order to get time for his intrigues with England to operate.<sup>70</sup>

In these comments, Martin divined British intentions by noting that Great Britain was not attempting to keep Texas independent for the Texans' sake, but primarily to deny that territory to the United States. However, events soon took a positive turn for the friends of annexation, as A. J. Donelson informed Polk on May 14, 1845, that "neither Houston, nor the executive of Texas, nor all the Diplomacy of Europe can throw a moments doubt about decision of the people in its favor [of Annexation]. Congress and the people in Convention will ratify our proposals [the Annexation of Texas] without the change of a letter."<sup>71</sup> Still, some Americans feared that the British were determined to keep Texas out of the Union at any cost. For example, prominent Democrat and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court John Catron suggested to Polk on May 20, 1845, that the Oregon "question is a 'bone to knaw' and excuse for war measures founded on the consideration that this Young Eagle had as well have a wing cropped to keep her out of Texas, California, and the ancient places of Mexico. There it is, England seeks the footing she has long had in Portugal & Spain, and she is making masterly work of it."<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, on May 26, 1845, Polk wrote A. J. Donelson concerning continued foreign interference in the Texan annexation question, writing, "There can be no doubt that the combined efforts of *Brittish, French, & Mexican* authorities will continue to be exerted to prevent it, as long as there is the slightest hope of success. Whilst this is the case, it is well known that many leading

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<sup>70</sup> "Jacob L. Martin to James K. Polk, May 17, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 385-386.

<sup>71</sup> "A.J. Donelson to James K. Polk. May 14, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 372.

<sup>72</sup> "John Catron to James K. Polk, May 20, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 396-397.

men in Texas, are secretly opposed to the measure and are only restrained from making open resistance to it, by, the popular opinion of the masses.”<sup>73</sup> As the various foreign governments continued to pressure the Republic of Texas to accept the previously negotiated British, French, and Mexican agreements regarding an armistice and permanent Texan independence, some Americans came to view the ultimate Annexation of Texas to the United States as a foregone conclusion. For example, Andrew Jackson wrote to Polk on May 26, 1845, rejoicing that “Texas comes into the union with a united voice, and Gen[era]l Houston, as I knew, puts his shoulders to the wheels to roll it in speedily. I knew British gold could not buy Sam Houston. *All* [is] safe and Donelson will have the honor of this important Deed. . . .”<sup>74</sup> However, Andrew Jackson would not live to see the Annexation of Texas, passing away on June 8, 1845. One funeralgoer, J. George Harris, gave a detailed account of events to Polk on June 12, 1845:

Gen[eral] Houston, his lady and son, were at the funeral, after which they repaired to the house of Maj[or] A.J. Donelson where they are now stopping . . . He protests that no European Government has acted in any other than the most open and fair spirit towards Texas, and avows that Texas has not connived at any intrigues like those of which Pres[ident]. Jones has been suspected. So far as my judgment goes of what Gen[eral] Houston says, he is of the opinion that Texas, while attempting to dispose of her sovereignty had the right of a young girl to play the coquette a little, but that she would have fought again and again for her own independence before she would have been annexed either directly or indirectly to any other power than the U[nited] States, and he seemed to be deeply affected by the death of Gen[eral] Jackson; and was constantly expressing his regret that he had not arrived a few hours earlier to receive the last blessing of the patriot. I had supposed that when Gen[eral] Houston arrived at Nashville all parties would be ready to greet him with the plaudit: “Well done, good and faithful servant,” for although he had been absent from home for years yet he did not return in the light of a “prodigal son.” On the contrary, the “talent” which his native country had given him he had

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<sup>73</sup> “James K. Polk to A.J. Donelson, May 26, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 408-409.

<sup>74</sup> “Andrew Jackson to James K. Polk, May 26, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 410.

not buried, but had “gained five other talents,” and certainly he deserved a general welcome.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the denials by Houston of the existence of any nefarious European intrigues, the U.S. Special Envoy to Texas, Charles A. Wickliffe informed Polk on June 4, 1845, about the status of the British mediated treaty between Texas and Mexico, noting, “I refer you to my note to Mr Buchanan of the 30<sup>th</sup> Inst[ant] in reference to the return of Mr. Elliot and the preliminaries of a treaty or basis of negotiation with this Republic [Texas] proposed by Mexico.”<sup>76</sup> In a follow-up letter to Secretary of State Buchanan, Wickliffe summarized a report that the “[British Charge D’ Affaires in Texas] Capt[ain] Elliot says he has obtained for Texas all he promised and what the President [Anson Jones] assured him in April last would be satisfactory to the Government of Texas, Viz ‘an agreement by Mexico to acknowledge by treaty the Independence of Texas upon the sole condition that she will stipulate never to annex herself to the United States. The question of boundary to be hereafter settled.’”<sup>77</sup> Wickliffe followed this letter with another report to Polk, recalling the belligerent tone that British Charge D’Affaires in Texas Charles Elliot had taken as of late regarding the likely Annexation of Texas by the United States:

Captain Elliot did not hesitate to speak of the object of his visit to Mexico to the citizens of the Republic; said that *he had obtained* their Independence but he regretted to learn upon his return that a majority of the people were for annexation and that he felt for them who opposed it, that Mexico would declare war instantly. The United States would Blockade the ports of Mexico but that the British Government would not submit to it consequently there would be war for 20 years and he would advise his friends in Texas to leave the country ... my opinions and suspicions of Pres[iden]t Jones and those who control him were correct. They ... entered into a scheme with Elliot to defeat annexation at a time when popular sentiment had not (without division) developed itself. That he was pledged to Elliot to prevent all military operations [operations] on the part of Texas on the Frontier

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<sup>75</sup> “J. George Harris to James K. Polk, June 12, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 444-445.

<sup>76</sup> “Charles A. Wickliffe to James K. Polk, June 4, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 422-424.

<sup>77</sup> William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831-60 XII* [12 Vols.] (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1939), 421-422.

until the result of his mission to Mexico could be known and that no call of congress would be made until its regular session in Nov[ember].<sup>78</sup>

As these statements reveal, it was clear to Wickliffe that the British government was indeed scheming to keep Texas out of the Union, even hinting at a conflict between Great Britain and Mexico, on the one side, and the United States, on the other side, to dissuade Americans from following through with annexation. Anticipating the imminent vote in favor of the Annexation of Texas to the United States, Polk wrote to Sam Houston on June 6, 1845, "I congratulate you upon the certainty, of which you give assurance, that Texas, will accept the proposition for annexation made to her by the U[nited] States, and that she may in effect be now regarded as a part of our Union ... If she accepts unconditionally, the great measure, of the re-union of the two countries, will be placed beyond danger ... You may have no apprehensions in regard to your boundary. Texas [was] once a part of the Union, and we will maintain all your rights, of territory, and will not suffer them to be sacraficed [sacrificed]."<sup>79</sup> Again, on June 15, 1845, Polk wrote A. J. Donelson with instructions to give the Texan government more assurances:

The threatened invasion of Texas by a large Mexican army is well calculated to excite great interest here, and increases our solicitude concerning the final action by the Congress and Convention of Texas, upon our proposition for annexation. In view of the facts disclosed by you, not only as regards, the approach of an invading Mexican army, but of the open intermeddling of the Brittish Charge d'affairs, with the question of annexation: I have lost no time in causing the most prompt and energetic measures, to be adopted here. I am resolved to defend and protect Texas, as far as I possess, the Constitutional power to do so ... whilst we will protect them against their Mexican enemies, stimulated & excited as these enemies have been by Brittish intrigue & influence ... we should not stand quietly by, and permit, an invading foreign enemy, either to occupy or devastate any portion of the Texian territory. Of course I would maintain the Texas title to the extent which she claims it to be, and not permit an invading enemy, to occupy a foot of the soil East of the Rio Grande ... The people of Texas, may be assured too, as I wrote you in a former

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<sup>78</sup> "Charles A. Wickliffe to James K. Polk, June 4, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 425-428.

<sup>79</sup> "James K. Polk to Sam Houston, June 6, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 431.

letter, that when she becomes a member of our Union, we will not only defend her but do her full and ample justice.<sup>80</sup>

These assurances appear to have allayed the fears of many influential Texans because on July 12, 1845, the President of Texas Anson Jones notified Polk that “the Deputies of the people of Texas assembled in Convention at the City of Austin of the 4<sup>th</sup> Inst. and adopted on that day an Ordinance expressing the acceptance and assent of the people to the proposal made by the government of the United States on the subject of the Annexation of Texas to the American Union. This assent given with promptness and much unanimity affords the assurance that this great measure, to the success of which your Excellency is so sincerely attached, will be consummated without farther difficulty, and, as I ardently hope in peace.”<sup>81</sup> As word of the success of the annexation measure reached the president in Washington, Polk continued to receive encouragement from Democrats from all across the United States regarding Texas. One such individual was St. Louis newspaper editor Shadrach Penn Jr., who wrote to Polk on July 15, 1845, that “Texas is safe. Many of the Whigs will now yield on that question—and the disaffection of a few professed Democratic Senators would produce no result, other than is really desirable.”<sup>82</sup>

As many Americans like Shadrach Penn Jr. breathed a sigh of relief regarding Texas, others, such as Second Seminole War veteran and soldier Charles H. Nelson, warned that war might still occur over annexation. Nelson reached out to Polk on July 15, 1845:

If Texas adopts Annexation war may not insue [ensue], but if under the improper influences which are so publicly employed [employed] by two of the most powerful Foreign Powers operating alike upon their avarice and fears, I doubt not but that they are alike appointed to stop & prevent what should be the course adopted by the government of the U.S. ... You are aware that our Government has made many

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<sup>80</sup> “James K. Polk to A.J. Donelson, June 15, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 449-451.

<sup>81</sup> “Anson Jones to James K. Polk, July 12, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 52-53.

<sup>82</sup> “Shadrach Penn Jr. to James K. Polk, July 15, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 66.

severe Lurches since its existence but none so great as the one brought you to the Chief Majesty, friends & foe view it is a miracle while the Balance of mankind sit in mute astonishment. The hand of Destiny is in this and points with unerring finger the path to pursue; our Destiny may be delayed but not stayed. ... What patriotic heart that beats but what must throb for our Success, then win with our hardy Legions armed with Justice we can rock a world to its center, if a world is combined against us.<sup>83</sup>

Also around this time, former Tennessee Secretary of State Daniel Graham messaged Polk on July 18, 1845, regarding Sam Houston and his rumored flirtations with various British intrigues over the years, writing, “My own unaided inferences were that he [Houston] was laboring under an apprehension, that his coquetting with Victoria [Great Britain], as he termed it, had perhaps been carried farther than he would now wish and having become satisfied of the public feeling on annexation in Texas, he had no desire to be there during the agitation of the question there this summer ... He apprehends that the question will be embarrassed at Washington next winter by British influence which he believes will be put forth with earnestness & power.”<sup>84</sup> Regardless of Houston’s suspected wavering on the annexation issue, on July 27, 1845, Polk wrote his congratulations to Donelson for the latter’s work in accomplishing the Annexation of Texas: “The Convention of Texas, had [has] accepted our terms of annexation, as proposed to her, without condition or alteration. You have had an important agency in consummating this great event, and it gives me pleasure to say to you, that your whole conduct merits, the approbation of your Government, as it must that of the country.”<sup>85</sup>

Soon after offering these congratulations to Donelson, Polk confided to his personal friend Robert Armstrong on July 28, 1845, “On last evening I received official despatches [dispatches]

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<sup>83</sup> “Charles H. Nelson to James K. Polk, July 15, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 61-62.

<sup>84</sup> “Daniel Graham to James K. Polk, July 18, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 75-76.

<sup>85</sup> “James K. Polk to A.J. Donelson, July 27, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 102-103.

from Maj[or] Donelson conveying the gratifying intelligence that the *convention of Texas* did on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July pass an ordinance with but one dissenting vote accepting the terms of annexation proposed by the United States.”<sup>86</sup> In turn, Armstrong responded to Polk from abroad on August 4, 1845, reporting, “The reception of the news of the annexation of Texas was rec[eive]d by the Americans here with great joy. All our Ships in Port hoisted their colors to the masthead. Such a glorious consummation of a great cause is indeed gratifying to all true Americans and to you must be doubly so.”<sup>87</sup> Polk also notified former member of the Tennessee State Senate A. O. P. Nicholson on July 28, 1845, “I received last night official despatches from Texas, announcing the acceptance by the Convention, of the terms of annexation proposed by the United States, without conditions, or change. Texas may now be regarded as part of our Country, and in anticipation of the consummation of the great event, you see, our land and Naval forces, are in a position & ready to protect and defend her.”<sup>88</sup> Later reflecting on the good news of annexation, Polk wrote to North Carolina Senator William H. Haywood, Jr. on August 9, 1845:

The action of the Government and people of Texas, on the question of annexion [annexation], shows I think the wisdom of the choice of the alternative propositions which was made. If the other alternative had been chosen, I think we have now abundant evidence to prove that Texas would probably been lost to the Union. If negotiations had been opened by commissioners great delay would necessarily have taken place, giving ample opportunity to British and French intrigue to have seriously embarrassed, if not defeated annexation ... Regarding Texas as now virtually a part of our country, I have yielded to the invitation of the Texan Congress and convention, and have ordered a part of our land and naval forces to her frontier, to protect and defend her people and territory against the renewed invasion of Mexico ... We will not be the aggressors upon Mexico; but if her army shall cross the Del Norte [Rio Grande] and invade Texas, we will if we can drive her army, to her own territory ... We invited Texas to unite her destinies with our own. She has accepted the invitation, upon the terms proposed, without limitation, alteration, or

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<sup>86</sup> “James K. Polk to Robert Armstrong, July 28, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 105.

<sup>87</sup> “Robert Armstrong to James K. Polk, August 4, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 113-114.

<sup>88</sup> “James K. Polk to A.O.P. Nicholson, July 28, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 108-109.



restriction and if because she has done so, she is invaded by the Mexican Army, surely we are bound to give her our aid in her defence.<sup>89</sup>

As anxiety over a potential war with Mexico continued to grow, granted these firm assurances by Polk, Associate Justice John Catron informed the president that rumors over U.S. expansion into California and other parts of Mexico threatened to draw Great Britain into the now seemingly impending conflict, noting on August 16, 1845, that “rumour says we are to have a war with Mexico. The appointment of Col[onel]. Almonte Sec[retary] at war, looks belligerent, but if war comes, the only fear is, we cannot stop short of doing too much, and thereby exciting European Jealousy; and especially as our newspapers are constantly vaunting that the Union will add California and Mexico this side of the Cordelleras. This is provoking folly Just at this time, with the Texas and Oregon [Oregon] q[uestio]ns.”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, influential Virginia Democrat Alexander McCall wrote to Polk on August 22, 1845, that “Mexico has no right to *Brittish Umpirage* & having no sailors for privateers the result must be that our ships will *sink crews* composed of French Spanish & British subjects. The advancement of true American interests is destruction to the antiquated debts & taxation of Europe & therefore a general war for *national existence* is close at hand ... That no European nation can be allowed to interpose in conflict of this continent will be the prevailing sentiment of our nation.”<sup>91</sup>

Given the momentum toward war, some Americans were concerned that Polk was not doing enough to prepare for a conflict with Mexico and even warned that an early U.S. defeat would damage the U.S. negotiating position in Oregon. As U.S. Vice President George M. Dallas

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<sup>89</sup> “James K. Polk to William H. Haywood Jr., August 9, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 140-141.

<sup>90</sup> “John Catron to James K. Polk, August 16, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 155-156.

<sup>91</sup> “Alexander McCall to James K. Polk, August 22, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 169-170.

of Pennsylvania wrote Polk on August 25, 1845, “The accumulation of forces at San Luis de Potosi and Monterey constitute, as I think, such a military demonstration as cannot be disregarded without hazarding the most painful consequences ... A single and sudden defeat would give a shock to the whole country, and disgrace us throughout Europe; especially after the bold language and manner we have been using ... The loss of a battle at this moment ... would place in jeopardy Texas, and make Oregon ludicrous.”<sup>92</sup> Polk responded to Dallas’ criticisms on August 28, 1845, assuring him:

I have exerted the whole power with which I am invested by the Constitution and the laws to defend the people and territory of Texas, against an attack, should one be made ... You may rely upon it, that the moment the first act of hostility is committed by Mexico, either by a Declaration of War, or by marching a strong army across the Del Norte [Rio Grande] ... our land and Naval forces, will, not as you seem to believe, have their hands, tied up by their orders ... I agree with you that a disaster in the opening of a war, would be most unfortunate. Such I think cannot happen ... In a word I have anticipated every possible contingency which may happen, and have done all I need do, unless there was an actual declaration of War, or an invasion.<sup>93</sup>

However, despite Polk’s actions, Dallas was not alone in his fears, as New Haven, Connecticut, probate judge Charles J. Ingersoll worried about what an early U.S. defeat might do to the American government’s reputation, writing to the president on August 26, 1845:

If we are checked in the first encounter with the Mexican forces, the effect will be fatal to your administration & disastrous to the country, which may lose both Texas and Oregon by such a misfortune ... you may rely upon it that neither this country, nor England and France, will be, the one satisfied, the others struck as they all should be, by merely driving back a Mexican invasion of Texas ... If we are unsuccessful in the first encounter the war will last longer than your administration, and you must meet your first Congress under the most disreputable circumstances. Whereas if our troops signally crush and demolish the first attempt, you will meet Congress with such strength as to ensure the possession of Texas, peace with

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<sup>92</sup> “George M. Dallas to James K. Polk, August 25, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 180-181.

<sup>93</sup> “James K. Polk to George M. Dallas, August 28, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 189-191.

Mexico, and the character with all foreign nations to ensure a long career of unmolested and progressive prosperity.<sup>94</sup>

However, in contrast to Dallas, Ingersoll concluded on a slightly more positive note, suggesting that a decisive victory would go far in establishing the United States as a great power in the eyes of the civilized world. Still, where some Americans saw an impending disaster, others, such as Illinois Democrat representative Stephen A. Douglas, envisioned even greater opportunities for expansion resulting from a war with Mexico. Writing to Polk on August 25, 1845, Douglas stated, “I do not think that our government ought to confine its operations to mere defensive warfare. The Northern Provinces of Mexico including California ought to belong to this Republic, and the day is not far distant when such a result will be accomplished. The present is an auspicious time. The declaration of war by Mexico renders such a step necessary and proper, and I hope the administration will resolve upon an expedition against New Mexico and California immediately. Such a movement will meet with the enthusiastic support of the whole west.”<sup>95</sup> As Representative Douglas demonstrated the expansionist fervor for which he would later become known, Polk wrote Sam Houston on August 31, 1845, updating him on various U.S. military movements while also inquiring on the progress of the Texans in forming a new state constitution:

Should Mexico declare war, she will be promptly met by our forces, by sea and land. Should she instead of declaring war, invade Texas by crossing the *Del Norte* [Rio Grande] by a considerable force, we shall regard that act as the commencement of hostilities on her part, and our forces, will drive them back, if Taylor has sufficient force to do so. Regarding the *Del Norte* as your true Western boundary, not a Mexican soldier ... should be permitted to remain East of that river. In these movements our squadron will of course cooperate, with the army, on land, and will blockade the Mexicans ports in the Gulf ... We have heard nothing of the proceedings of your Convention for over a month. I take for granted however that, they will form a Republican Constitution, and have it at Washington, ready to be submitted to our Congress at the opening of their Session in December. There can

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<sup>94</sup> “Charles J. Ingersoll to James K. Polk, August 26, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 187-188.

<sup>95</sup> “Stephen A. Douglas to James K. Polk, August 25, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 183.

be no doubt, but the new state will be admitted as a member of our Union, almost as a matter of course; certainly with no serious resistance.<sup>96</sup>

Despite ongoing concerns about a possible war with Mexico, congratulations continued to pour into the White House over the imminent U.S. Annexation of Texas. For example, lawyer, editor, and diplomat William Penn Chandler wrote Polk on September 8, 1845, “Allow me to present my congratulations on the happy issue, under your direction of the Texas Annexation. Every American here whether Whig or Democrat rejoices at the success of his country over the low Intrigues of British Diplomacy.”<sup>97</sup> In a similar, yet more belligerent vein, Arkansas Democrat Archibald Yell praised Polk on September 10, 1845, writing, “I congratulate you upon the favorable result of the Texas question ... If you can only be as fortunate in the negotiation of the Oregon question ... To make your Adm[inistration] bright & glorious we want a War with Mexico, and from present appearances we may also be blessed with an opportunity to give the Mexicans a dru[b]bing ... and acquire N[ew] Mexico & upper California, which has of late become indispensable to the govermitt [government], to complete our definse [defense] and wants on the Pacific. ...”<sup>98</sup> Therefore, like Stephen Douglas, Yell saw a potential conflict with Mexico as a convenient means of achieving the acquisition of California and New Mexico, as well as an opportunity to break out of any attempted encirclement of the United States by the British Empire.

Despite some lingering minor opposition, momentum finally carried through to the successful completion of the Annexation of Texas by the United States, as Texan President Anson Jones wrote to Polk on November 12, 1845, “I have the honor to transmit you herewith a copy of

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<sup>96</sup> “James K. Polk to Sam Houston, August 31, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 198-199.

<sup>97</sup> “William Penn Chandler to James K. Polk, September 8, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 214.

<sup>98</sup> “Archibald Yell to James K. Polk, September 10, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 219-220.

the ‘Constitution of the State of Texas,’ with the proper evidence of its adoption by the people of this Republic, to be laid before the Congress of the United States for its final action, in accordance with the provisions of the “Joint Resolution for annexing Texas to the United States.”<sup>99</sup> Polk later informed Buchanan on December 8, 1845, that “I received by the mail of Saturday evening, the accompanying papers, containing the official announcement by the President of Texas, that the Constitution, a copy of which he transmits, had been ‘ratified confirmed and adopted by the people of Texas themselves, in accordance with the joint Resolution for annexing Texas to the United States.’ I deem it proper to communicate to both Houses of Congress, copies of these papers, as also of the Constitution ... I desire to make the communication to day.”<sup>100</sup> However, Polk’s nerves were clearly on edge as he sought to complete the Annexation of Texas, writing to his Vice President George M. Dallas on December 25, 1845, while patiently awaiting the arrival of the resolution finalizing the measure of annexation:

You are aware that the Joint Resolution to admit Texas into Union has not been signed by the presiding officers of the two Houses, nor can it be until your return, unless indeed the Senate shall elect a President pro tempore. I thought it proper to communicate this fact to you, supposing it may not have occurred to you, and to say that it is deemed of great importance that the action of our Congress should be made known to the authorities of Texas, at the earliest practicable period. I have a messenger ready to start at an hour’s notice. I will approve the Resolution the instant it comes to me & dispatch the messenger. I think it probable that your impression was that the temporary occupant of the chair could sign the Resolution. Such a thing has never been done, nor do I think he has the power. I thought My Dear Sir: that you would be obliged to me for the suggestion, for I know you are as serious as any one that Texas should come into the Union at the earliest practicable period, and be represented in Congress.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Anson Jones to James K. Polk, November 12, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 368.

<sup>100</sup> “James K. Polk to James Buchanan, December 8, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 408-409.

<sup>101</sup> “James K. Polk to George M. Dallas, December 25, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 440.

This delay in receiving Congressional approval for the final instrument necessary to admit Texas into the Union seemed to give Polk no small measure of frustration. However, several days later, on December 29, 1845, Polk would finally inform his friend Robert Armstrong, “I have this day approved and signed a Joint Resolution of Congress for the admission of the State of Texas into the Union, and also an act to extend the laws of the United States over the new State.”<sup>102</sup> With the Annexation of Texas to the United States now beyond the power of any foreign intrigue to prevent, Polk congratulated Sam Houston:

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Instant, a joint Resolution which had previously passed the House, passed the Senate to admit Texas as one of the States of our Union upon an equal footing with the original States. The vote in the House was 141, in favour and 13, against it. Some delay has occurred in transmitting an authenticated copy of the act, to *President Jones*, in consequence of the fact, that the two Houses inadvertently adjourned over the Christmas holidays, before the presiding officers had signed it, which can only be done during the Session of each House and in their presence. Both Houses will meet to day, when doubtless it will be signed and presented to me, for my approval, which will be immediately given, and a special messenger despatched [dispatched], to the Seat of Government of Texas, with the official evidence of the fact. I hope no delay may occur after its receipt by *Pres[iden]t Jones* in convening your Legislature, to that end that Senators may be chosen and be here at the earliest practicable day ... As soon as the State is represented, and I can inform myself of your interests and wishes, I will take sincere pleasure, in presenting and advancing them. -James K. Polk, P.S. Since writing the foregoing the Resolution to admit Texas, into the Union has been approved and signed by me. A special messenger will leave to night bearing an authenticated copy of it to *President Jones*. I have approved and signed also, an act extending the laws of the United States over the State of Texas, an authenticated copy of which will be sent by the messenger to *President Jones*.<sup>103</sup>

Soon after this, Polk wrote to his brother William on December 29, 1845, announcing with unconcealed pride, “I have to day performed the pleasing duty of approving and signing the Joint Resolution for the admission of Texas into the Union, so that the measure of annexation is now

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<sup>102</sup> “James K. Polk to Robert Armstrong, December 29, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 443-444.

<sup>103</sup> “James K. Polk to Sam Houston, December 29, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 445-446.

consummated.”<sup>104</sup> The final chapter in the story of the U.S. Annexation of Texas occurred on February 14, 1846, when the last President of Texas, Anson Jones, provided the Texan people with a fitting tribute in a speech: “The lone star of Texas, which ten years since arose amid clouds over fields of carnage, and obscurely shone for a while, has culminated, and, following an inscrutable destiny, has passed on and become fixed forever in that glorious constellation which all freemen and lovers of freedom in the world must reverence and adore—the American Union ... The final act in this great drama is now performed. The republic of Texas is no more.”<sup>105</sup> With a poetically rhetorical flourish, the Annexation of Texas was complete, but even as this issue was resolved, war soon threatened with the Republic of Mexico.

In conclusion, the Annexation of Texas to the United States, at least in the eyes of America’s leaders and statesmen, successfully pre-empted a British attempt to establish a foothold of influence on the Western frontier of the Union from which Great Britain might be able to stir up Indian uprisings, slave rebellions, and potentially even insurrections among states from disaffected parts of the country. These leaders were keenly aware of the United States’ strategic vulnerabilities as a nation, weaknesses that might be exploited by a potentially hostile British Empire in the case of war. More importantly, on a geopolitical scale, the defeat of British efforts to erect a buffer state between the United States and Mexico, or, in particular, Northern Mexico, was a signal victory for the United States in its advancement across the continent. Now, only the all-important territory of California, with its critically vital Bay of San Francisco, held the key to U.S. economic ascendancy and eventual dominance on the Pacific Rim, standing in the way of the United States’ achievement of its continental expansion and Manifest Destiny.

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<sup>104</sup> “James K. Polk to William Polk, December 29, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 449.

<sup>105</sup> Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 176.

## Chapter 6: The Polk Corollary, California, and the Oregon Country

With Texas now firmly within the embrace of the Union, many Americans now turned their eyes to the lingering crisis with the British Empire over the Oregon Country and the potential acquisition of California as the objective of a likely war with Mexico. In both territories, however, the shadow of British influence loomed large, even credibly threatening to deprive the United States of a Pacific Coast. Regarding California, Mexican debt to British bondholders and the fear of an American conquest weighed powerfully on the minds of Mexican officials who would rather leave California in the hands of Great Britain than the United States. Also, on the disposition of the Oregon Country, the Hudson's Bay Company and its allies in the British Government fought hard for the Columbia River as the southern boundary of British claims, or failing that, an independent Oregon south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel and north of the Columbia River. The Americans, for their part, made bold claims to "'54'40' or Fight," thereby taking a strong stand for the southern limit of Russian Alaska as the United States most northerly claim in Oregon. These regions, California and Oregon, intersected in an unusual way in the late 1840s, with some in the American government fearing that inaction in organizing administrations for those two territories might lead to the creation of a Pacific Republic, merging them both into one new proposed country.

The seeds for this idea were likely planted in January 1845, when Massachusetts merchant William Sturgis gave a speech on the Oregon Country in which he stated:

The people of this country [Americans] are both covetous and ambitious in regard to territory. They covet and are ready to grasp at all that lies upon their borders, and are ambitious of extending their empire from sea to sea—from the shores of the Atlantic to the borders of the Pacific. I do not participate in this feeling ... Settlements scattered over a vast extent of territory— very likely to be badly governed in time of peace, and certain to present remote and exposed points to be defended in time of war— will not, in my belief, add to the power or promote the prosperity of the United States ... who can believe that such population, when it shall have become able to govern and protect itself, will submit to be governed by



others, and look to the shores of the Atlantic— some two or three thousand miles distant— for their laws and regulations. The Rocky Mountains, and the dreary deserts on either side, form a natural barrier between different nations, rather than a connecting link between parts of the same nations; and I care not how soon they form the boundary between the United States, *as they are now*, and an independent nation, comprising the *whole* of what is now called the “Territory of Oregon.”<sup>1</sup>

Many Northern Whigs agreed with Sturgis that the United States and Great Britain should leave the Oregon Country to its destiny and allow it to become an independent nation apart from both countries. Sturgis’ speech even attracted the attention of British admirers such as Lord Ashburton, who wrote Sturgis a letter of congratulations and agreed with his conclusions:

I have personally a high opinion of the future destinies of that portion of the coast of the Pacific. The Northern Pacific Ocean, and in the course of time probably the eastern shores of Asia, will find their masters in the country north of California. But I have a very low opinion of any interest either your country or mine are likely to have in any division of the territory. From the moment it becomes of any real importance, it will not be, and should not be, governed from either Washington or from West-minster. You do not, or should not want land, and we certainly do not want colonies, and least of all such as would be unmanageable from their distance, and only serve to embroil us with our neighbors. I am not without a wish that this new Pacific republic should be founded by our own race, which with an their detects, are likely to spread the best description of Christian civilization; but to say the truth, I care little whether this be done from Old England directly, or intermediately through New England. What I do care about is that we should not quarrel about this or any other measure, and I really believe that we should all be better by leaving this question to sleep again for another half century.<sup>2</sup>

As will be seen, British interest in the idea of an independent Oregon would grow more unsettling to American leaders throughout the remainder of the decade. Around the same time, newly inaugurated President of the United States James K. Polk acknowledged the Oregon controversy in his first address to Congress on March 4, 1845. In his message, Polk declared:

Nor will it become in a less degree my duty to assert and maintain by all Constitutional means the right of the United States to that portion of our territory which lies beyond the Rocky Mountains. Our title to the country of the Oregon is

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<sup>1</sup> William Sturgis, *The Oregon Question: Substance of a Lecture Before the Mercantile Library Association, Delivered January 22, 1845* (Boston: Jordan, Swift & Wiley, 1845), 23-24.

<sup>2</sup> *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Transmitted to Congress with the Annual Message of the President*, December 2, 1872, Part II, Volume V, No. 25. Document 31.

“clear and unquestionable,” and already are our people preparing to perfect that title by occupying it with their wives and children. But eighty years ago our population was confined on the west by the ridge of the Alleghanies. Within that period--within the lifetime, I might say, of some of my hearers--our people, increasing to many millions, have filled the eastern valley of the Mississippi, adventurously ascended the Missouri to its headsprings, and are already engaged in establishing the blessings of self-government in valleys of which the rivers flow to the Pacific. The world beholds the peaceful triumphs of the industry of our emigrants. To us belongs the duty of protecting them adequately wherever they may be upon our soil. The jurisdiction of our laws and the benefits of our republican institutions should be extended over them in the distant regions which they have selected for their homes. The increasing facilities of intercourse will easily bring the States, of which the formation in that part of our territory can not be long delayed, within the sphere of our federative Union. In the meantime every obligation imposed by treaty or conventional stipulations should be sacredly respected.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, one of the greatest challenges of the new Polk Administration was the disposition of the Oregon Country and the American desire for a Pacific Coast. On this subject and the need to outfit an expedition to explore Oregon, Vice President George Dallas wrote to Polk on March 27, 1845, noting, “The Tariff will soon engage attention, and its new attitude and relations are of extreme interest. Oregon, too, under the splendid and exact illustrations of an Exploring Expedition, assumes double importance.”<sup>4</sup> Also, the popular Roman Catholic priest James Reid encouraged Polk regarding Oregon on March 19, 1845, warning of British designs on that territory: “I hope that our legislative wisdom and prowess will retain Oregon from the fangs of british usurpation. ...”<sup>5</sup> Bringing California into the conversation surrounding the Oregon Crisis, American jurist Charles Ingersoll advised Polk on March 23, 1845, “I suggested to Mr. Buchanan what you may consider a wild notion, to ask Mr. Clay to undertake the Mexican mission and make peace with that neighbor by paying her liberally for a new frontier including port Francisco. This

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<sup>3</sup> James K. Polk, *Inaugural Address, March 4, 1845*, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/polk.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/polk.asp)

<sup>4</sup> “George M. Dallas to James K. Polk, March 27, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 239.

<sup>5</sup> “James Reid to James K. Polk, March 19, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 209.

by the same stroke settles our Oregon and Texas difficulties.”<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, in Europe, Polk’s inaugural message was not well received in Great Britain, and British MP Lord John Russell responded to the President of the United States in Parliament:

As to the state of the negotiations between this country and the United States with respect to Oregon ... we have in the first place an assertion that the claim of the United States to this territory is “clear and unquestionable;” and in the next place, we have the assertion that its title to the territory was perfected by emigration and settlement on the part of the United States; and, thirdly, we have the assertion that before a very long time the institutions of the United States will be extended to the Territory of Oregon, and that a new State, forming part of the Federal Union, will be established in that territory ... so far as ancient discovery establishes a claim, England has a superior claim to the United States ... That district is becoming, on account of the forts on the river Columbia, more important every year ... I may be told that it does not matter if this rocky and barren territory should be claimed, or occupied, or taken by the United States ... It cannot be a matter of indifference, that a large territory to which we have a better and a juster title, should be yielded to what I must call a blustering announcement on the part of the President of the United States. It cannot be a matter of indifference that the communication between that country, west of the Rocky Mountains, and China, the East Indies, and the whole of South America, should be surrendered at once to a Foreign Power; but, above all, it cannot be a matter of indifference, that the tone or the character of England should be lowered in any transaction which we may have to carry on with the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, many Americans living abroad or with connections outside the country wrote to Polk about the response of the British press, including the unofficial organs of its government, to Polk’s inaugural address to Congress. At this time, a Merchant named Alexander Jones informed Polk on April 16, 1845, “You will perceive the English papers have indulged in some censure, on that part of your Inaugural Address, which relates to the Oregon question. This is a matter of Small moment. ...” Jones also noted with alarm, “I have not seen any contradiction in the English papers, of the charge made against the Government, of its intrigue with Santa Ana for the purchase of

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<sup>6</sup> “Charles Ingersoll to James K. Polk, March 23, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 224.

<sup>7</sup> Commons Chamber. Volume 79: Debated on Friday 4 April 1845. Note: British House of Commons response to Polk’s “clear and unquestionable” Oregon comments from his Inaugural Address.

California.”<sup>8</sup> Over time, many Americans would see the fate of the Oregon Country and California as part of one great existential crisis facing the nation during Polk’s term, one that, if handled poorly, might result in the United States being denied a Pacific Coast and unhindered access to a profitable trade with the Orient. One of those concerned Americans was former President Andrew Jackson, who discussed Oregon with Polk in a letter from May 2, 1845:

I could not resist endeavouring to wade through the debate in the English parliament & comments on your inaugural as it relates to oragon [Oregon]. This is the rattling of British drums to alarm us, and to give life to their friends in the United States, such as the Hartford convention men, the Blue light federalists & abolitionists, and to prevent if Britain can, the reannexation of Texas, by shadowing forth war & rumors of war, to alarm the timid, & give strength to the traitors in our country, against our best interests & growing prosperity. This bold avowal by Peel, & Russell of a perfect claim to oragon [Oregon], must be met as boldly, by our denial [denial] of their right, and confidence in our own, that we view it too plain a case, *of right*, on our side to hesitate one moment upon the subject of extending our laws over it & populating with our people ... No temporizing with Britain on this subject now, *temporizing will not do*. Base your acts upon the firm basis, of asking nothing but what is *right* & permitting nothing that is *wrong*. War is a blessing compared with national degradation. The bold manner of [P]eels & Russels annunciation [annunciation] of the British right to oragon [Oregon], the time & manner requires a firm rebuke by you in your annual message ... expose Englands perfidy to the whole civilized wor[l]d. To prevent war with England a bold & undaunted front must be exposed. England with all hear Boast dare not go to war. All Europe knows she has no right to oragon [Oregon] nor ever had ... I am sure you will meet this with that energy & promptness that is due to yourself, & our national character.<sup>9</sup>

As Jackson blasted what he saw as the Whig descendants of the traitorous “Blue Light Federalists” from the War of 1812, now cloaked under the guise of abolitionism, with their old habits of acquiescing to a “balance of power” in North America that was far too generous to Great Britain, Jackson encouraged Polk to stand his ground in his negotiations with the British. Polk replied to Jackson on May 12, 1845, addressing his mentor’s concerns and assuring Jackson that

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<sup>8</sup> “Alexander Jones to James K. Polk, April 16, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 295.

<sup>9</sup> “Andrew Jackson to James K. Polk, May 2, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 332-333.

he would hold firm for American rights in Oregon: “You need have no uneasiness about the course of the administration on the Oregon question. The blustering rumours and tone of defiance, of Sir Robert Peel, Lord John Russell and others in the British Parliament, were intended probably to test our nerves. We stand firmly and boldly on our rights. We prefer peace if it can be preserved consistently with the national honour and interests, but if it cannot we are resolved to maintain our rights, at any hazard. ...” Polk concluded “I have myself no serious apprehensions of War.”<sup>10</sup> During this time, Polk also continued to receive support from well-wishers responding to his inaugural address such as influential Indiana Democrat John Law, who wrote optimistically on May 12, 1845, concerning the future of the United States:

On the Oregon, and Texas questions you will find the democracy of Indiana united to a man, Our title, our whole title, our right our whole right, to the Country beyond the Rocky Mountains they will maintain with the last drop of their blood, the last dollar of their treasure’s, and they fully sustain the bold manly and American view of the question taken in the Inaugural Address. Many of our people are preparing to emigrate to the Oregon, and many have gone. And if ever the contest should come between us and Great Britain, relative to our respective rights there, a contest certainly not to be sought by either party, but not to be avoided when our rights are invaded, the latter will find more Western rifles on the banks of the Columbia, than they ever dreamt of seeing in that quarter. The fact is, that nothing can, and nothing will stop our people from wending their way Westward. “The Star of Empire” point in that direction, and no threat from abroad, no legislative action at home, can prevent our population from reaching the shores of the Pacific. Ere four presidential terms have rolled around, not only Oregon, but *California* will be populated by American enterprise, and who shall stay their progress. And what human power can say, “Thus far Shalt thou go and no farther.” Well did the individual reply to Mr. Packenham last winter at Washington, when the former said in reference to the annexation of Texas “Your countrymen (The Americans) seem to have a most grasping ambition.” It comes with an ill grace from an Englishman, to charge us with a spirit of Territorial Acquisition.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “James K. Polk to Andrew Jackson, May 12, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 368.

<sup>11</sup> “John Law to James K. Polk, May 12, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 369-370.

Similarly, Van Buren appointee and former State Department clerk Jacob L. Martin wrote to Polk concerning the Oregon on May 17, 1845, noting that a firmer stand earlier might have resolved the situation already, or “if our warlike means were equal to the spirit & strength of our people, at this moment, the questions at issue would be promptly settled & without war. I trust that this will prove a lesson to be better prepared, hereafter.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Martin asserted that moving forward, a strong stand on the Oregon Crisis was necessary to dissuade the British from pushing extreme claims to the Pacific Northwest, as well as to avoid war. Meanwhile in Europe, France, under the “July Monarchy” of Louis Philippe the 1st, was for all intents and purposes a junior partner in a so-called Entente Cordiale with the United Kingdom in the 1840s. For example, French Foreign Minister Francois Guizot echoed earlier sentiments expressed by Lord Aberdeen from the latter’s January 23, 1845, letter to Charles Elliot, where Aberdeen asserted that “the continuance of Texas as an Independent Power ... must conduce to a more even, and therefore a more permanent balance of interests on the North American Continent.”<sup>13</sup> For his part, on June 10, 1845, Guizot stated that the French government’s position was identical to that of Great Britain:

France has a lasting interest in the maintenance of independent states in America, and in the balance of forces which exists in that part of the world. There are in America three powers, the United States, England, and the states of Spanish origin ... What is the interest of France? It is that the independent states remain independent, that the balance of forces between the great masses which divide America continue, that no one of them become exclusively preponderant. In America, as in Europe, by the very fact that we have political and commercial interests, we need independent states, an equilibrium of the several states. This is the essential idea which ought to determine the policy of France in America. It is not a question of protesting against the annexation of Texas to the United States, or of conflict to prevent it, if attempted ... France ought to act by use of her influence only ... She is not called upon to compromise herself, to bind herself regarding difficulties of the future, but it behooves her to protect by the authority of her name

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<sup>12</sup> “Jacob L. Martin to James K. Polk, May 17, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 385.

<sup>13</sup> Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas*, 429-430.

the independence of states and the maintenance of an equilibrium of the great political forces in America.”<sup>14</sup>

Thus, French designs regarding Texas demonstrated a near perfect harmony with both British Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen and his Charge D’Affaires in Texas Charles Elliot. On the American side, John Law wrote to Polk on June 26, 1845, speculating on British intentions toward the Oregon Country in a letter that also contained a prediction:

In spite of all the obstacles which they [the English] may attempt to place in our way, in spite of all their machinations publick and private, our course is onward, and while they dispute our passage north, they may as well be looking out for our limits on the Pacific *south* of the 42’. There are some good ports in the “Bay of San Francisco,” as well as in the “Straits of Fuca,” and what my Dear Sir can prevent the “Westward Ho” of the hardy pioneers of the West. We who have passed our lives almost among these people know, that if our own Government cannot stay the emigration of this rifle bearing population, these emigrationaly “Sons of the Forest,” no foreign government can arrest their settlement from Monterey to Nootka Sound, *if they so will* it— much less England whose threats they despise, whose oppositions they court ... The elements are even now at work which will ultimately shear Great Britain of her gigantick power, possessions, influence, and wealth. She will then stand a monument, a landmark, to other nations, of the folly and madness which governed her Councils.<sup>15</sup>

Law’s prediction that nothing could stop American settlers’ onward progress across the continent embodied the optimism of many Americans from that time. As the United States confronted Great Britain in a rivalry over the Oregon Country, some Americans began to suggest invoking the Monroe Doctrine to ward off what they perceived as British encroachments in North America. For example, on July 15, 1845, St. Louis newspaper editor Shadrach Penn Jr. advised Polk, mentioning the Monroe Doctrine in connection with the Oregon Country:

Texas is safe. Many of the Whigs will now yield on that question— and the disaffection of a few professed Democratic Senators would produce no result, other than is really desirable. But caution is necessary on the Oregon question. In the West, East, North & South the mass of the people will be satisfied with nothing short of the whole territory to the Russian line. They are for the policy avowed in

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<sup>14</sup> Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1826-1867* (The John Hopkins Press, 1933), 71-72.

<sup>15</sup> “John Law to James K. Polk, June 26, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume IX, January-June 1845*, eds. Wayne Cutler and Robert G. Hall II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 461-462.

your Inaugural, and the Monroe declaration of 1823 and trust that no compromise will be thought of. Should one be made, depend upon it, it will be attacked from every quarter. It will be better to hold back and submit the question to Congress, than to hazard the consequences of proposing or agreeing to any compromise whatever. In reference to western feeling you probably place confidence in some men near you, and if so you will be misled. We are all for Oregon, and *all Oregon in the West, as well as in the South.* ...<sup>16</sup>

Penn's aforementioned letter to Polk may represent the origin of what would later become known as the Polk Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in December 1845. Others such as Virginia Land Office Clerk Charles Fletcher appealed to Polk, imploring him to connect the West to the East by railroad, lest Oregon establish itself as a separate country, writing on July 24, 1845, that:

If this rail road be made, the power of England will be broken and the Canadas will solicit of their own accord to be admitted into the Union ... The principle is now conceded by congress and the nation that "new states may be admitted into the Union" whether they are contained within the area of that tract of country ceded to the United States by Great Britain at the peace of '83 or beyond it and this the Canadas and California and the Hudson Bay Co. may each or all be admitted in turn or time. But the great art of England now will be to defeat any more annexation and to prevent the United States having any more territory on the Pacific. She will try to build up a separate government on that shore; already we see it announced in the newspapers that a new and independent Republic will be likely to be established on the Pacific and great exertions will be made by those opposed to American interests to impress the belief upon the people of the East that California and Oregon are too far off to be under the government of the United States. Let this rail road be finished and all their arguments will vanish ...<sup>17</sup>

Fletcher also followed up with another letter to Polk on the subject on September 18, 1845:

Since I have undertaken to be sentinel upon the outpost of the American Boundary it behooves me to be vigilant that no part of our country be alienated from the rest; it appears to be as necessary to watch against the insidious writings of our own countrymen as against the warlike demonstrations of our enemies ... Here is the beginning of an attempt to form a separate and independent government [in Oregon] disconnected with the United States. This will suit England exactly. She will hold on to as much of the territory of Oregon as she can and she will try to foster us in dependent government of the remainder and of all California with whom she can have treaties without consulting the government of the states east of the

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<sup>16</sup> "Shadrach Penn Jr. to James K. Polk, July 15, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 66.

<sup>17</sup> "Charles Fletcher to James K. Polk, July 24, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 96-97.



Rocky mountains. By this arrangement Great Britain will completely shut out the commerce of the United States from the Pacific ocean except such as can be obtained by commercial treaties. Instead of commanding this trade we shall have to ask permission of a foreign nation to enjoy a part of it. To counteract the designs of our enemies ... the establishment of a government, of a post route to Astoria and the granting of a charter for a Rail Road will effectually secure a large territory west of the Rocky Mountains and give this nation an outlet on the Pacific.<sup>18</sup>

In August 1845, concerned over the unsettled nature of the diplomatic situation with Great Britain over the Oregon Country, Polk requested that his Secretary of State James Buchanan respond to the British rejection of the American compromise proposal regarding that territory, writing, "We should progress without delay in the Oregon negotiation. You may consider me impatient on this subject. I do not consider that I am so, but still I have a great desire, that what is contemplated, should be done, as soon as it may suit your convenience."<sup>19</sup> Buchanan responded to Polk on August 11, 1845, writing, "it is clearly our policy to temporize, as to time, with Great Britain & to delay our answer for the present. To say to her, in strong terms, that we will insist upon our extreme right would be to exclude her altogether from any outlet to the Pacific ... We ought not, in my opinion, to do any thing at the present moment which might tend to make G[reat].B[ritain]. the ally of Mexico, in case of war when the delay of a few weeks can do no possible injury."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Secretary of State Buchanan was clearly concerned that any apparent diplomatic misstep at that time might lead to a two-front war between the United States on one side and Great Britain and Mexico on the other.

On the status of California, Polk's personal friend Robert Armstrong wrote to the President from the U.S. Consulate in Liverpool, England, acknowledging the rumor that Mexico might sell

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<sup>18</sup> "Charles Fletcher to James K. Polk, September 18, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 253.

<sup>19</sup> "James K. Polk to James Buchanan, August 7, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 126.

<sup>20</sup> "James Buchanan to James K. Polk, August 11, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 142-143.

California to the British in order to pay off their debts to Great Britain. Thus, Armstrong informed Polk on August 4, 1845, that “I cannot say what truth there may be in the report that England has a mortgage in California, but if you have any reason to believe there is any foundation for it, I would suggest never to settle the Oregon question short of 54’ unless Gr[eat] Britain renounced all pretension to any farther possessions on our continent. England must never have California and it seems to me advisable to make Oregon the bone of contention to prevent it.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, noting British ambitions, Virginian Alexander McCall warned Polk on August 7, 1845, that “the expression of American interests has made England recede from her Texian position, but she will fix here eye upon Calafornia [California].”<sup>22</sup> Also, influential New York Democrat Levi D. Slamm wrote Polk on October 2, 1845, stating, “The importance of that country [California] in a National point of view—the evident design of [the] British Government to get it within its meshes—would seem to require on the spot an active, discreet and intelligent agent, to protect American citizens and give our government the earliest information ... the interest I feel in any matter involving an extension of ‘the area of freedom’ or the curtailment of British power on this continent.”<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, to Americans such as Levi Slamm, U.S. expansionism was about strengthening the Union and denying important strategic territories to the British. Concerning California, Polk wrote to U.S. diplomat John Slidell, who would be dispatched to negotiate a treaty with Mexico in the hopes of acquiring California and New Mexico by purchase, on November 10, 1845, “I am exceedingly desirous to acquire *California* ... If you can acquire both *New Mexico* and *California*, for the sum authorized, the nation I have no doubt will approve the act ... If unfortunately, you

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<sup>21</sup> “Robert Armstrong to James K. Polk, August 4, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 113.

<sup>22</sup> “Alexander McCall to James K. Polk, on August 7, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 127-128.

<sup>23</sup> “Levi D. Slamm to James K. Polk, on October 2, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 272-273.

shall fail to effect a satisfactory adjustment, of the pending differences between the two countries ... we must take redress for the wrongs and injuries we have suffered into our own hands, and I will call on Congress to provide the proper remedies.”<sup>24</sup> Not coincidentally, in his diplomatic instructions to Slidell from the same day, Secretary of State Buchanan was clear in his reasons for why any treaty with Mexico needed to include the cession of California to the United States:

From information possessed by this Department it is to be seriously apprehended that both Great Britain and France have designs upon California ... whilst this Government does not intend to interfere between Mexico and California, it would vigorously interpose to prevent the latter from becoming either a British or a French Colony. You will endeavor to ascertain whether Mexico has any intention of ceding it to the one or the other power, and if any such design exists, you will exert all your energies to prevent an act which, if consummated, would be so fraught with danger to the best interests of the United States ... The possession of the Bay and harbor of San Francisco is all important to the United States. The advantages to us of its acquisition are so striking, that it would be a waste of time to enumerate them here. If all these should be turned against our country, by the cession of California to Great Britain, our principal commercial rival, the consequences would be most disastrous. The Government of California is now but nominally dependent on Mexico, and it is more than doubtful whether her authority will ever be reinstated. Under these circumstances, it is the desire of the President that you shall use your best efforts to obtain a cession of that Province from Mexico to the United States.<sup>25</sup>

As demonstrated by Buchanan’s instructions to Slidell, apprehension over British and possibly French designs on California played a significant role in the Polk Administration’s reasoning behind acquiring California. Earlier in his letter to Slidell, Buchanan foreshadowed Polk’s December 2, 1845, Address to Congress as it pertained to foreign interference in the affairs of the New World; echoing the Monroe Doctrine from two decades before, Buchanan wrote:

The nations on the continent of America have interests peculiar to themselves. Their free forms of Government are altogether different from the monarchical institutions of Europe. The interests and the independence of these sister nations require that they should establish and maintain an American system of policy for their own protection and security, entirely distinct from that which has so long prevailed in

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<sup>24</sup> “James K. Polk to John Slidell, November 10, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 362-363.

<sup>25</sup> James Buchanan and John Bassett Moore, *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence, Volume 6* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1909), 304.

Europe. To tolerate any interference on the part of European sovereigns with controversies in America; to permit them to apply the worn-out dogma of the balance of power to the free States of this continent; and above all, to suffer them to establish new Colonies of their own, intermingled with our free Republics, would be to make, to the same extent, a voluntary sacrifice of our independence. These truths ought everywhere, throughout the continent of America, to be impressed on the public mind. If therefore in the course of your negotiations with Mexico, that Government should propose the mediation or guarantee of any European Power, you are to reject the proposition without hesitation. The United States will never afford, by their conduct, the slightest pretext for any interference from that quarter in American concerns. Separated as we are from the old world and still further removed from it by the nature of our political institutions, the march of free Government on this continent must not be trammled by the intrigues and selfish interests of European powers. Liberty here must be allowed to work out its natural results; and these will, ere long, astonish the world. Neither is it for the interest of those powers to plant colonies on this continent. No settlements of the kind can exist long. The expansive energy of free institutions must soon spread over them. The colonists themselves will break from the mother country, to become free and independent States. Any European nation which should plant a new colony on this continent would thereby sow the seeds of troubles and of wars, the injury from which, even to her own interests, would far outweigh all the advantages which she could possibly promise herself from any such establishment.<sup>26</sup>

Buchanan was not alone in asserting the Monroe Doctrine to ward off European interference in the disputes between the United States and Mexico; in a letter from September 19, 1845, prominent New York City lawyer and Democrat John McKeon similarly suggested to Polk that he appeal to or reiterate the Monroe Doctrine :

Far be it from me to dictate to the Executive the course he should pursue but it appears to me never had any President a better opportunity than yourself to stamp the impress of American statesmanship on the history of the world. At this moment the European powers are watching with anxiety the extension of the United States. They dread the power which must grow up here and for the first time the doctrine of a balance of power is talked of on this continent. That means some method to check the advance of the Union. I believe that Mr Guizot's suggestion as to balance of power and Mr Peels threat would be well met by a declaration (it would in fact be nothing more than reiterating Mr Monroes doctrine) that the United States would not permit in silence European interference in this continent. What is to prevent an American President from addressing Congress in strong language on the corrupting interference of Transatlantic Powers. The popular explosion which would follow

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 295-296.

such a declaration would annihilate British influence here and give an overwhelming impetus to the Democratic party.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, not only did McKeon believe that invoking the Monroe Doctrine was necessary to ward off any further British or French intrigues on the periphery of the United States, but also; Polk's language from his December 2, 1845, Address to Congress borrowed phrases from McKeon's letter almost verbatim. Furthermore, influential Tennessean J. G. M. Ramsey wrote to Polk around this time, suggesting similar action to McKeon, stating on October 11, 1845, "I hope the Oregon negotiation may terminate alike favorably and gloriously. I cannot be supposed to look far into that subject, but as I informed you in a former off-hand suggestion the policy of Mr. Monroe not to allow European colonization or interference [interference] in American affairs appears to me to be right and I think has the sanction of enlightened sentiment every where among our people. I doubt not your course on that subject will be such as the true interests of the country will demand."<sup>28</sup> Although Ramsey had Oregon in mind when he made his suggestion, he believed that a reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine could serve U.S. interests in other places as well. Soon after McKeon's letter, Polk wrote to his friend Gideon J. Pillow on October 3, 1845, repeating McKeon's earlier suggestion to confront Guizot's "balance of power," asserting:

One thing you may regard as settled, and that is that no inclination or interference on the part of England or any other foreign power will be permitted. Their officious intermeddling to prevent the annexation of Texas, has been signally rebuked. Mr. G[u]izot's doctrine, lately broached of a 'balance of power' on this continent, be adjusted & arranged of course, by the dictation of Foreign government Heads, to suit their tastes and interests, is not for a moment to be tolerated. We will manage our own affairs, and will not submit to the national degradation of permitting any foreign powers to interfere with them.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "John McKeon to James K. Polk, September 19, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 255.

<sup>28</sup> "J.G.M. Ramsey to James K. Polk, October 11, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 255.

<sup>29</sup> "James K. Polk to Gideon J. Pillow, October 3, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 276.

Here, Polk's December 2, 1845, Address to Congress and what would later become known as the Polk Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine begins to take shape. Meanwhile, on November 7, 1845, former Secretary of State and influential Massachusetts Whig leader Daniel Webster buoyed British hopes for an independent Oregon when he delivered a speech to a mostly Whig audience at Faneuil Hall in Boston. Addressing the crisis between the United States and Great Britain, Webster declared the following to his audience:

The Oregon Territory embraces that part of the continent which lies west of the Rocky Mountains, and between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific ... It is enough to say it is in dispute between England and the United States, and has been in dispute for forty years. This controversy seems now to be approaching a sort of crisis ... let me ask if there be any sensible man in the whole United States who will say for the moment that when fifty or a hundred thousand persons ... shall find themselves on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, that they will long consent to be under the rules either of the American Congress or the British Parliament. They will raise a standard for themselves, and they ought to do it. I look forward to the period when they will do this as not so far distant but that many now present, and those not among the youngest of us, will see a great Pacific republican nation. I believe that it is in the course of Providence and of human destiny that a great State is to arise, of English and American descent, whose power will be established over the country on the shores of the Pacific; and that all those rights of natural and political liberty; all those great principles that both nations have inherited from their fathers, will be transmitted through us to them, so that there will exist at the mouth of the Columbia, or more probably farther south a great *Pacific republic*, a nation where our children may go for a residence, separating themselves from this Government, and forming an integral part of a new government, half-way between England and China; in the most healthful, fertile, and desirable portion of the globe, and quite too far remote from Europe and from this side of the American Continent to be under the governmental influences of either country.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, by early December 1845, the U.S. Minister to the United Kingdom, Louis McLane, writing from his diplomatic post overseas, informed Polk of the enthusiastic reaction in the foreign press to Webster's Faneuil Hall Speech in Boston. McLane wrote that *The Times*, the political organ of Peel's ministry, as well as Aberdeen's Foreign Office, plus *The Standard*, *The*

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster: Volume 13* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1903), 312, 314-315.

*Morning Herald*, and even the French Journal *Courier Francais*, all mentioned and approved of the substance of Webster's arguments in support of an independent Oregon:

I accompany this letter by the Standard, quasi ministerial paper or as we say in Washington "organ," containing a reference to Mr. Webster's Boston Speech ... [and] his anti american notion of erecting the territory into an independent State ... an independent territory in Oregon to which, it is asserted ... that neither G[reat].B[ritain]. or the U.S. is entitled, a pretty sweeping mode of carrying out Mon[sieur]. Guizot's balance of power on the American Continent ... G[reat].B[ritain]. has only to acquiesce in that view, *according to the suggestions of Mr. Webster ... and France and this Government* [Great Britain] become *immediately* allied to carry out *this* notion, *an alliance or cooperation, be it remembered, upon which G[reat].B[ritain]. would never calculate upon any other ground.* Might not *Russia* also prefer the idea of a separate independent government in that quarter for the present, taking her chance with all other Nations to cultivate such relations with the new independent and weak government as would ultimately make it a part of her own dominions. Such would undoubtedly become the fate of such new government at no remote day. It would have to fall into the hands of the *U[nited].S[tates]., G[reat].B[ritain]. or Russia,* though the struggle might be long and severe among those powers. And this a scheme, which an *American* Statesmen in the cradle of *American liberty* and in accordance with European hostile policy, gravely producing the means by which his own government may be cajoled or by a new holy alliance coerced to abandon rights which he himself is obliged to admit as unquestionable to the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel of Latitude! ... To abandon the territory which even England would be willing to concede to be ours; for the purpose of raising up a rival nation, to hem us in north, west and south by independent rival nations, and create in those vast region[s] on the Pacific a bone of contention for all the powers of the world to battle for ...<sup>31</sup>

Hence, McLane raised the prospect that an independent Oregon might become, at the very least, a geopolitical chess piece between the United States, Great Britain, and possibly Russia or, at the very worst, a battleground between those Great Powers. Also, Webster's speech fueled Democrat suspicions about Northern Whigs' rejection of Manifest Destiny and their apparent submissiveness to Great Britain and even amenableness to a "balance of power" tilted in favor of the British. Similarly, on December 1, 1845, former Chief Clerk for the State Department Jacob L. Martin sent an update to Polk, this time from France, here speaking of Guizot's ministry:

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<sup>31</sup> "Louis McLane to James K. Polk, December 1-2, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 395-397.

There is intense excitement in England & even here [in France], upon the Oregon question ... Public sentiment here [France] sympathizes with us, but I am sorry to say there is no effective opposition to the government, whose animus is decidedly adverse to us. All that the diversified and unorganized opposition may be able to do, is to prevent France from taking an active part with England ... One would think, that the humiliating issue of French interference in the Texas question, would have indisposed this government to further intermeddling between the U.S. & England. But His Majesty the King of the French sacrifices every other interest to the English alliance, and would if possible cooperate with Great Britain anywhere & for any purpose. It is his fixed idea—Texas, Madagascar, Buenos Ayres it is all the same thing, provided his arms & diplomacy make common cause with England ... The French people almost to a man disapprove of the leanings of their government towards England against the U[nited]. States; as was proved in the course of the Texan question, where the defeat of the Jones & Elliot intrigue in conjunction with the French representatives in Mexico & Texas, was backed with universal pleasure ... Let a war break out, and French sympathy in our favor, will be irrepressible if not from love to us, from incurable hostility to the enemy & rival of centuries [England].<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to McLane's dire predictions, Martin's report from France assured Polk that the sympathy of the French people was with the United States, regardless of the allegiance of the French government to British Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen. Finally, on December 2, 1845, 22 years to the day that President James Monroe first enunciated the Monroe Doctrine to the world, President James K. Polk added his "Polk Corollary" to that very doctrine and impressed his stamp upon the foreign policy traditions of the United States of America. In this address, Polk declared:

In calling the attention of Congress to our relations with foreign powers ... Adopting the maxim in the conduct of our foreign affairs "to ask nothing that is not right and submit to nothing that is wrong," it has been my anxious desire to preserve peace with all nations, but at the same time to be prepared to resist aggression and maintain all our just rights ... In contemplating the grandeur of this event [The Annexation of Texas] it is not to be forgotten that the result was achieved in despite of the diplomatic interference of European monarchies. Even France, the country which had been our ancient ally ... most unexpectedly, and to our unfeigned regret, took part in an effort to prevent annexation and to impose on Texas, as a condition of the recognition of her independence by Mexico, that she would never join herself to the United States. We may rejoice that the tranquil and pervading influence of the American principle of self-government was sufficient to defeat the purposes of British and French interference, and that the almost unanimous voice of the people

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<sup>32</sup> "Jacob L. Martin to James K. Polk, December 1, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 398-399.



of Texas has given to that interference a peaceful and effective rebuke. From this example European Governments may learn how vain diplomatic arts and intrigues must ever prove upon this continent against that system of self-government which seems natural to our soil, and which will ever resist foreign interference. Toward Texas I do not doubt ... that she will never have cause to regret that she has united her "lone star" to our glorious constellation.<sup>33</sup>

Polk proceeded to a discussion of the Pacific Northwest and the Oregon Country:

Oregon is a part of the North American continent, to which, it is confidently affirmed, the title of the United States is the best now in existence ... The rapid extension of our settlements over our territories heretofore unoccupied, the addition of new States to our Confederacy, the expansion of free principles, and our rising greatness as a nation are attracting the attention of the powers of Europe, and lately the doctrine has been broached in some of them of a "balance of power" on this continent to check our advancement. The United States, sincerely desirous of preserving relations of good understanding with all nations, can not in silence permit any European interference on the North American continent, and should any such interference be attempted will be ready to resist it at any and all hazards ... The people of the United States can not, therefore, view with indifference attempts of European powers to interfere with the independent action of the nations on this continent ... Jealousy among the different sovereigns of Europe, lest any one of them might become too powerful for the rest, has caused them anxiously to desire the establishment of what they term the "balance of power." It can not be permitted to have any application on the North American continent, and especially to the United States. We must ever maintain the principle that the people of this continent alone have the right to decide their own destiny. Should any portion of them, constituting an independent state, propose to unite themselves with our Confederacy, this will be a question for them and us to determine without any foreign interposition. We can never consent that European powers shall interfere to prevent such a union because it might disturb the "balance of power" which they may desire to maintain upon this continent.<sup>34</sup>

Polk then referenced the Monroe Doctrine, writing:

Near a quarter of a century ago the principle was distinctly announced to the world, in the annual message of one of my predecessors ... This principle will apply with greatly increased force should any European power attempt to establish any new colony in North America. In the existing circumstances of the world the present is deemed a proper occasion to reiterate and reaffirm the principle avowed by Mr. Monroe and to state my cordial concurrence in its wisdom and sound policy. The reassertion of this principle, especially in reference to North America, is at this day but the promulgation of a policy which no European power should cherish the

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<sup>33</sup> James K. Polk, *First Annual Message to Congress, December 2, 1845*, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-2-1845-first-annual-message>

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

disposition to resist ... it should be distinctly announced to the world as our settled policy that no future European colony or dominion shall with our consent be planted or established on any part of the North American continent.<sup>35</sup>

In his message to Congress, Polk connected the European powers' desire for a "balance of power" on the North American continent to attempts by those powers to establish new colonies on the periphery of the United States and, in its stead, proposed a utopian vision of an expansive continental republican bastion of free Americans under one banner. In the wake of Polk's Message to Congress, all throughout that December, the president received praise and congratulatory messages for his bold reaffirmation of the Monroe Doctrine. For example, Democrat influencer Fitzwilliam Byrdsall wrote to Polk on December 3, 1845, "I have just read the Message, in the *N.Y. Sun* of this morning ... Its views in relation to Texas, as well as our difficulties with Mexico, are judicious, while peculiarly happy and appropriate in its sentiments and language upon the European policy of the balance of Power, Here it is universally sustained by every right minded American, against foreign interference. The subject of Oregon is well treated and our claim to the whole of Oregon ... will place the patriotism of the present administration upon high ground."<sup>36</sup> Many other Americans shared Byrdsall's approval of Polk's warning to European powers, especially to the United States' main rival in the Oregon Country at the time, Great Britain. Similarly, Democrat Alexander H. Everett congratulated Polk on December 8, 1845, writing:

I avail myself of the occasion to express to you the great satisfaction with which I have read the message. The spectacle of national progress and prosperity presented by it is truly magnificent; and ... will be viewed with delight and admiration by the friends of Liberty throughout the civilised world ... although it will, of course, call forth a fresh burst of ambiguity and venom from the British press ... I was particularly pleased with allusion in the message to the evidence of France on this matter. Though delicate & even friendly in its terms, it is precise, pointed and full of significance. Its justice will be seen and felt by such men as Louis Philippe and Mon[sieur]. Guizot. The apprehensions, real or pretended, of foreign wars that were

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Fitzwilliam Byrdsall to James K. Polk, December 3, 1845," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 400.

to result from the ‘annexation’ [of Texas] have already gone off in smoke ... The same considerations, which have compelled Great Britain to acquiesce, very much against her will, in the ‘Annexation,’ will also compel her to consent to an equitable adjustment of the Oregon question by direct negotiation.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, Everett essentially believed that the U.S. had successfully called the Europeans’ bluff on a confrontation over Texas and that Polk should stand firm over the Oregon. Even Polk himself seemed pleased with the response to his message, writing to his brother William on December 13, 1845, “As far as I have learned, it has been well received by the Country, the Democracy giving it a united and enthusiastic support, and many of the Whigs, yielding a tacit assent and making no open opposition. Upon the Oregon question the opposition have been taken all aback and know not what to say. Upon that question the patriotic feeling of the country. I shall be anxious to know how the message is received in different parts of Europe, and I desire that you will write to me on the subject.”<sup>38</sup> Although Polk enjoyed hearing the reactions of his countrymen to his message, he eagerly anticipated the response of the European powers to his Polk Corollary. Shortly thereafter, Polk began to receive news from abroad concerning the reception of his message by the various governments of Europe beginning after the new year, when Louis McLane wrote to Polk on January 17, 1846:

I ought, perhaps, not to omit on this occasion to state that the part of the Message which has produced the greatest sensation abroad, not excepting perhaps the strictures upon Oregon, is that repeating the declaration of Mr Monroe respecting European colonization upon the American continent. It need not surprise you to discover, at no distant day, that a favorite scheme with the leading Powers of Europe is to compose the Mexican troubles by giving her a settled monarchical form of government, and supplying the monarch from one of their own families. So far as the hope of consummating this scheme may be entertained by anyone it will be used to inspire opposition to the Message, and to bring other governments upon the continent, to sympathize with G.[reat]B.[ritain] in her dispute with us in regard to Oregon. The extent of this feeling in France, Col[onel] King has no doubt

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<sup>37</sup> “Alexander H. Everett to James K. Polk, December 8, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 409-410.

<sup>38</sup> “James K. Polk to William Polk, December 13, 1845,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume X, July-December 1845*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 442.

acquainted you with. I confess I found it to exist in a greater degree than I could possibly have supposed; and I think you may fairly expect that in case of war with England, we shall have to encounter any opposition from the government of France that the popular will may allow; and upon the strength of that popular will, in opposition to the present government, I have no great reliance.<sup>39</sup>

As indicated by his letter, McLane informed Polk that, although the feeling of the French people was with America and even as McLane did not anticipate that the United States would have to face both Great Britain and France in a war over Oregon or potentially California, several European powers might be inclined to support Great Britain in the Oregon dispute because Polk's Corollary threatened their long-held scheme to place a European monarch on the throne of Mexico. The United States Charge D'Affaires in Austria, William H. Stiles, messaged Polk from the United States Legation in Vienna on January 20, 1846, writing that:

Never before has a haughty English press condescended to style us a "great" nation, never before has such a compliment been extended from Guizot, that we were destined to become the first power on the Globe, and never before the appearance of this document, have the European Governments, so sensibly felt, both, that the motto of our guidance was indeed, "to do nothing but what is right, and to submit to nothing that is wrong" and still more that we were in reality, at all times, prepared in ability to sustain it. When the original thirteen States with a population only of three millions, first declared their independence, the act created in the minds of European powers but a feeling of contempt and was looked upon with indifference, destined as they supposed the experiment to certain & speedy destruction, but now when experience has proved, that, that experiment must succeed, when the light of their principles is disturbing the rotten foundations of Monarchy ... that posing of indifference towards the United States has been exchanged into one of intense interest, and that feeling of contempt, been supplanted by one of deep and bitter jealousy at every stride which she is now so rapidly making towards the pinnacle of national power & glory ... The critical situation of affairs between the United States & Great Britain as regards the Oregon question, the effect of the message upon that question in producing or preventing war and the prevailing opinion that a war between those countries, must lead to a general war in Europe rendered that document a matter of absorbing attention throughout the whole Continent.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "Louis McLane to James K. Polk, January 17, 1846," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XI, 1846*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 32.

<sup>40</sup> "William H. Stiles to James K. Polk, January 20, 1846," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XI, 1846*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 38-39.

Therefore, as Stiles reported from the Austrian Empire, Polk's Message had greatly increased the perception in Europe that the United States would go to war over Oregon and that the various European powers should think long and hard about backing Great Britain with anything more than their sympathies. Soon after this, William Polk provided his brother with an update on the reaction to his message from abroad on February 18, 1846, "The rebuke to France was well planted, and the tone of the language employed to England in regard to the Oregon question, wrung admiration and applause from the bitterest Whigs in Paris ... Your Message has had more effect, to give our Government and Country standing abroad than any other previous paper of the same kind. It has awakened a spirit of enquiry in the European World as to our true power and greatness."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, William Polk reported to the president that the Polk Corollary was firm enough to rebuke the French government without also offending the French people.

Thankfully, regarding the Oregon Country, the Polk Administration successfully navigated a diplomatic crisis in the spring of 1846 and avoided a potential two-front war, producing a peaceful resolution over that territory. A treaty between the United States and Great Britain was signed on June 15, 1846, dividing the Oregon Country/Columbia District at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, leaving the British with all of the mainland territory north of that line, plus all of Vancouver Island, and leaving the United States with all of the mainland territory south of the line.<sup>42</sup> However, after the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Mexico in late April 1846, President Polk expressed concern that Great Britain might still become involved in the conflict, writing to Louis McLane on June 22, 1846, as follows:

We are prosecuting the Mexican war with great energy and vigor, and hope to bring it to a speedy and honorable close. Judging from your letters and the tone of the

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<sup>41</sup> "William Polk to James K. Polk, February 18, 1846," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XI, 1846*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009) 83.

<sup>42</sup> David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation; Texas Oregon and the Mexican War* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1973) 407.

British press, which is exceedingly violent, I am not without some apprehension that there may be some European interference on behalf of Mexico. I do not doubt the sincerity of the assurances to the contrary, given to you by the Earl of Aberdeen, so far as he is concerned, but if there should be a change of Ministry soon, as you think probable, I fear we have no guaranty against such interference by Great Britain herself. Our people would be exceedingly jealous of the object of such [an] attempt, and would I think resist it almost as one man ... When we shall treat with Mexico, we will deal boldly and justly by her, but we will not permit any other Power to interpose any agency in the making nor will we agree to make a Treaty under the guaranty of any other Power. The doctrine of the annual message against European interference or interposition in the affairs of this continent [will be] fully maintained and strictly carried out. The most prompt and vigorous measures are being [taken] to seize and hold military possession ... of the Northern Provinces of Mexico. These we will hold until an honourable peace shall be concluded by a Treaty ... You may rely upon it, that the slightest interference by any foreign Power, with the strict blockade which we have ordered of the coasts of Mexico, will be at once resisted. I hope no such interference may occur, but if it does, collision with the interfering Power will be inevitable.<sup>43</sup>

Similar sentiments expressing concern that Great Britain might be drawn into the U.S. conflict with Mexico over the territory of California were reflected by Polk in a diary entry in which he recalled a discussion that he had had with Senator Thomas Hart Benton from Missouri. Explaining his December 2, 1845, Message to Congress, Polk wrote:

The conversation then turned on California, on which I remarked that Great Britain had her eye on that country and intended to possess it if she could, but that the people of the United States would not willingly permit California to pass into the possession of any new colony planted by Great Britain or any foreign monarchy. And that in reasserting Mr. Monroe's doctrine I had California and the fine bay of San Francisco as much in view as Oregon. Col[onel]. Benton agreed no foreign power ought to be permitted to colonize California, any more than they would be to colonize Cuba. As long as Cuba remained in the possession of the present government we would not object, but if a powerful foreign power was about to possess it, we would not permit it. On the same footing we would place California.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, whereas many people's minds naturally turned to Oregon after hearing Polk's message, Polk himself was clearly looking beyond Oregon to a potential conflict with Mexico and

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<sup>43</sup> "James K. Polk to Louis McLane, June 22, 1846," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XI, 1846*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 217.

<sup>44</sup> James K. Polk and Allan Nevins, *Polk: The Diary of a President*, 19.

the acquisition of the coveted territory of California. Meanwhile, to prevent California from falling into British hands, Polk authorized Secretary of State James Buchanan to dispatch the following instructions to the U.S. consular representative in the Mexican territory of California, Thomas O. Larkin. Before the outbreak of hostilities between the U.S. and Mexico, Buchanan wrote to Larkin:

I feel much indebted to you for the information which you have communicated to the Department from time to time in relation to California. The future destiny of that country is a subject of anxious solicitude for the Government and people of the United States. The interests of our commerce and our whale fisheries on the Pacific ocean demand that you should exert the greatest vigilance in discovering and defeating any attempts which may be made by foreign governments to acquire a control over that country. In the contest between Mexico and California we can take no part, unless the former should commence hostilities against the United States, but should California assert and maintain her independence, we shall render her all the kind offices in our power, as a sister Republic ... But whilst these are the sentiments of the President, he could not view with indifference the transfer of California to Great Britain or any other European Power. The system of colonization by foreign monarchies on the North American continent must and will be resisted by the United States. It could result in nothing but evil to the colonists under their dominion who would naturally desire to secure for themselves the blessings of liberty by means of republican institutions; whilst it must prove highly prejudicial to the best interests of the United States. Nor would it in the end benefit such foreign monarchies. On the contrary, even Great Britain, by the acquisition of California, would sow the seeds of future war and disaster for herself, because there is no political truth more certain than this fine Province could not long be held in vassalage by any European power. The emigration to it of people from the United States would soon render this impossible.<sup>45</sup>

Secretary of State Buchanan also warned Consul Larkin of the following:

[Any] appearance of a British Vice Consul and a French Consul in California at the present crisis, without any apparent commercial business, is well calculated to produce the impression, that their respective governments entertain designs on that country which must necessarily be hostile to its interests. On all proper occasions, you should not fail prudently to warn the Government and people of California of the danger of such an interference to their peace and prosperity, to inspire them with a jealousy of European dominion, and to arouse in their bosoms that love of liberty and independence so natural to the American Continent. Whilst I repeat that this Government does not, under existing circumstances, intend to interfere between Mexico and California, it would vigorously interpose to prevent the latter from becoming a British or French Colony. In this they might surely expect the aid

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<sup>45</sup> James Buchanan and John Bassett Moore, *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence, Volume 6* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1909), 275-276.

of the Californians themselves. Whilst the President will make no effort and use no influence to induce California to become one of the free and independent States of this Union, yet if the people should desire to unite their destiny with ours, they would be received as brethren, whenever this can be done without affording Mexico just cause of complaint. Their true policy for the present in regard to this question, is to let events take their course, unless an attempt should be made to transfer them without their consent either to Great Britain or France.<sup>46</sup>

From the British perspective, correspondence revealing British apprehension over American designs on California began to appear with increasing frequency in the late 1830s. For example, British Minister Plenipotentiary to Mexico Richard Pakenham wrote to Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston on November 16, 1836, noting American intentions regarding “the Californias, which Territory, from its commanding geographical position, its fine harbours and the abundant resources it possesses for maritime aggrandizement, is in itself enough to excite the cupidity of such as enterprising and ambitious a people.”<sup>47</sup> Lord Palmerston also received similar warnings from other British citizens posted abroad, such as the Earl of Ashburnham, who messaged from Mexico, “Your Lordship will see that the Californias are no less independent of the Mexican government and that their revolt, if not originally prompted, is fomented by the same agency, with doubtless the same views [as Texas] and probably with far more serious consequences eventually to European commerce, and particularly that of Great Britain.” Ashburnham continued, “The possession of the fine ports on that coast and of a country whose resources are not as yet fully known, but which appear to be inexhaustible, especially in materials for shipbuilding, would eventually give to it [the United States] the monopoly of the trade of the

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<sup>46</sup> James Buchanan and John Bassett Moore, *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence, Volume 6* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1909), 276-277.

<sup>47</sup> Foreign Office 50/100. From Pakenham. 1836, Sep-Dec. 60-65vo. Pakenham to Palmerston. Number 64. Mexico. September 6, 1836.



Pacific and that of China.”<sup>48</sup> Hence, British observers were very concerned that the acquisition of San Francisco would give the Americans potential maritime supremacy in the Pacific Ocean.

Such was the concern that Richard Pakenham even began to advocate for the settlement of an English colony in the Mexican territory of California. In 1841, Minister Pakenham again wrote to Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston, that “there is no part of the world offering greater natural advantages for the establishment of an English colony than the Provinces of Upper California; while its commanding position on the Pacific, its fine harbours, its forests of excellent timber for ship-building as well as ceasing to belong to Mexico, and the gradual increase of foreign population in California render it probable that its separation from Mexico will be effected at no distant period; in fact, there is some reason to believe that daring and adventurous speculators in the United States have already turned their thoughts in that direction.”<sup>49</sup> Wishing to pre-empt the American settlement of California, Pakenham clearly wanted to establish a British colony there first. Surveying American public opinion regarding a Pacific coastline, British diplomat Lord Ashburton reached out to then Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen on April 25, 1842:

The Americans evidently attach great importance to their territory on the Pacific, although at present they have few if any settlers there, and as they have located the great body of Indian tribes which they have forced back from the countries east of Mississippi, on the headwaters of the Missouri towards the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific, it will not be easy for their Western settlements to spread in the usual manner in that direction for many years to come. What they are principally looking to is to have a harbour of their own on the Pacific ... This acquisition of the harbour of San Francisco seems to have been a project of some standing, for Mr. Everett spoke to me of it before I left England. I doubt whether in any case we could interfere with effect to prevent this arrangement unless it were attempted to be forced upon Mexico. We shall therefore probably do well to avail ourselves of the circumstances of their expectation to settle satisfactorily our own boundaries. I much doubt whether the Americans will for many years to come make any

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<sup>48</sup> F.O. 50/106 From Pakenham and Ashburnham. 1837, Mar-Jun. 238-243 Ashburnham to Palmerston. Number 19. Mexico. June 2, 1837.

<sup>49</sup> F.O. 50/146 From Pakenham. 1841, Aug. 254-259. Pakenham to Palmerston. Number 91. Mexico. August 30, 1841.

considerable lodgement on the Pacific. The Indians are in great force there and naturally jealous of and hostile to them.<sup>50</sup>

Although Ashburton doubted that the Americans would be able to establish a significant presence on the Pacific for some time to come, others were not so convinced. In May 1844, now British Ambassador to the United States Richard Pakenham suggested to Lord Aberdeen, “Perhaps, my Lord, a joint intimation on the part of England and France of their desire that California should continue to belong to Mexico, or arrangement like that lately adopted with regard to the Sandwich Islands might be thought expedient before the designs of the American Government with respect to California shall have matured, or a more favorable opportunity have presented itself for their consummation.”<sup>51</sup> The idea of a joint Anglo-French position on California would actually be explored in the upcoming years. Then, in late 1844, several British consuls began pushing strongly for Great Britain to urge the Californians to declare their independence from Mexico and ask for British protection. One individual arguing for such a course of action was James A. Forbes, who constantly complained about what he claimed was the chronic incompetence of the Mexican administration there:

[The] “Imbecility” of the present Departmental government has animated the malcontents of the former revolutions to unite in one common cause, to expel the Mexican government by the extermination or expulsion of Mexican authority from this Department and set up an independent state “under the protection of a foreign power.” They differ as to means, time and method to bring it about or the line of conduct to be adopted when that separation shall have taken place. The majority of the foreign population in California is Anglo-American. It is for the United States protection. Californians are suspicious of the United States Government but it is not improbable that in any emergency they would accept the American flag ... As the inhabitants of California have always been taught that “Great Britain is the most powerful, most equitable, and most generous nation of the Universe, they would respectfully desire to know whether the protection of that great nation can be extended to them, or in other words, whether this country can be received under the

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<sup>50</sup> F.O. 5/379 From Lord Ashburton. 1842, Apr-Jun. 3-19, Ashburton to Aberdeen. Number 2. Washington. April 25, 1842.

<sup>51</sup> F.O. 5/405 From Pakenham. 1844, May. Pakenham to Aberdeen. Number 46. Washington. May 13, 1844. [F.O. 204/84:777 et vo].

protection of Great Britain in a similar manner to that of the Ionian Island[s] but to remain for the present under the direct government of one of its natives, though under the same form of Government of that Republic.” California has the means to effect separation from Mexico but for its future security requires the protection of some powerful nation. Therefore the option of the British Government is to accept or reject the offer.<sup>52</sup>

Forbes and others’ complaints over British inaction were apparently registering with the upper echelons of the British government. In late 1844, the British Foreign Office wrote to the British Minister to Mexico, Charles Bankhead, “as to the point whether Great Britain would assume the Protectorate of California ... We have, undoubtedly, no right to excite or encourage the Inhabitants of California to separate themselves from Mexico ... But it may be a matter of serious importance to Great Britain that California, if it shake off the rule of Mexico, should not place itself under the protection of any other Power whose supremacy might prove injurious to British interests.”<sup>53</sup> As to what nation the dispatch was alluding to when it mentioned “any other Power,” it was almost certainly referring to the United States. The British Foreign Office also dispatched a similar message to its various consuls in the Republic of Mexico, writing:

Her Majesty’s Government can have nothing to do with any insurrectionary movement which may occur in California; nor do they desire that their agents in that part of the world should encourage such a movement. They desire, on the contrary, that their agents remain entirely passive ... It is entirely out of the question that Her Majesty’s Government should give any countenance to the notion which seems to have been agitated of Great Britain being invited to take California under her protection ... It is, however, of importance to Great Britain, while declining to interfere herself, that California, if it should throw off the Mexican yoke, should not assume any other which might prove inimical to British interests. It will therefore be highly desirable that at the same time that it is intimated to the persons of authority in California that the relations which exist between Great Britain and Mexico prevent us from taking part in any proceedings of the Californians which may have for their object the separation of that province from Mexico, those persons should be clearly made to understand that Great Britain would view with

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<sup>52</sup> F.O. 50/179 Consul-Barron, Foreign Various, and Consular Domestic. 1844. 85-98, James A. Forbes to Barron. Number 8. Monterey. September 5, 1844.

<sup>53</sup> F.O. 50/172 To Bankhead. 1844, Jan-Dec. 148-153vo. Foreign Office to Bankhead. Number 53. December 31, 1844.

much dissatisfaction the establishment of a protectoral power over California by any other foreign state.<sup>54</sup>

The continued insistence that California not to fall into the hands of “any other power” demonstrates the seriousness with which the foreign policy establishment of Great Britain feared California falling into American hands. Some Britons such as Colonel J. M. Colquhoun of the Royal Artillery even suggested renegotiating the boundary between Northern Mexico and the Oregon Country to create a buffer between the United States and Mexico, writing to Minister Bankhead in late May 1845, “If Mexico is desirous of preserving her independence and avoid[ing] a war with the United States that would hardly fail to deprive her at once of California, Mexico should accept Great Britain’s limit at 39 Degrees and 20 Minutes, claimed by Vancouver on June 4, 1792, this would provide Mexico with an effective barrier against the encroachment of the United States the British could develop the resources of the area, enabling it to acquire strength.”<sup>55</sup> Also, in June 1845, British Ambassador to the United States Richard Pakenham wrote to Lord Aberdeen concerning the controversy over the possible American Annexation of Texas and a potential war between the U.S. and Mexico:

All of this appears to come marvellously to the assistance of the scheme of encroachment next to be put into practice by the Democracy of this Country [the United States], the appropriation of the Californias ... if the annexation of Texas should be consummated and a war between Mexico and the United States prove the consequence, it may be taken as a matter of certainty, that the Harbours of California will be forthwith occupied by an American naval force ... The acquisition of California is I am sure the object which the Americans look forward to compensate them for the expence and discredit of a war with Mexico ... It is not for me to point out to Y.I. the very serious consequences in a political as well as a commercial point of view which might attend the occupation of California by any powerful maritime nation, and more especially by the United States ... such an arrangement would be scarcely more agreeable to France than it would be to England ... the French Government would be found disposed to go a good deal

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<sup>54</sup> F.O. 50/179 Consul-Barron, Foreign Various, and Consular Domestic. 1844. 9-12. Foreign Office to Barron. Number 3. December 31, 1844.

<sup>55</sup> F.O. 50/186 From Bankhead. 1845, Jul-Sep. 170-173vo. J.M. Colquhoun to Bankhead. Woolwich. May 30, 1845.

farther in resisting the annexation of California than they saw reason to go in the affair of Texas.<sup>56</sup>

Although Pakenham may have overstated the willingness of France to oppose the U.S. acquisition of California by force of arms, others agreed that Great Britain ought to go to the last extremity to prevent such an event. Several months later, an interesting exchange occurred when the Mexican Minister in London, Tomas Murphy, approached British Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen. According to Aberdeen, Murphy told him in an interview on September 23, 1845, that:

war was certain with the U[nited]. States, & that he had no doubt they would be able to stand their ground on the Texan frontier; but that the distance of California was so great, and the country so thinly inhabited, & the resources of the Government so much impoverished that it would be impossible to defend the Province ... Under these circumstances He was entrusted to propose to me some arrangement by which it should be to our interest to protect California from Invasion of the U.[nited] States. He had no specific proposal to make, but the Gov[ernmen]t. would be ready to agree to any terms which should have the effect of excluding the U.[nited] States ... I told the Mexican Minister [Murphy] that I would give him no answer. He must be perfectly aware of our desire to keep the U.[nited] States out of California if possible; but that I could not say in what manner we could contribute to this end. I told him that even if we could allow such an English interest to be constituted in California as would give us a right to protect the Province, this could not be done without exciting the jealousy of other Powers; and that in whatever it might be possible to do, I wished to act in concert with France.<sup>57</sup>

As revealed by Aberdeen's statement, Great Britain was hesitant to act without French approval. However, British Prime Minister Robert Peel soon responded to the inquiry of the Mexican Minister to the United Kingdom, Tomas Murphy, by writing:

The Mexican offer as to California comes I fear too late. Even if there were no other objection to the acceptance of it, I doubt whether it would not be better to declare boldly and frankly that on considerations of general policy we would resist the conquest of California by the United States, than after the declaration of war on the part of Mexico, or on the Eve of its Declaration, to attempt to establish such an English interest ... If the interest had bona fide existed at the commencement of hostilities, the character of our intervention would be different. But the hasty

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<sup>56</sup> F.O. 50/186, 88-92. Pakenham to Aberdeen. Number 67. Washington. June 12, 1845.

<sup>57</sup> William Devereux Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas*, 68-69.

establishment of it under present circumstances would have a suspicious appearance, and would give a selfish character to our interference.<sup>58</sup>

Expressing doubts, Peel wondered “whether France is disposed Cordially to unite with us in preventing the Conquest and annexation of California by the United States.”<sup>59</sup> Even so, Lord Aberdeen continued to articulate his desire to act in concert with the government of France, stating that “if we could succeed in enlisting France” by helping them to see “their own interest, cordially to unite in resisting American aggression, it would be a great stroke of policy, & go far to change the whole face of affairs. They began well, but timidly, in Texas; perhaps a direct interest may make them bolder in California.”<sup>60</sup> As revealed by Aberdeen’s writings around this time, acting alone would be folly, for as Peel indicated, such a course of action would seem to indicate a selfish motive on the part of Great Britain to the other European powers. Still, in his correspondence with Peel, Lord Aberdeen wrote that:

War has not yet been declared by Mexico, and they would no doubt if necessary regulate their mode of proceeding in this respect so as to render our course more easy. The question seems now to be tolerably simple. I am clearly of opinion that we ought not interfere singly. If England and France should think proper, from notions of general policy, to declare that they will not suffer California to be invaded, this is war against the United States; for no independent Power would tolerate such a limitation being imposed upon their free action, without war. There is not the least chance of France being prepared to take any such course. It is barely possible that if an English and French interest were created in the Province sufficient to justify our interfering, this might take place without leading to war, and it is also possible that this might offer a sufficient temptation to France to act with us. But I do not expect that anything can come of this suggestion; in which case, we have no alternative but to leave the field open to the U.[nited] States.<sup>61</sup>

Lord Aberdeen’s analysis here was an honest and remarkably accurate appraisal of the diplomatic landscape of the time. However, Aberdeen’s hopes were buoyed when he received an

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 69-70.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 70.

encouraging reply from the French government regarding California on October 3, 1845. Aberdeen summarized the note as follows:

The Subject of California was more favorably received than I expected although as I had made no specifick suggestion he could give no positive opinion. But he repeated that he was determined to act with us in America whenever it was possible, and that he would persevere in abandoning the old French policy of connection with the U.[nited] States. He had done this in Texas, in spite of much opposition, and would not hesitate to do so again when any opportunity should occur. He wished to have some intelligible proposal of the course we desired to adopt in California, in order to see whether he could adopt it at once. Notwithstanding these friendly declarations, however, I am by no means of opinion that either Guizot or the King is at all prepared to incur the risk of war with the U.[nited] States for the sake of California, nor do I know that we should be justified in pressing them to adopt such a course.<sup>62</sup>

Aberdeen's previously stated conclusion in which he doubted France would go to war to prevent the U.S. conquest of California displayed an enlightened measure of geopolitical realism. In the spring of the following year, Minister Bankhead wrote to Aberdeen about the ruler of Mexico, General Paredes, stating in April 1846 that "Paredes [the Mexican president] expressed some hope that England and France (especially the former) would devise some means which would check the grasping ambition of the United States and secure to this country the possession of her territory. He argued that the loss of California would eventually be a serious injury to the interests of Great Britain; and such an event he feared would in a very short time be consummated."<sup>63</sup> Despite Paredes' analysis of British interests regarding California and his attempt to convince Great Britain to take a stand in protecting Mexico's distant province from incorporation into the United States, British officials refused to commit to any decisive actions. Meanwhile, the response of many Britons to the British government's inaction regarding the situation regarding California

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 70-71

<sup>63</sup> F.O. 50/196 From Mr. Bankhead. 1846, Mar-Apr. 264-273vo. Bankhead to Aberdeen. [Confidential]. Number 58. Mexico. April 29, 1846

and Mexico was often one of disgust and exasperation. For example, E. P. Woolrich, a Briton living in Quebec, appealed to Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston:

The Americans have now publicly avowed their intentions of acquiring New Mexico and California with ulterior aims, it becomes a serious reflection to all who are lovers of monarchy and have a loyal heart beating in their bosoms with a desire to see the world at peace; whether England and France can be so blind to make their own safety, and their own interest as to permit a republican nation, already their rivals, although in a state of boyhood only, and who on the subject of democracy and equality, are actually envied to over run in a profound peace ... Great Britain is the arbiter of the peace of the world. The United States would succumb instantly if opposed by either France or Great Britain. It becomes the Minister of Great Britain to at once put a stop to this system of robbery, by first taking possession and then keeping it [California], and those nations who see and permit the crime, are somewhat guilty. On the interreference of France or England or both, the case of monarchy depends; the cause of peace, and of good government, or morality, religion and the supremacy of the laws.<sup>64</sup>

Woolrich was not alone in warning British officials of the danger of allowing the Americans to gain a foothold in California. Around this time, British Army officer William Peel wrote to the British Ambassador to the United States, Richard Pakenham, stating, “American settlements in Willamette Valley [in Oregon] running south and on Sacramento running north will soon unite. Their junction will render the possession of Port San Francisco to the American Union inevitable, and that Harbour has so many advantages, is safe from attack, and the land round its enormous girth is so rich and accessible, that when once in their possession, it will, I fear, give the Americans a decided superiority in the Pacific.”<sup>65</sup> From a strategic military perspective, Peel’s evaluation of San Francisco and California in general as a potential key to military supremacy in the Pacific Ocean turned out to be quite prophetic if twentieth-century history is to be consulted. Then, in May 1846, after the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Mexico in the

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<sup>64</sup> F.O. 50/204 Foreign Various and Consular Reports. 1846. 67-68vo. E.P. Woolrich to Palmerston. Quebec. April 12, 1846.

<sup>65</sup> F.O. 5/379, 142-143vo. Lt. William Peel to Pakenham. Havana. January 2, 1846.



Mexican War British Minister to Mexico Charles Bankhead sent a dispatch to Lord Aberdeen with a startling proposal from Mexico:

During my last visit to General Paredes, His Excellency told me that he was very anxious to make a proposition to Her Majesty's Government, growing out of the present most critical position of the Californias. The President prefaced his proposals with some remarks as to the advantages of such a territory belonging to great Britain with reference to her Indian and Chinese possessions and the interests she must have on the northwest coast of America. General Paredes proposed to the British Government that in order to ensure ostensibly the repayment of a loan to be advanced for the present exigencies of the Mexican government, and to enable them to make some head against the designs of the United States and Enemies of good order within, he, General Paredes, should bind himself by virtue of the Extraordinary powers, with which he doubts not Congress will invest the Executive to hypothecate the Californias to England, and to permit that power to take military possession of the country. In short, my Lord, it is an indirect offer of sale, and it is the first time that any such offer has ever been hinted at from a responsible authority ... viewing the present state of relations between the United States and Mexico, the undisguised expression of desire on the part of the former to possess California together with the reservation contained in Your Lordship's despatch Number 53 of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1844 as to the possession of that country by a Foreign Power, I did not think it expedient to reject the offer made by the President, promising to His Excellency that it should be placed before Your Lordship ... I do not presume to give any opinion on the feasibility of these plans, but the present most critical position of California would, I think, make the arrangement acceptable, and would certainly have the effect of securing that fine country from the grasp of the United States.<sup>66</sup>

However, the Foreign Office responded to Bankhead concerning the Mexican proposal to transfer California to Great Britain on August 15, 1846, noting, "General Paredes had proposed to you in a conversation with you that Great Britain should take military possession of the Californias. If he again reverts to the subject tell him that H.M. Government would not at present feel disposed to enter into any treaty for the acquisition of California, and the more so, because, it seems, according to recent accounts, that the Mexican Government may by this time have lost its authority and command over that Province, and would therefore be unable to carry into effect its share of

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<sup>66</sup> F.O. 50/197 From Mr. Bankhead. 1846, May-Jun. Bankhead to Aberdeen. [Confidential]. Number 73. Mexico. May 30, 1846.

any arrangement which might be come regarding it.”<sup>67</sup> Still, it was Lord Aberdeen who read the thinking of America’s leaders the clearest, specifically in assuming that the United States would risk war with any power that interfered to keep California out of the Union. In his diary entry from May 13, 1846, Polk described a tense cabinet meeting in which Secretary of State James Buchanan brought a prepared dispatch to the various heads of Europe, explaining the outbreak of hostilities between the U.S. and Mexico, or as Polk recalled:

Mr. Buchanan had stated that our object was not to dismember Mexico or to make conquests, and that the Del Norte was the boundary to which we claimed; or rather that in going to war we did not do so with a view to acquire either California or New Mexico or any other portion of the Mexican territory. I told Mr. Buchanan that I thought such a declaration to foreign governments unnecessary and improper ... I told him that though we had not gone to war for conquest, yet it was clear that in making peace we would if practicable obtain California and such other portion of the Mexican territory and to defray the expense of the war which that power by wage. I told him it was well known that the Mexican Government had no other means of indemnifying us. Mr. Buchanan said if when Mr. McLane announced to Lord Aberdeen the existence of the war with Mexico the latter should demand of Mr. McLane to know if we intended to acquire California or any other part of the Mexican territory and no satisfactory answer was given, he thought it was almost certain that both England and France would join with Mexico in the war against us. I told him that the war with Mexico was an affair with which neither England, France, nor any other power had any concern; that such an inquiry would be insulting to our government, and if made I would not answer it, even if the consequence should be war with all of them. I told him I would not tie up my hands or make any pledge to any foreign power as to the terms on which I would ultimately make peace with Mexico. I told him no foreign power had any right to demand any such assurance, and that I would make none such let the consequences be what they might. Then, said Mr. Buchanan, you will have war with England as well as Mexico, and probably France also, for neither of these powers will ever stand by and see California annexed to the United States. I told him that before I would make the pledge which he proposed, I would meet the war which either England or France or all the Powers of Christendom might wage, and that I would stand and fight until the last man among us fell in the conflict. I told him that neither as a citizen nor as President would I permit or tolerate any intermeddling of any European Powers on this continent ... [and] sooner than give the pledge he proposed ... I would let the war which he apprehended with England come and would take the whole responsibility.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> F.O. 50/194 To Mr. Bankhead. 1846, Jan-Dec. 60-61vo. Foreign Office to Bankhead. Number 4. August 15, 1846.

<sup>68</sup> James K. Polk and Allan Nevins, *Polk: The Diary of a President*, 90-92.

Meanwhile, the apparent collapse of the Entente Cordiale between Great Britain and France by late 1846 regarding a common front against the United States was noted with glee by some U.S. diplomats abroad. George Bancroft, who replaced Louis McLane as United States Minister to the United Kingdom, wrote Polk on November 3, 1846:

From the Continent, no doubt, you have received full accounts of the doings of Louis Philippe and Spanish Queens and Infantas. Lord Palmerston is angry: the entente cordiale is broken-up; the dead body of the Treaty of Utrecht is dug up to frighten fools with; and even the fools laugh at the imposition. The serious part for us is, that at the meeting of Victoria and L. Philippe at the castle of Ere, the marriage of Montpesier & the Infanta was spoken of. To conciliate England to this personal object the King of the French meddled with Texas; and now having failed in Texas, to the general satisfaction of the French, he is met by England with a protest against the intermarriage between his family and the royal family of Spain. The breach is the wider because Louis Philippe and Guizot are openly charged with bad faith; but England will rest content with a harmless protest, and the communication of the papers to Parliament.<sup>69</sup>

Hence, the divide between Great Britain and France was exacerbated by disagreements between the two nations over dynastic disputes, which worked much to the advantage of the United States during its war with Mexico.

Around this time also, Polk received praise for his December 8, 1846, Address to Congress against foreign interference. On this speech, political writer James K. Paulding wrote to Polk on December 14, 1846, remarking, "I cannot, however, rest satisfied without expressing my cordial approval both of the style and sentiments of that paper, most especially of the part which relates to Foreign Interference. He who speaks in the name of the greatest Empire that exists or that ever existed should speak as you have done. We have been long enough, first the victims, next the dupes of European pretension and intrigue, and it is time they should distinctly understand, that the New

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<sup>69</sup> "Louis McLane to James K. Polk, November 3, 1846," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XI, 1846*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 377-378.

World has set up for herself.”<sup>70</sup> Also, concerning the Oregon Country, despite the signing of the Anglo-American treaty resolving the boundary dispute, U.S. leaders continued to suspect that Great Britain was still promoting the idea of an independent state in the Pacific Northwest on American territory. In early 1847, the Polk Administration received reports from a concerned American named John M. Shively claiming that the British-backed Hudson’s Bay Company was working to influence many settlers there to support the idea of an independent Oregon.<sup>71</sup>

In response, Secretary of State James Buchanan drafted a note to Shively in which Buchanan reaffirmed Polk’s determination “to hold” the Oregon Territory at all costs and help “provide for” its inhabitants.<sup>72</sup> To counter British influence in the new Pacific Northwest of the United States, Polk authorized Buchanan to appoint Shively as the deputy postmaster of Astoria in the Oregon Territory and to carry a message to the people of Oregon:

[They] may rest assured that the Government and people of the United States will never abandon them, or prove unmindful of their welfare. We have given a sufficient pledge of this determination by the zeal and firmness with which, throughout a quarter of a century, our just right to that Territory was steadfastly maintained against the claims of Great Britain, until at last the question was finally adjusted between the two Powers by the Treaty of June, 1846. That treaty has secured to us the whole territory on the continent, south of the parallel of 49’, and this we shall never abandon. We feel the deepest interest in the prosperity of the people of Oregon. Their brethren on this side of the Rocky mountains regard them with affection and with hope. We can perceive, in the not distant future, one or more glorious states of this confederacy springing into existence on the shores of the Northern Pacific—states composed of our own kindred—of a people speaking our own language, governed by Institutions similar to those which secure our own happiness, and extending the blessings of religion, liberty, and law, over that vast region. Their commerce and trade with the other states of the Union will confer mutual benefits on all parties concerned, and will bind them to us, and us to them, in bonds of reciprocal interest and affection more durable than adamant ... Their foreign commerce with the West coast of America, with Asia, and the isles of the

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<sup>70</sup> “James K. Paulding to James K. Polk, December 14, 1846,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XI, 1846*, ed. Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 421.

<sup>71</sup> James K. Polk, *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XII, January-July 1847*, eds. Tom Chaffin and Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 478.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

Pacific, will sail under the protection of our common flag, and cannot fail to bear back wealth in abundance to their shores.<sup>73</sup>

As Polk took action to thwart possible British intrigues in the Oregon Territory, events elsewhere continued to demonstrate that the Entente Cordiale had all but fully collapsed. For example, on January 4, 1847, Minister Bancroft wrote to Polk about the British reaction to his December 8, 1846, Address to Congress:

Many thanks for your message which is both clearly and vigorously written. The comments upon it in many of the English papers spring from their consciousness of your success and of their own inability to interfere. It was a hard lesson for England to learn, but she has learned it, that America means to go on her own way, and that Europe, though it might gaze with envy, must give up the thought of swaying her destiny ... The news from America has been looked forward to with intense avidity. When the message came, they found it unanswerable. They saw that the Californias would certainly become ours, & they se[n]t up a savage, incoherent growl. The growl was the more fierce, because they intend only to be lookers on ... Then too Lord Palmerston has broken with Guizot and Louis Philippe, and does, by no means, carry the English Public along with him. Guizot & Louis P. are on this occasion firm. It was the court which led to this mistake of the English ministry. The queen Victoria has her self addressed a letter to the queen of the French, & another to the Queen of the Belgians, mildly written, it is said, but still expressing her dissatisfaction. That discontent is not shared by the British people. On the other hand Guizot has written to Lord John Russell a letter, insinuating that it would be better to have a more peace-loving man than Lord Palmerston to manage English foreign affairs ... I think Guizot has had experience enough to make him look with different eyes on the balance of Power in America.<sup>74</sup>

After gloating over the impotence of Guizot to enforce his “balance of power” scheme, Bancroft wrote to President Polk on January 19, 1847, with an update stating that “Louis Philippe has had a signal triumph, though at the expense of the entente cordiale ... Towards the United States the feeling is such as I have heretofore described to you. They do not love us; but they are compelled to respect us ... England sees that the Californias must be ours; & sees it with unmingled

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<sup>73</sup> James Buchanan and John Bassett Moore, *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence, Volume VII* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1909), 239-240.

<sup>74</sup> “George Bancroft to James K. Polk, January 4, 1847,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XII, January-July 1847*, eds. Tom Chaffin and Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 28-29.

regret, but remains 'neutral.' You may rely on my conducting myself with circumspection; and, what is more important, you may rely, I think, that the embarrassments of domestic affairs here, will forbid all British or French interference in Mexican affairs."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, a variety of diplomatic issues continued to drive Great Britain and France apart from each other at a time when both countries, especially Great Britain, were handicapped by domestic opposition and, as such, were virtually powerless to prevent the imminent U.S. acquisition of California. Meanwhile, as the Mexican War progressed, Minister Bancroft relayed European reactions to recent U.S. victories. On June 3, 1847, Bancroft wrote Polk:

The taking of San Juan & the Battle of Cerro Gordo, have changed entirely the complexion of European opinion about Mexico & the United States. The greatness of the results is becoming more & more apparent. Those friendly to America desire to see our rule extended very far: & the cessions of territory which would have been thought sufficient heretofore, would now seem less considerable. Commerce on the Pacific under our flag is the great result that is anticipated ... No European Government has taken greater interest in our affairs than the Prussian. The king of Prussia has, from the first, watched events ... & I am persuaded, views our progress, as the cause of civilization. Lately at a public meeting where I was present, the Prussian minister spoke of our coming power on the shores of the Pacific with hope & approbation, in the presence of a very numerous & very distinguished gathering. Perhaps I ought to add that the English did not cheer him; but he expressed himself deliberately & decidedly; & does so on all occasions in his intercourse with the ministry; & tells them the results are inevitable, that we are beyond their influence.<sup>76</sup>

As American arms continued to triumph on the battlefield, Polk continued to receive letters of praise from all quarters. Railroad magnate Vernon K. Stevenson observed to Polk on May 29, 1847, "We are taking all Mexico with our Glorious army & France can say nothing since her tricks for the Infanta & we have silenced England by small presents to her starving populace so it seems that the ballanc[e] of Power so much talked of in annexing Texas, fails to act, even when we are

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<sup>75</sup> "George Bancroft to James K. Polk, January 19, 1847," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XII, January-July 1847*, eds. Tom Chaffin and Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 53.

<sup>76</sup> "George Bancroft to James K. Polk, June 3, 1847," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XII, January-July 1847*, eds. Tom Chaffin and Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 328.

reaching to the verry city of Mexico.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, U.S. Charge D’Affaires in Austria William H. Stiles praised Polk on August 26, 1847, writing, “You have the honor of being the author of our second ‘declaration of independance,’ an independance too, not of Great Brittain alone, but of the whole and entire world, and that which at the time of its appearance, was regarded but as idle yankee braggardism is now quietly settled down into solemn and incontrovertible truth ... the annexation of Texas, settlement of the Oregon question, modification of the Tariff, probable addition of the Californias and especially the most remarkable manner in which we have hastised Mexico ... These things have together exhalted our country ...”<sup>78</sup>

As Stevenson and Stiles’ words demonstrate, Americans were well aware of the rising estimation of America as a regional, if not great power, in the eyes of Europe. Meanwhile, Bancroft continued to update Polk with news from abroad, noting the following on October 18, 1847:

I heard yesterday so curious an anecdote, that I must send it to you. The Duke de Broglie, now French Ambassador here, said a few days ago to a person of very high station & exceedingly well acquainted with the views of the British Government, “How do you explain that the English Government look on and witness the immense successes of the United States in Mexico? How is it possible for them to consent to the vast acquisitions of power and territory, which the U.S. are making in those regions?” This he said, as one who wondered that England had not proposed to France a renewal of the entente cordiale, in reference to this very subject of Mexico. The Duke received for answer, that Great Britain was too wise a country to interfere in such a cause; that Mexico in the hands of the people of the United States would be to England of far more value than she ever was before in respect to commerce and security of property invested there. This little manifestation of a regret at the vanishing of Mr Guisot’s Balance of power in North America, seemed to me irresistibly ludicrous.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> “Vernon K. Stevenson to James K. Polk, May 29, 1847,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XII, January-July 1847*, eds. Tom Chaffin and Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 311.

<sup>78</sup> “William H. Stiles to James K. Polk, August 26, 1847,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XIII, August 1847–March 1848*, ed. Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017), 79.

<sup>79</sup> “George Bancroft to James K. Polk, October 18, 1847,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XIII, August 1847–March 1848*, ed. Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017), 166.

Although mentioned here in jest, even the prospect of all of Mexico being absorbed by the United States failed to move the British or French governments to action. As American arms progressed with each battle, Polk discussed his terms and conditions for peace with Mexico in his Third Annual Address to Congress in 1847, asserting that:

It is manifest to all who have observed the actual condition of the Mexican Government for some years past and at present that if these Provinces [New Mexico & California] should be retained by her she could not long continue to hold and govern them ... This would be especially the case with Upper California. The sagacity of powerful European nations has long since directed their attention to the commercial importance of that Province, and there can be little doubt that the moment the United States shall relinquish their present occupation of it and their claim to it as indemnity an effort would be made by some foreign power to possess it, either by conquest or by purchase. If no foreign government should acquire it in either of these modes, an independent revolutionary government would probably be established by the inhabitants and such foreigners as may remain in or remove to the country as soon as it shall be known that the United States have abandoned it. Such a government would be too feeble long to maintain its separate independent existence, and would finally become annexed to or be a dependent colony of some more powerful state. Should any foreign government attempt to possess it as a colony, or otherwise to incorporate it with itself, the principle avowed by President Monroe in 1824, and reaffirmed in my first annual message, that no foreign power shall with our consent be permitted to plant or establish any new colony or dominion on any part of the North American continent must be maintained. In maintaining this principle and in resisting its invasion by any foreign power we might be involved in other wars more expensive and more difficult than that in which we are now engaged ...<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, on Mexico, Polk wrote:

if our troops were withdrawn before a peace was conducted, that the Mexican people, wearied with successive revolutions and deprived of protection for their persons and property, might at length be inclined to yield to foreign influences and to cast themselves into the arms of some European monarch for protection from the anarchy and suffering which would ensue. This, for our own safety and in pursuance of our established policy, we should be compelled to resist. We could never consent that Mexico should be thus converted into a monarchy governed by a foreign prince. Mexico is our near neighbor, and her boundaries are coterminous with our own through the whole extent across the North American continent, from ocean to ocean. Both politically and commercially we have the deepest interest in

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<sup>80</sup> James K. Polk, *Third Annual Message to Congress, December 7, 1847*, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-7-1847-third-annual-message>



her regeneration and prosperity. Indeed, it is impossible that, with any just regard to our own safety, we can ever become indifferent to her fate.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, in his Fourth and Final Annual Address to Congress in 1848, Polk observed:

Within less than four years the annexation of Texas to the Union has been consummated; all conflicting title to the Oregon Territory south of the forty-ninth degree of north latitude, being all that was insisted on by any of my predecessors, has been adjusted, and New Mexico and Upper California have been acquired by treaty ... It would be difficult to calculate the value of these immense additions to our territorial possessions. Texas, lying contiguous to the western boundary of Louisiana, embracing within its limits a part of the navigable tributary waters of the Mississippi and an extensive seacoast, could not long have remained in the hands of a foreign power without endangering the peace of our southwestern frontier ... the danger of irritation and collision of interests between Texas as a foreign state and ourselves would have been imminent ... Had Texas fallen into the hands or under the influence and control of a strong maritime or military foreign power, as she might have done, these dangers would have been still greater. They have been avoided by her voluntary and peaceful annexation to the United States. Texas, from her position, was a natural and almost indispensable part of our territories ...<sup>82</sup>

Relatedly, on California, Polk wrote:

Upper California ... From its position it must command the rich commerce of China, of Asia, of the islands of the Pacific, of western Mexico, of Central America, the South American States, and of the Russian possessions bordering on that ocean ... The depot of the vast commerce which must exist on the Pacific will probably be at some point on the Bay of San Francisco, and will occupy the same relation to the whole western coast of that ocean as New Orleans does to the valley of the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico ... Situated on a safe harbor, sufficiently capacious for all the navies as well as the marine of the world, and convenient to excellent timber for shipbuilding, owned by the United States, it must become our great Western naval depot ... The powers of Europe, far removed from the west coast of America by the Atlantic Ocean, which intervenes, and by a tedious and dangerous navigation around the southern cape of the continent of America, can never successfully compete with the United States in the rich and extensive commerce which is opened to us ... by the acquisition of California ...<sup>83</sup>

Here, Polk looked to a future of American greatness and prosperity after the U.S. annexation of the Mexican Cession from the Treaty of Guadeloupe-Hidalgo signed on May 30,

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> James K. Polk, *Fourth Annual Message to Congress, December 5, 1848*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/fourth-annual-message-6>

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

1848, an acquisition that included both California and New Mexico. Polk soon grew increasingly apprehensive about the disposition of the territories recently acquired and feared that, if no territorial governments were organized for them, they might be lost to the United States forever, and this can clearly be seen in his writings from late 1848 and early 1849. For example, on December 12, 1848, Polk recalled in his diary:

I then stated to the Cabinet that I feared no action would be had at the present session of Congress for the government of California and New Mexico; that I feared this would be the case from the want of concert of action or any common views among the members of Congress with whom I had conversed. I stated further that I apprehended if these territories were left without a government for another year, and especially California, they might be lost to the Union ... finding themselves without a government or the protection of law, they would probably organize an independent government, calling it the California or Pacific Republic, and might endeavor to introduce [induce] Oregon to join them ... To guard against the loss of California I deemed it very important that the question of its government should be settled at the present session of Congress. I then stated that I thought it indispensable that we should agree upon a plan of settlement ... and exercise what influence we might possess to carry it through at the present session. All present agreed that this would be proper and, indeed, our duty. It is a question rising above ordinary party considerations.<sup>84</sup>

These concerns were also expressed in Polk's letters to key individuals around this time. For instance, Polk wrote influential Democrat and former U.S. Senator from Michigan Lewis Cass on December 15, 1848, "My strong apprehension is, that if no Government be provided for California, at the present session, there is imminent danger that, that rich and fine country may be lost to the Union ... In this condition, of things, if Congress shall do nothing at the present session, they may, and in all probability will, organize an Independent Government, calling it, the California or Pacific Republic, and may endeavour to induce Oregon to join them."<sup>85</sup> Polk also wrote George Bancroft on January 5, 1849, stating, "My apprehensions are, that if nothing be done,

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<sup>84</sup> James K. Polk and Allan Nevins, *Polk: The Diary of a President, 1845-1849*, 356-357.

<sup>85</sup> "James K. Polk to Lewis Cass, December 15, 1848," in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XIV, April 1848 – June 1849*, ed. Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2021), 393.

at the present session, there is imminent danger that California may be lost to the Union ... They may style themselves the California Republic, or uniting Oregon, the Pacific Republic. In this condition of things, when Congress shall assemble next December, they may be in a quasi State of revolt, declaring their disinclination to be connected with our Union of States.”<sup>86</sup> Polk also wrote to former Tennessee Governor Aaron V. Brown on January 9, 1849, that “I fear if nothing be done at the present session, that California, may set up an Independent Government & that fine country be lost to the Union.”<sup>87</sup> These fears that California and the Oregon Territory might possibly unite to form an independent Pacific Republic echoed the concerns of several Americans who wrote to Polk and warned of this very thing and of which Polk now himself believed.

In addition to his concerns over California in the waning days of the Polk Administration, the president was also faced with the potential of other territories of strategic importance falling into the hands of European powers, perhaps most alarmingly, those of Great Britain. During the Yucatan Caste War of the late 1840s, the inhabitants of the Mexican territory of the Yucatan offered themselves up to the United States, Great Britain, Spain, or any foreign power who would save them from extermination. When Polk discussed this problem with his cabinet, he noted:

The Gov[ernment]. of Yucatan asks the aid of the U.S., & states that the same aid had been asked from the Governments of Great Britain & Spain, & that the Yucatanas [?] were ready to surrender their country & the sovereignty over it to any Government which would protect & save them from extermination ... I stated that we could never agree to see Yucatan pass into the hands of a foreign monarchy to be possessed and colonized by them, and that sooner than this should take place the U.S. should afford the aid & protection asked, but that this could only be done by the authority of Congress ... I requested Mr. Buchanan to prepare another draft of a message & submit it to me, placing the interposition of the U.S. upon the ground that it would be dangerous to us, and a violation of our settled policy, to

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<sup>86</sup> “George Bancroft to James K. Polk, January 5, 1849,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XIV, April 1848 – June 1849*, ed. Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2021), 426-427.

<sup>87</sup> “James K. Polk to Aaron V. Brown, January 9, 1849,” in *Correspondence of James K. Polk: Volume XIV, April 1848 – June 1849*, ed. Michael David Cohen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2021), 432.

permit either Great Britain or Spain to possess & colonize the country, and to do this [prevent this] the U.S. ought to afford the aid asked.<sup>88</sup>

The aforementioned address to Congress by Polk on the Yucatan Crisis from April 28, 1848, read as follows:

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States: I submit, for the considerations of Congress, several communications received at the Department of State from Mr. Justo Sierra, Commissioner of Yucatan, and also a communication from the governor of that state, representing the condition of the extreme suffering to which their country has been reduced by an insurrection of the Indians within its limits, and asking the aid of the United States. The communications present a case of human suffering and misery which cannot fail to excite the sympathies of all civilized nations. From these and other sources of information, it appears that the Indians of Yucatán are waging a war of extermination against the white race. In this civil war, they spare neither age nor sex, but put to death indiscriminately all who fall within their power. The inhabitants, panic-stricken, and destitute of arms, are flying before their savage pursuers towards the coast; and their expulsion from their country, or their extermination would seem to be inevitable, unless they can obtain assistance from abroad. In this condition, they have, through their constituted authorities, implored the aid of this government, to save them from destruction, offering, in case this should be granted, to transfer the “dominion and sovereignty of the peninsula” to the United States. Similar appeals for aid and protection have been made to the Spanish and English governments. Whilst it is not my purpose to recommend the adoption of any measure with a view to the acquisition of the “dominion and sovereignty” over Yucatan, yet, according to our established policy, we could not consent to a transfer of this “dominion and sovereignty,” either to Spain, Great Britain, or any other European power.<sup>89</sup>

Polk then went on to invoke the Monroe Doctrine of December 1823 in his Polk Corollary of December 1845:

Our own security requires that the established policy thus announced should guide our conduct, and this applies with great force to the peninsula of Yucatan. It is situated in the Gulf of Mexico, on the North American continent; and from its vicinity to Cuba, to the capes of Florida, to New Orleans, and indeed to our whole south-western coast, it would be dangerous to our peace and security if it should become a colony of any European nation. We have now authentic information that, if the aid asked from the United States be not granted, such aid will probably be obtained from some European power which may hereafter assert a claim to

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<sup>88</sup> James Knox Polk, Milo Milton Quaife, and Andrew Cunningham McLaughlin, *The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849 in Four Volumes. Volume III* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910), 433-434.

<sup>89</sup> James Buchanan and John Bassett Moore, *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence. Volume VIII, 1848-1853* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1909), 54-55.

“dominion and sovereignty” over Yucatan ... I have considered it proper to communicate the information contained in the accompanying correspondence, and I submit to the wisdom of Congress to adopt such measures as, in their judgement, may be expedient, to prevent Yucatan from becoming a colony of any European power, which, in no event, could be permitted by the United States; and, at the same time, to rescue the white race from extermination or expulsion from their country.<sup>90</sup>

Much as he had done in his reasoning for wanting to acquire Texas, Polk now cited the danger that Yucatan in the hands of a European power might pose to New Orleans and the United States’ Gulf Coast. However, not wanting to jeopardize the recently negotiated peace treaty with Mexico, Polk hesitated to intervene in the Yucatan.

Also around this time, relatedly, U.S. concern over the potential transfer of Cuba from Spain to Great Britain inspired a last-minute attempt by the Polk Administration to acquire that island by purchase in 1848. Several cabinet meetings addressed the subject of Cuba, in which Polk made his reasons for wanting the island clear to his officials. In his diary entry from May 30, 1848, Polk wrote, “I informed the Cabinet to-day that I desired to invite their attention ... for consideration, [to] the important question whether a proposition should not be made to Spain to purchase the Island of Cuba. The subject was freely discussed. The great importance of the Island to the U.S., and the danger, if we did not acquire it, that it might fall into the hands of Great Britain, were considered ... I intimated my strong conviction that the effort should be made without delay to purchase the Island.”<sup>91</sup> Similarly, on June 9, 1848, Polk recorded, “The Secretary of State at my request read to the Cabinet the draft of the letter to the U.S. consul at Havannah ... In this letter the consul was informed the U.S. must preserve the national faith with Spain, and take no part in the [anticipated] civil war or revolution in Cuba ... He was also informed that the U.S. would keep

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 54-55.

<sup>91</sup> James Knox Polk, Milo Milton Quaife, and Andrew Cunningham McLaughlin, *The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849 in Four Volumes. Vol. III* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910), 468-469.

in good faith her Treaty with Spain and preserve her neutrality, [but] she could never consent to see Cuba transferred to any European power.”<sup>92</sup>

Finally, in Polk’s Diary from June 17, 1848, the president wrote, “The Cabinet met at the usual hour; all the members present. Mr. Buchanan read the despatch to Mr. Saunders, U.S. minister to Spain, on the subject of the purchase of Cuba. ...” Among other things, the dispatch noted that “he [Saunders] was authorized to inform him in conversation that the U.S. could never permit Cuba to pass into the hands of any European Power, and that whilst the Island remained a possession of Spain the U.S. would in no way interfere with it.”<sup>93</sup> The proceeding letter to Romulus M. Saunders on Cuba was even more emphatic:

We are content that it shall continue to be a Colony of Spain. Whilst in her possession we have nothing to apprehend ... But we can never consent that this Island shall become a Colony of any other European power. In the possession of Great Britain or any strong naval power, it might prove ruinous both to our domestic and foreign commerce, and even endanger the Union of the States. The highest and first duty of every independent nation is to provide for its own safety; and acting upon this principle we should be compelled to resist the acquisition of Cuba by any powerful maritime State with all the means which Providence has placed at our command. Cuba is almost within sight of the coast of Florida. Situated between that State and the Peninsula of Yucatan and possessing the deep, capacious, and impregnable fortified harbor of Havana, if this Island were under the dominion of Great Britain, she could command both the inlets to the Gulf of Mexico. She would thus be enabled in time of war effectively to blockade the mouth of the Mississippi and to deprive all the western States of this Union, as well as those within the Gulf, teeming as they are with an industrious and enterprising population, of a foreign market for their immense productions. But this is not the worst. She could, also, destroy commerce by sea between our ports on the Gulf [of Mexico] and our Atlantic ports, —a commerce of nearly as great a value as the whole of our foreign trade ... Of what vast importance would it then be to her to obtain the possession of an Island from which she could at any time destroy a very large proportion both of our foreign and coasting trade ... if she could acquire the sovereignty over this Island ... our commerce on that sea [Caribbean], as well as in the Gulf, would be placed at her mercy ....<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 486-487.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 492-493.

<sup>94</sup> James Buchanan and John Bassett Moore, *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence. Vol. VIII 1848-1853* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1909), 90-92, 94.

In what must have been both a relief and disappointment, Saunders' communications carried a response from the Spanish Foreign Secretary, Pedro J. Pidal, which simply read, "He [Pidal] believed such to be the feeling of the country [Spain] that sooner than see the island transferred to *any power*, they would prefer seeing it sunk in the ocean."<sup>95</sup> Hence, even in his last days as president, Polk was preoccupied with the possibility of rival states under European influence growing up on the periphery of the United States, territories that could potentially be utilized in a "balance of power" geopolitical system on the North American continent. As Polk strove to keep Great Britain from establishing a new "balance of power" in North America that would present yet another grave British threat to U.S. national security, he, like many other Democrats, took the utopian aspect of Manifest Destiny very seriously, perhaps as seriously as the Democrat who coined the term itself, John O'Sullivan.

Often overlooked by most historians is the entire contribution of Manifest Destiny's founding father, John O' Sullivan, and his full body of work in the American press. The origin of the term "Manifest Destiny" to describe the drive for U.S. territorial expansion can be traced to several articles written by O'Sullivan throughout the year 1845. For example, on the Oregon Crisis, O'Sullivan wrote:

Away, away with all these cobweb issues of rights of discovery, exploration, settlement, continuity, etc. To state the truth at once in its neglected simplicity, we are free to say that were the respective cases and arguments of the two parties, as to all these points of history and law reversed – had England all ours, and we nothing but hers— our claim to Oregon would still be best and strongest. And that claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.<sup>96</sup>

In an earlier essay on foreign policy, John O'Sullivan declared:

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<sup>95</sup> Frederick Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism*, 266.

<sup>96</sup>John O'Sullivan, *The New York Morning News*, December 27, 1845.

The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High -- the Sacred and the True. Its floor shall be a hemisphere -- its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation an Union of many Republics, comprising hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master, but governed by God's natural and moral law of equality, the law of brotherhood -- of "peace and good will amongst men." ... We must onward to the fulfilment of our mission -- to the entire development of the principle of our organization -- freedom of conscience, freedom of person, freedom of trade and business pursuits, universality of freedom and equality. This is our high destiny, and in nature's eternal, inevitable decree of cause and effect we must accomplish it. All this will be our future history, to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man -- the immutable truth and beneficence of God. For this blessed mission to the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth, has America been chosen; and her high example shall smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs, and carry the glad tidings of peace and good will where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than that of beasts of the field. Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity?<sup>97</sup>

O'Sullivan also wrote about Texas in connection to Manifest Destiny:

It is time now for opposition to the Annexation of Texas to cease ... Texas is now ours ... Her star and her stripe may already be said to have taken their place in the glorious blazon of our common nationality; and the sweep of our eagle's wing already includes within its circuit the wide extent of her fair and fertile land ... She is no longer to us a mere country on the map. She comes within the dear and sacred designation of Our Country ... and that which is at once a sentiment and a virtue, Patriotism, already begins to thrill for her too within the national heart ... the manner in which other nations have undertaken to intrude themselves into it, between us and the proper parties to the case, in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions. This we have seen done by England, our old rival and enemy; and by France, strangely coupled with her against us, under the influence of the Anglicism strongly tinging the policy of her present prime minister, Guizot. The zealous activity with which this effort to defeat us was pushed by the representatives of those governments, together with the character of intrigue accompanying it, fully constituted that case of foreign interference ...<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> John O'Sullivan, "The Great Nation of Futurity," *The United States Democratic Review* 6, no. 23 (New York: 1839): 426-430.

<sup>98</sup> John O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17 (New York: 1845): 5-10.



However, perhaps the most overlooked part of O’Sullivan’s famous tract was in the following paragraph:

Away, then, with all idle French talk of balances of power on the American Continent. There is no growth in Spanish America! Whatever progress of population there may be in the British Canadas, is only for their own early severance of their present colonial relation to the little island three thousand miles across the Atlantic; soon to be followed by Annexation, and destined to swell the still accumulating momentum of our progress. And whosoever may hold the balance, though they should cast into the opposite scale all the bayonets and cannon, not only of France and England, but of Europe entire, how would it kick the beam against the simple, solid weight of the two hundred and fifty, or three hundred millions—and American millions—destined to gather beneath the flutter of the stripes and stars, in the fast hastening year of the Lord 1945!<sup>99</sup>

Finally, the U.S. acquisition of California and Oregon helped to advance America’s Manifest Destiny by making the United States a continental nation, virtually assuring its place as a future world economic and military power and by foiling yet another British effort to contain the United States through a “balance of power.” Certainly, for political pamphleteers and editors like John O’Sullivan, the social, cultural, and utopian appeal of Manifest Destiny included various allusions to new lands for the speedily multiplying American population to farm and develop. However, behind O’Sullivan’s most famous uses of the phrase “Manifest Destiny” lay a deeply rooted awareness of the geopolitical reality of the North American continent and the United States’ relation to a real or imaginary “balance of power.” To most Americans, such a European concept had no place in the New World because a “balance of power” would always endanger liberty by pressuring the United States into a perpetual militarization of its society and an unceasing centralization in its government. Only Manifest Destiny would allow for a glorious future of limited government and individual liberty.

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<sup>99</sup> John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17 (New York: 1845): 5-6, 9-10.

## Conclusion

In summary, throughout U.S. history, American statesmen were in near constant fear of encirclement by hostile foreign powers, the prospect of separate confederacies being established in close proximity to one another and, relatedly, the probability that European powers might exploit rivalries among several regional American sovereignties to establish a “balance of power” system of diplomacy similar to that which had plagued the Old World since at least the Peace of Utrecht (1713). Furthermore, the authors of *The Federalist Papers* were as well acquainted with the history of the European continent as they were with that of their own, and as such, they knew full well the diplomatic games employed by countries like Great Britain to keep their list of enemies and rivals weak or helpless. Along with John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton, many other prominent Americans of the Founding Era including the first three presidents of the United States—George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson—wrote with great intelligence in observing what they perceived as European attempts to support satellite states on the borders of the U.S. aligned with either Great Britain, France, or Spain. To the overwhelming majority of these men, the last and best hope to prevent such a scenario from playing out on the North American continent, with all its accompanying horrors of militarization and government centralization, was to incorporate those territories into one national Union.

Even before the United States existed as a nation, American colonists lived in apprehension of French and Indian threats lurking on the frontiers of the Thirteen Colonies. After independence had been achieved, however, the threat shifted to a British and Indian one, as well as the threat posed by Americans whose loyalty to the new nation was suspect. Whether it was the Allen brothers in Vermont, the Westsylvania separatists involved in the Whiskey Rebellion, James Wilkinson in Kentucky, or later Aaron Burr in the Western United States, even Americans by birth

were targets of European influence and intrigues hoping to exploit the western settlers' reliance on the tributaries of rivers such as the Mississippi and St. Lawrence. In addition to disloyal Americans, the vast array of hostile Indian tribes east of the Mississippi in both the Old Northwest territory and that south of the Ohio offered an opportunity for rival foreign powers to exploit in times of war. During the Washington Administration, British officials encouraged the Northwestern Indian tribes adjacent to British North America in their hostility to the United States, just as Spain encouraged the same demeanor among the Southern Indian tribes adjacent to the Spanish Floridas and Louisiana. With successful diplomacy under Washington, Adams, and Jefferson, the United States eliminated the threat of war with Great Britain, Spain, and France, as well as removed the Spanish from Louisiana, thus pre-empting the re-establishment of French influence on the North American continent. Also, during the War of 1812, the military ability of William Henry Harrison removed the threat of the Northwestern Indian tribes forever, just as Andrew Jackson did among the Southern Indian Tribes, while also preventing a resurgence of western separatism that threatened if New Orleans had fallen to the British.

However, the end of the War of 1812 left several unresolved issues with which the postwar generation of American leaders had to contend. The use of "neutral" Spanish Florida by the war-time belligerent British Empire against the United States illustrated the danger that Florida, in British hands, posed to U.S. national security. The initial steps to prevent a British takeover of Spanish Florida prompted President James Madison to issue his "No-Transfer" or "Non-Transfer" proclamation, in which he declared that the United States would use force if necessary to prevent Florida from falling into the hands of a power other Spain by seizing that colony. Also, around this time, the Spanish-American revolutions led to a re-evaluation of U.S. policy towards the Spanish Empire, prompting Jefferson's "Large Policy" warning against the transfer of Spanish America to

France or Great Britain from Spain and culminating in James Monroe and John Quincy Adams' "Monroe Doctrine," which asserted that the United States would view a recolonization of Spanish America by any foreign power as hostile to the interests and institutions of America. Also, bad faith British interference in U.S. negotiations with Spain over the purchase of Florida by suggesting that the Americans trade their lands west of the Mississippi for the coveted Spanish colony only later served to increase the suspicions of John Quincy Adams that the British offer of a joint declaration through British Foreign Secretary George Canning in 1823 was actually a veiled British scheme to trick the United States into forever pledging itself against expanding into any part of the former Spanish Empire. This distrust contributed to John Quincy Adams' insistence on a unilateral declaration by Monroe rather than a joint declaration by Great Britain and the U.S.

Still, not all of the diplomatic actions of the Monroe Administration were as widely heralded by the American public as the Monroe Doctrine. In fact, the Adams-Onís, or Transcontinental, Treaty of 1819 resolving the Florida dispute laid the groundwork for yet another, this time over the boundary between the territory of Texas and New Spain—later Mexico—and was highly ridiculed by future generations of political leaders who believed that John Quincy Adams unnecessarily abandoned U.S. claims to Texas, either out of ignorance or maliciousness. The resulting nearness of Texas to the U.S. city of New Orleans, the gateway and emporium of the West, gave many U.S. statesmen, including John Quincy Adams' own Secretary of State Henry Clay, concerns as to America's strategic vulnerability. This uneasiness passed from John Quincy Adams' Administration to that of his successor, Andrew Jackson, who made several of his own attempts to purchase Texas from Mexico, here following up on the efforts made by Henry Clay some years earlier. What made Texas' status even more unnerving was the possibility that it might fall under the sway of the United States' old rival Great Britain after Texas achieved its

independence from Mexico. Such a prospect became even more worrisome when considered alongside several crises that occurred during the Jackson and Van Buren Administrations, such as Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831), the Black Hawk War (1832), the Nullification Crisis (1832–1833), the Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire (1833), and tense relations with Great Britain during the Upper and Lower Canadian Rebellions (1837–1838), thus raising concerns that, in case of war between the United States and Great Britain, the British might attempt to stir up a slave rebellion, a general Indian uprising, and/or sectional strife between North and South.

As the Polk Administration moved into the White House, the fulfillment of John Tyler's Joint Resolution Annexation plan was far from certain, for even though Tyler had signed the resolution in his last days in office, the people of Texas still had to decide between Mexican recognition of their independence backed by Great Britain and leaving negotiations of the Texas–Mexico frontier in the hands of mediators or annexation to the United States, with the Rio Grande as the Texan border with Mexico. In 1845, Polk and his State Department, working through United States Charge D' Affaires in Texas Andrew Jackson Donelson, nephew of the former president with which Donelson shared his name, thwarted British attempts to dissuade Texans from the path of annexation. For their part, British officials' desire to keep Texas as an independent country was rooted in their hopes of establishing Texas as a buffer state between the United States and Mexico. Therefore, such a course was thought to be the best means of protecting the Mexican people from American aggression, of preventing the United States' continued western expansion, and of maintaining an alternative cotton-supplying region separate from the United States. However, in this duel of statecraft, the United States succeeded in finally annexing Texas and welcoming the former country in as a new state in the Union.

With Texas no longer obstructing the path of U.S. western expansion, only the Mexican territories of California and New Mexico, as well as the disputed Oregon Country, remained in the way of keeping the United States from becoming a truly continental nation. As with Texas, British officials sought to keep California from becoming an integral part of the United States. However, just as in the case of Texas, the British failed to thwart American expansion, largely because of U.S. president James K. Polk's strong assertions in his December 1845 reaffirmation of the Monroe Doctrine. Often referred to as the Polk Corollary to the older declaration, Polk implied that California and Oregon were off limits to European colonization and that a European sponsored "balance of power" in North America was not to be tolerated. The failure of Great Britain and France to establish a "balance of power" was exacerbated by other disagreements between the two powers that, combined, undermined any desire by either country to intervene in the Mexican War on behalf of Mexico. However, despite U.S. success in acquiring California, New Mexico, and Oregon through conquest or negotiation, the American inability to organize governments for those territories briefly led to fears that the Pacific region might become an independent country aligned to another power such as Great Britain.

In conclusion, the ahistorical interpretation of Neo-Abolitionist historians is challenged by facts supporting an alternative theory based, in part, on information previously unavailable to historians. Although the twentieth-century historiography of the Mexican War occasionally took note of American concerns over foreign intrigues in territories on the periphery of the United States, few, if any, serious studies have been undertaken to examine whether American perceptions of British intentions were justified by actual British conduct. This new information reveals that Polk and his predecessors were right to suspect British designs of denying the United States the acquisition of Texas, California, and the Pacific Northwest, but also of potentially destabilizing

the Union by means of establishing satellite states from which they could stir up Indian uprisings on the frontier, encourage slave rebellions in the South, and support internal separatist movements against the United States and its government. Therefore, Manifest Destiny, as understood by the political culture of the Jacksonian Era (1815–1850), developed as part of a deliberate grand strategy and national security policy, often in conjunction with the Monroe Doctrine, to prevent the establishment of a European-style “balance of power” geopolitical system on the North American continent, as well as the possible encirclement of the U.S. by hostile foreign powers.

To men such as Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk, the blessings of one expansive, national Union meant perpetual peace with limited government and no standing armies; whereas a “balance of power” in North America meant perpetual war, standing armies, centralized power, and constant intrigues from European powers. Therefore, the erroneous belief of Neo-Abolitionist historians that a “slave power” conspiracy was behind the motivations of Democrat leaders to promote the expansion of the United States is further contradicted by evidence that the slavery controversy more often acted to inhibit U.S. territorial aggrandizement than to inspire such a movement. Furthermore, the writings of key policymakers in the Polk Administration clearly demonstrate that slavery did not motivate either Polk or his closest associates and that those Democrats who might have promoted expansion for that purpose were outside of the administration and its decision-making process. Finally, the ultimate appeal of Manifest Destiny to Democrat leaders lay in its promotion of a strategic realism which had at its roots the geopolitical thinking of the Founding Fathers, who often warned against separate confederacies, the “problem of neighborhood” and the encirclement of the nation. For many patriotic Americans, the last and best hope for peace and security; the answer to these age-old problems was one, indissoluble Union instead of numerous sovereignties under foreign influence sharing a limited continental space.

## Appendices

### Map of Proposed Western Separatist State, 1794

Bemis, Samuel Flagg. *Pinckney's Treaty; America's Advantage from Europe's Distress, 1783-1800*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 246.

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PINCKNEY'S TREATY



MAP IV.





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