



Excerpts from John Adams's Special Message

Source: “[John Adams—Special Message to the Senate and the House, May 16, 1797](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/messages/ja97-03.htm)” [http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/messages/ja97-03.htm] on the EDSITEment resource [The Avalon Project](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm) [http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm].

Adams describes an insult to the United States on the part of France:

...After the President of the United States received information that the French Government had expressed serious discontents at some proceedings of the Government of these States..., he thought it expedient to send to that country a new minister... For this purpose he selected from among his fellow-citizens a character ... most esteemed and respected in the nation... The (French) minister of foreign relations informed the... American minister that the (French) Executive Directory had determined not to receive another minister... from the United States until after the redress of grievances... During his residence at Paris, cards of hospitality were refused him, and he was threatened with being subjected to the jurisdiction of the minister of police... The refusal on the part of France to receive our minister... until we have acceded to their demands without discussion and without investigation is to treat us neither as allies nor as friends, nor as a sovereign state.

Adams accuses France of attempting to cause dissension among the citizens of the United States:

The speech of the (French) President discloses... a disposition to separate the people of the United States from the Government, to persuade them that they have different affections, principles, and interests from those of their fellow citizens whom they themselves have chosen to manage their common concerns, and thus to produce divisions fatal to our peace. Such attempts ought to be repelled with a decision which shall convince France and the world that we are not a degraded people, humiliated under a colonial spirit of fear and sense of inferiority, fitted to be the miserable instruments of foreign influence...

Adams accuses France of secretly deciding to ignore a significant part of a treaty of friendship and commerce with the United States:

It is my sincere desire... to preserve peace and friendship with all nations; [but] there is reason to believe that the Executive Directory passed a decree on the 2d of March last contravening in part the treaty of amity and commerce of 1778, injurious to our lawful commerce and endangering the lives of our citizens.

As a response to the problems with France and ongoing conflict between Britain and France and the resulting disruption to American shipping, Adams asks for a military build-up:

A naval power, next to the militia, is the natural defense of the United States.

... I recommend to your consideration a revision of the laws for organizing, arming, and disciplining the militia, to render that natural and safe defense of the country efficacious.

President Adams addresses directly the members of the joint session of Congress. First, he warns about the danger of “foreign and domestic factions” on American citizens:

...Gentlemen of the Senate and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives:

...endeavors have been employed to foster and establish a division between the Government and people of the United States. To investigate the causes which have encouraged this attempt is not necessary; but to repel, by decided and united councils, insinuations so derogatory to the honor and aggressions so dangerous to the Constitution, union, and even independence of the nation is an indispensable duty. It must not be permitted to be doubted whether (There must be no doubt that) the people of the United States will support the Government established by their voluntary consent and appointed by their free choice, or whether, by surrendering themselves to the direction of foreign and domestic factions, in opposition to their own Government, they will forfeit the honorable station they have hitherto maintained...

Then Adams ends by discussing the principles he considers important:

...having ... devoted the best part of my life to obtain and support... independence, and constantly witnessed the patriotism... of my fellow-citizens on the most trying occasions, it is not for me to hesitate or abandon a cause in which my heart has been so long engaged.

Convinced that the conduct of the Government has been just and impartial to foreign nations, that those internal regulations which have been established by law for the preservation of peace are in their nature proper, and... fairly executed, nothing will ever be done by me... to innovate upon principles which have been so deliberately and uprightly established, or to surrender in any manner the rights of the Government. To enable me to maintain this declaration I rely, under God, with entire confidence on the firm and enlightened support of the National Legislature and upon the virtue and patriotism of my fellow-citizens.