

James Madison, Jr. (1751-1836)

## Seventh Annual Message

*given on December 5, 1815*

Fellow-Citizens of the Senate and of the House of Representatives:

I have the satisfaction on our present meeting of being able to communicate to you the successful termination of the war which had been commenced against the United States by the Regency of Algiers. The squadron in advance on that service, under Commodore Decatur, lost not a moment after its arrival in the Mediterranean in seeking the naval force of the enemy then cruising in that sea, and succeeded in capturing two of his ships, one of them the principal ship, commanded by the Algerine admiral. The high character of the American commander was brilliantly sustained on that occasion which brought his own ship into close action with that of his adversary, as was the accustomed gallantry of all the officers and men actually engaged. Having prepared the way by this demonstration of American skill and prowess, he hastened to the port of Algiers, where peace was promptly yielded to his victorious force. In the terms stipulated the rights and honor of the United States were particularly consulted by a perpetual relinquishment on the part of the Dey of all pretensions to tribute from them. The impressions which have thus been made, strengthened as they will have been by subsequent transactions with the Regencies of Tunis and of Tripoli by the appearance of the larger force which followed under Commodore Bainbridge, the chief in command of the expedition, and by the judicious precautionary arrangements left by him in that quarter, afford a reasonable prospect of future security for the valuable portion of our commerce which passes within reach of the Barbary cruisers.

It is another source of satisfaction that the treaty of peace with Great Britain has been succeeded by a convention on the subject of commerce concluded by the plenipotentiaries of the two countries. In this result a disposition is manifested on the part of that nation corresponding with the disposition of the United States, which it may be hoped will be improved into liberal arrangements on other subjects on which the parties have mutual interests, or which might endanger their future harmony. Congress will decide on the expediency of promoting such a sequel by giving effect to the measure of confining the American navigation to American seamen ? a measure which, at the same time that it might have that conciliatory tendency, would have the further advantage of increasing the independence of our navigation and the resources for our maritime defence.

In conformity with the articles in the treaty of Ghent relating to the Indians, as well as with a view to the tranquillity of our western and northwestern frontiers, measures were taken to establish an immediate peace with the several tribes who had been engaged in hostilities against the United States. Such of them as were invited to Detroit acceded readily to a renewal of the former treaties of friendship. Of the other tribes who were invited to a station on the Mississippi the greater number have also accepted the peace offered to them. The residue, consisting of the more distant tribes or parts of tribes, remain to be brought over by further explanations, or by such other means as may be adapted to the dispositions they may finally disclose.

The Indian tribes within and bordering on the southern frontier, whom a cruel war on their part had compelled us to chastise into peace, have latterly shown a restlessness which has called for preparatory measures for repressing it, and for protecting the commissioners engaged in carrying the terms of the peace into execution.

The execution of the act fixing the military peace establishment has been attended with difficulties which even now can only be overcome by legislative aid. The selection of officers, the payment and discharge of the troops enlisted for the war, the payment of the retained troops and their reunion from detached and distant stations, the collection and security of the public property in the Quartermaster, Commissary, and Ordnance departments, and the constant medical assistance required in hospitals and garrisons rendered a complete execution of the act impracticable on the 1st of May, the period more immediately contemplated. As soon, however, as circumstances would permit, and as far as it has been practicable consistently with the public interests, the reduction of the Army has been accomplished, but the appropriations for its pay and for other branches of the military service having proved inadequate, the earliest attention to that subject will be necessary, and the expediency of continuing upon the peace establishment the staff officers who have hitherto been provisionally retained is also recommended to the consideration of Congress.

In the performance of the Executive duty upon this occasion there has not been wanting a just sensibility to the merits of the American Army during the late war, but the obvious policy and design in fixing an efficient military peace establishment did not afford an opportunity to distinguish the aged and infirm on account of their past services nor the wounded and disabled on account of their present sufferings. The extent of the reduction, indeed, unavoidably involved the exclusion of many meritorious officers of every rank from the service of their country, and so equal as well as so numerous were the claims to attention that a decision by the standard of comparative merit could seldom be attained. Judged, however, in candor by a general standard of positive merit, the Army register will, it is believed, do honor to the establishment, while the case of those officers whose names are not included in it devolves with the

strongest interest upon the legislative authority for such provision as shall be deemed the best calculated to give support and solace to the veteran and the invalid, to display the beneficence as well as the justice of the Government, and to inspire a martial zeal for the public service upon every future emergency.

55 Although the embarrassments arising from the want of an uniform national currency have not been diminished since the adjournment of Congress, great satisfaction has been denved in contemplating the revival of the public credit and the effi ciency of the public resources The receipts into the Treasury from the vanous branches of revenue during the nine months ending on the 30th of September last have been estimated at \$12,500,000, the issues of Treasury notes of every denomination during the same period amounted to the sum of \$14,000,000, and there was also obtained upon  
60 loan during the same period a sum of \$9,000,000, of which the sum of \$6,000,000 was subscribed in cash and the sum of \$3,000,000 in Treasury notes With these means, added to the sum of \$1,500,000, being the balance of money in the Treasury on the 1st day of January, there has been paid be tween the 1st of January and the 1st of October on account of the appropriations of the preceding and of the present year (exclusively of the amount of the Treasury notes subscribed to the loan and of the amount redeemed in the payment of du ties and taxes) the aggregate sum of \$33,500,000,  
65 leaving a balance then in the Treasury estimated at the sum of \$3,000,000 Independent, however, of the arrearages due for military services and supplies, it is presumed that a further sum of \$5,000,000, including the interest on the public debt payable on the 1st of January next, will be demanded at the Treasury to compete the expenditures of the present year, and for which the existing ways and means will sufficiently provide.

The national debt, as it was ascertained on the 1st of Octo ber last, amounted in the whole to the sum of \$120,000,000,  
70 consisting of the unredeemed balance of the debt contracted before the late war (\$39,000,000), the amount of the funded debt contracted in consequence of the war (\$64,000,000), and the amount of the unfunded and floating debt, including the vanous issues of Treasury notes, \$17,000,000, which is in a gradual course of payment There will probably be some ad dition to the public debt upon the liquidation of various claims which are depending, and a conciliatory disposition on the part of Congress may lead honorably and advantageously to an equitable arrangement  
75 of the militia expenses incurred by the several States without the previous sanction or authority of the Government of the United States, but when it is considered that the new as well as the old portion of the debt has been contracted in the assertion of the national rights and independence, and when it is recollected that the public expenditures, not being exclusively bestowed upon subjects of a transient nature, will long be visible in the number and equip ments of the American Navy, in the military works for the de fense of our harbors and our frontiers, and in the supplies of our  
80 arsenals and magazines the amount will bear a gratifying comparison with the objects which have been attained, as well as with the resources of the country.

The arrangements of the finances with a view to the receipts and expenditures of a permanent peace establishment will necessarily enter into the deliberations of Congress during the present session. It is true that the improved condition of the public revenue will not only afford the means of maintaining the faith of the Government with its creditors  
85 inviolate, and of prosecuting successfully the measures of the most liberal policy, but will also justify an immediate alleviation of the burdens imposed by the necessities of the war. It is, however, essential to every modification of the finances that the benefits of an uniform national currency should be restored to the community. The absence of the precious metals will, it is believed, be a temporary evil, but until they can again be rendered the general medium of exchange it devolves on the wisdom of Congress to provide a substitute which shall equally engage the confidence  
90 and accommodate the wants of the citizens throughout the Union. If the operation of the State banks can not produce this result, the probable operation of a national bank will merit consideration; and if neither of these expedients be deemed effectual it may become necessary to ascertain the terms upon which the notes of the Government (no longer required as an instrument of credit) shall be issued upon motives of general policy as a common medium of circulation.

95 Notwithstanding the security for future repose which the United States ought to find in their love of peace and their constant respect for the rights of other nations, the character of the times particularly inculcates the lesson that, whether to prevent or repel danger, we ought not to be unprepared for it. This consideration will sufficiently recommend to Congress a liberal provision for the immediate extension and gradual completion of the works of defense, both fixed and floating, on our maritime frontier, and an adequate provision for guarding our inland frontier  
100 against dangers to which certain portions of it may continue to be exposed.

As an improvement in our military establishment, it will deserve the consideration of Congress whether a corps of invalids might not be so organized and employed as at once to aid in the support of meritorious individuals excluded by age or infirmities from the existing establishment, and to procure to the public the benefit of their stationary services and of their exemplary discipline. I recommend also an enlargement of the Military Academy already  
105 established, and the establishment of others in other sections of the Union; and I can not press too much on the attention of Congress such a classification and organization of the militia as will most effectually render it the safeguard of a free state. If experience has shewn in the recent splendid achievements of militia the value of this resource for the public defense, it has shewn also the importance of that skill in the use of arms and that familiarity

with the essential rules of discipline which can not be expected from the regulations now in force. With this subject is  
110 intimately connected the necessity of accommodating the laws in every respect to the great object of enabling the  
political authority of the Union to employ promptly and effectually the physical power of the Union in the cases  
designated by the Constitution.

The signal services which have been rendered by our Navy and the capacities it has developed for successful co-  
operation in the national defense will give to that portion of the public force its full value in the eyes of Congress, at  
115 an epoch which calls for the constant vigilance of all governments. To preserve the ships now in a sound state, to  
complete those already contemplated, to provide amply the imperishable materials for prompt augmentations, and to  
improve the existing arrangements into more advantageous establishments for the construction, the repairs, and the  
security of vessels of war is dictated by the soundest policy.

In adjusting the duties on imports to the object of revenue the influence of the tariff on manufactures will necessarily  
120 present itself for consideration. However wise the theory may be which leaves to the sagacity and interest of  
individuals the application of their industry and resources, there are in this as in other cases exceptions to the general  
rule. Besides the condition which the theory itself implies of a reciprocal adoption by other nations, experience  
teaches that so many circumstances must concur in introducing and maturing manufacturing establishments,  
especially of the more complicated kinds, that a country may remain long without them, although sufficiently  
125 advanced and in some respects even peculiarly fitted for carrying them on with success. Under circumstances giving a  
powerful impulse to manufacturing industry it has made among us a progress and exhibited an efficiency which justify  
the belief that with a protection not more than is due to the enterprising citizens whose interests are now at stake it will  
become at an early day not only safe against occasional competitions from abroad, but a source of domestic wealth  
and even of external commerce. In selecting the branches more especially entitled to the public patronage a preference  
130 is obviously claimed by such as will relieve the United States from a dependence on foreign supplies ever subject to  
casual failures, for articles necessary for the public defense or connected with the primary wants of individuals. It will  
be an additional recommendation of particular manufactures where the materials for them are extensively drawn from  
our agriculture, and consequently impart and insure to that great fund of national prosperity and independence an  
encouragement which can not fail to be rewarded.

135 Among the means of advancing the public interest the occasion is a proper one for recalling the attention of Congress  
to the great importance of establishing throughout our country the roads and canals which can best be executed under  
the national authority. No objects within the circle of political economy so richly repay the expense bestowed on  
them; there are none the utility of which is more universally ascertained and acknowledged; none that do more honor  
to the governments whose wise and enlarged patriotism duly appreciates them. Nor is there any country which  
140 presents a field where nature invites more the art of man to complete her own work for his accommodation and  
benefit. These considerations are strengthened, moreover, by the political effect of these facilities for  
intercommunication in bringing and binding more closely together the various parts of our extended confederacy.  
Whilst the States individually, with a laudable enterprise and emulation, avail themselves of their local advantages by  
new roads, by navigable canals, and by improving the streams susceptible of navigation, the General Government is  
145 the more urged to similar undertakings, requiring a national jurisdiction and national means, by the prospect of thus  
systematically completing so inestimable a work; and it is a happy reflection that any defect of constitutional authority  
which may be encountered can be supplied in a mode which the Constitution itself has providently pointed out.

The present is a favorable season also for bringing again into view the establishment of a national seminary of  
learning within the District of Columbia, and with means drawn from the property therein, subject to the authority of  
150 the General Government. Such an institution claims the patronage of Congress as a monument of their solicitude for  
the advancement of knowledge, without which the blessings of liberty can not be fully enjoyed or long preserved; as a  
model instructive in the formation of other seminaries; as a nursery of enlightened preceptors, and as a central resort  
of youth and genius from every part of their country, diffusing on their return examples of those national feelings,  
those liberal sentiments, and those congenial manners which contribute cement to our Union and strength to the great  
155 political fabric of which that is the foundation.

In closing this communication I ought not to repress a sensibility, in which you will unite, to the happy lot of our  
country and to the goodness of a superintending Providence, to which we are indebted for it. Whilst other portions of  
mankind are laboring under the distresses of war or struggling with adversity in other forms, the United States are in  
the tranquil enjoyment of prosperous and honorable peace. In reviewing the scenes through which it has been attained  
160 we can rejoice in the proofs given that our political institutions, founded in human rights and framed for their  
preservation, are equal to the severest trials of war as well as adapted to the ordinary periods of repose. As fruits of  
this experience and of the reputation acquired by the American arms on the land and on the water, the nation finds  
itself possessed of a growing respect abroad and of a just confidence in itself, which are among the best pledges for its  
peaceful career. Under other aspects of our country the strongest features of its flourishing condition are seen in a  
165 population rapidly increasing on a territory as productive as it is extensive; in a general industry and fertile ingenuity

which find their ample rewards, and in an affluent revenue which admits a reduction of the public burdens without withdrawing the means of sustaining the public credit, of gradually discharging the public debt, of providing for the necessary defensive and precautionary establishments, and of patronizing in every authorized mode undertakings conducive to the aggregate wealth and individual comfort of our citizens.

170 It remains for the guardians of the public welfare to persevere in that justice and good will toward other nations which invite a return of these sentiments toward the United States; to cherish institutions which guarantee their safety and their liberties, civil and religious; and to combine with a liberal system of foreign commerce an improvement of the national advantages and a protection and extension of the independent resources of our highly favored and happy country.

175 In all measures having such objects my faithful co-operation will be afforded.  
(3162 words)

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