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# "Under the auspices of peace": The Northwest Indian War and its Impact on the Early American Republic

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the influence of the Northwest Indian War on the development of the early United States republic. In the years between the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783 and the establishment of a new federal government in 1789, the United States frontier was plagued by rivalry between citizens and Native Americans. The United States federal government viewed the success and progress of the nation as contingent upon possession of the Northwest Territory, and as such developed and adjusted their Indian policies to induce the Indians to peacefully accept United States authority in the Northwest Territory. The violence that erupted out of the deterioration of these attempts resulted in demands by citizens to quell the aggressive Indians in the early years of George Washington's presidency, which consequently invited reforms that ultimately strengthened the federal government's power.

## **Keywords**

Northwest Indian War, George Washington, Federal Government, Northwest Territory, Henry Knox

**"Under the Auspices of Peace":  
The Northwest Indian War and its Impact on  
the Early American Republic**

By  
Melanie L. Fernandes



In April, 1789, George Washington was inaugurated as the first president of the United States of America. Filled with pride for his new country and hope for its future, he spoke in his inaugural address about the prospects of the United States. Washington was clear that above all, the new government of the United States should do right by itself to preserve the nation and protect its citizens:

In these honorable qualifications, I behold the surest pledges, that as on one side, no local prejudices, or attachments; no separate [sic] views, nor party animosities, will misdirect the comprehensive and equal eye which ought to watch over this great assemblage of communities and interests: so, on another, that the foundations of our National policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality; and the pre-eminence of a

free Government, be exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its Citizens, and command the respect of the world.<sup>231</sup>

Washington wanted for no particular group's interests to dictate the government's policies, and he wanted to ensure that the government would always have the nation and its citizens' best interests in mind. For Washington, this was one means of working towards his main goal for the nation: that the United States as a new nation would "command the respect of the world."

In order to achieve this, Washington had numerous ambitious, but necessary, goals for the nation. He wanted to reduce the national debt, establish a strong currency, and reopen trade and renew amiable relations with the British. In short, his goals all had to do with economic and national security, which he understood to be crucial to the protection and success of the nation. Washington and his contemporaries knew that proving the legitimacy of the United States to major European powers was extremely important during the early years of the republic, as this was when it was most vulnerable. Unfortunately for these men, the process of establishing the foundation of the United States was far more complicated than they would have hoped. Along with all the pressures of establishing order and an effective government,

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<sup>231</sup> Dorothy Twohig, *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1987-2015), 2:152.

managing the national debt from the Revolutionary War, and attempting to reconcile with Great Britain, the United States faced conflict with Indian tribes that threatened the entire success of the nation.

It is undeniable that the nation's early success was largely tied to Indian relations. In some sense this was because Washington and other national leaders saw the nation's success as contingent upon the opening of the Northwest Territory. The Treaty of Paris, which signified the official end of the American Revolution in 1783, extended the western border of the United States to the Mississippi River. The Continental Congress, the governing body from the Revolution until the establishment of the new federal government in 1789, planned to decrease national debt by selling this land to settlers on the western frontier.

However, the Native Americans living in this territory were not consulted when the Treaty of Paris was signed. Tension and animosity exploded as the United States attempted to assert their dominance on the lands that Native Americans still claimed. These tensions had years to build up between the end of the Revolutionary War and when Washington took office in 1789. However, until Washington's presidency the Continental Congress did not take Native American opinion into consideration when forming Indian policy. Continued violence marked the relationship between the frontier settlers and several western Native American tribes. As a result, Washington accepted his presidency just as

conflicts were reaching a climax. Frontiersmen demanded federal protection from the Indians; Indians refused to cede their lands, demanding that the borderline of the United States be moved back to its previous point at the Ohio River. Yet, with no regular army, minimal federal funds, and a government in its infancy, Washington was hardly in an optimal position to deal with this conflict. It was crucial that he deal with this issue effectively, as this was one of the first tests of the new nation's governing ability.

Washington was torn. While he wanted to come to a peaceful settlement with the dominant Northwestern Indian tribes, the Indians were not willing to make peace with the new Mississippi River land boundary and the United States was not willing to give up the Northwest Territory. Settlers were eager to move into the area, and Congress linked the progress of the nation to the acquisition of this territory. It seemed that Washington had no choice but to assert American authority and use force against the Indians. After all, simply conceding to them would make the United States federal government appear weak to Great Britain, the Indian tribes, and to the citizens of the United States. The federal government decided it would be in the United States' best interest to launch a military expedition to punish the aggressive Indian tribes.

The military campaigns sent by the United States to quell Indian hostilities in the Ohio country between 1790-1795 are collectively known as the Northwest Indian War. Historians have

noted this conflict as significant, and even critical, both in the course of Washington's presidency and the early development of the nation. However, there was no shortage of adversities for Washington to overcome as the first president of the United States, and the Northwest Indian War is often depicted as another issue on the list. Typically, this scholarship explores the Northwest Indian War in the context of overall Indian relations in the United States between 1785-1815.<sup>232</sup> Even Wiley Sword's *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* spends relatively little time exploring the deeper implications that these events had on the development of the United States.<sup>233</sup> More recently, Colin Calloway and William Patrick Walsh have focused on the nation's response to this conflict, but neither considers its impact in defining federal powers over the West and the states.<sup>234</sup> An examination of the papers of George Washington and his contemporaries indicates how they used the Northwest Indian War as an opportunity to strengthen the federal government. Native American relations and policy during

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<sup>232</sup> Dale Van Every, *Ark of Empire: The American Frontier, 1784-1803* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963); Reginald Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy, 1783-1812* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967).

<sup>233</sup> Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).

<sup>234</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army* (New York: University of Oxford Press, 2015); William Patrick Walsh, "The Defeat of Major General Arthur St. Clair, November 4, 1791: A Study of the Nation's Response, 1791-1793" (PhD diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1977).

this period were instrumental in defining the roles and abilities of the federal government. In many ways, the Northwest Indian War gave the United States the opportunity to establish how the federal government would be viewed not just by its own citizens, but by dominant powers of the world.

### **Securing Indian Lands**

A great deal of conflict occurred between the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783 and the establishment of the new federal government in 1789. This conflict defined the circumstances leading ultimately to the Northwest Indian War. During these years the United States operated under the governing body of the Continental Congress, which was established in 1774. At this time Congress set the precedent for what the United States' Native American policy would be, and the events of this period directly affected the circumstances that surrounded Washington when he entered the presidency.

At the conclusion of the American Revolution, the United States and Britain both signed the Treaty of Paris to officially establish peace between them. As a concession of this treaty, Britain ceded the land known as the Northwest Territory to the United States; the United States' western boarder was extended to the Mississippi River, which Britain permitted the United States to utilize for trade. The treaty also required Britain to remove all its soldiers from any western



Figure 1



*Old Northwest Region, 1783-90* in Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 2.

forts they occupied, but the British continued to hold the forts of Michilimackinac, Detroit, Niagra, Oswego, Oswegatchie, and several others for more than a decade after the treaty was signed.<sup>235</sup>

This allowed them to protect their extensive western trade and thereby maintain influence with their Native American allies, especially as the United States pushed into western territory.<sup>236</sup>

<sup>235</sup> "The Definitive Treaty of Peace 1783," Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/paris.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/paris.asp) (accessed November 12, 2015); Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 19.

<sup>236</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *Crown and Calumet: British-Indian Relations, 1783-1815* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 17.

The British presence in the Northwest Territory would be problematic for the United States in the years to come.

After the Treaty of Paris, treaty commissioners from the United States told the Indians living in the Northwest Territory that they were a conquered people, and as such were not entitled to live in the Northwest Territory. The Indians felt betrayed and abandoned by the British, who had not consulted them about the Treaty of Paris land cessions and left them to reconcile with the Americans on their own. The American federal government proceeded to develop their Indian policy around the assumption that the United States was the sovereign power in the Northwest Territory.<sup>237</sup> The implementation of this policy resulted in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, Treaty of McIntosh, and the Treaty of Fort Finney. The United States used these three treaties to secure land from the Indians in the Northwest Territory. With each of these treaties, the United States commissioners indicated that they wanted to make peace with the Native Americans. However, when the Native American tribes arrived at the treaty meetings they found that the commissioners had little intention of actually negotiating with them.

In 1784, the United States made the Treaty of Fort Stanwix with the Six Nations of the Iroquois. The Iroquois arrived at Fort Stanwix in New York in October ready to discuss terms of peace.

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<sup>237</sup> Walsh, "The Defeat of Major General Arthur St. Clair," 10.

Instead, the congressional commissioners read them the terms of the Treaty of Paris and they asked the Indians to choose a boundary line between United States and Indian land.<sup>238</sup> As some of the Iroquois tribes had been allied with the British during the Revolutionary War, the commissioners felt justified in dominating the treaty-making process. Cornplanter, a leader of the Seneca nation, acted as a spokesman and proposed to uphold the Ohio River boundary that had been established in a former treaty, the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix. Cornplanter explained that the traditional role of the Six Nations was to speak on behalf of the other western tribes and such a boundary would be in the best interest of all the western Indian tribes.<sup>239</sup> However, this boundary would have cut the United States off from much of the Northwest Territory. The commissioners told the Iroquois that they had no right to propose such a conservative boundary, as the United States was now the sovereign power in the Northwest Territory. They then offered the Iroquois an ultimatum: give up their land claims in the Northwest Territory, or face war with the United States.<sup>240</sup>

The 1784 Treaty of Fort Stanwix ultimately caused a divide in the Iroquois nations. With each nation on different standing with

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<sup>238</sup> Sword, *President Washington's Indian War*, 24.

<sup>239</sup> Thomas S. Abler, *Cornplanter: Chief Warrior of the Alleghany Senecas* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 66.

<sup>240</sup> Sword, *President Washington's Indian War*, 25; "Treaty With the Six Nations: 1784," Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/six1784.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/six1784.asp) (accessed November 13, 2015).

the United States it was difficult for the Six Nations to remain firmly unified and their confederacy began to deteriorate. Thus, the dominance of the Iroquois declined among the western Indians. As Cornplanter indicated in the treaty deliberations, the Iroquois had traditionally been a dominant force in the intertribal dynamic of the Northwest Territory. This gave way for the Shawnee and Miami, two tribes affected by a later treaty, to become more dominant powers in the west.<sup>241</sup>

The Americans enacted a second peace treaty, known as the Treaty of Fort McIntosh, with the Delaware and Wyandot tribes. The signing of this treaty took place thirty miles northwest of Pittsburgh in January, 1785. As with the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, the commissioners threatened war if these Indian tribes did not give up their lands and agree to live on designated United States reservations in the northern part of Ohio.<sup>242</sup> The last of these three treaties was made with the Shawnee, Miami, Potawatomi, and various Wabash tribes. Known as the Treaty of Fort Finney, or the Treaty at the Mouth of the Great Miami, it took place at the convergence of the Miami and Ohio Rivers in January, 1786. It restricted the Shawnee to a reservation next to the designated Delaware and Wyandot reservations in the northern corner of Ohio

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<sup>241</sup> Sword, *President Washington's Indian War*, 26.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

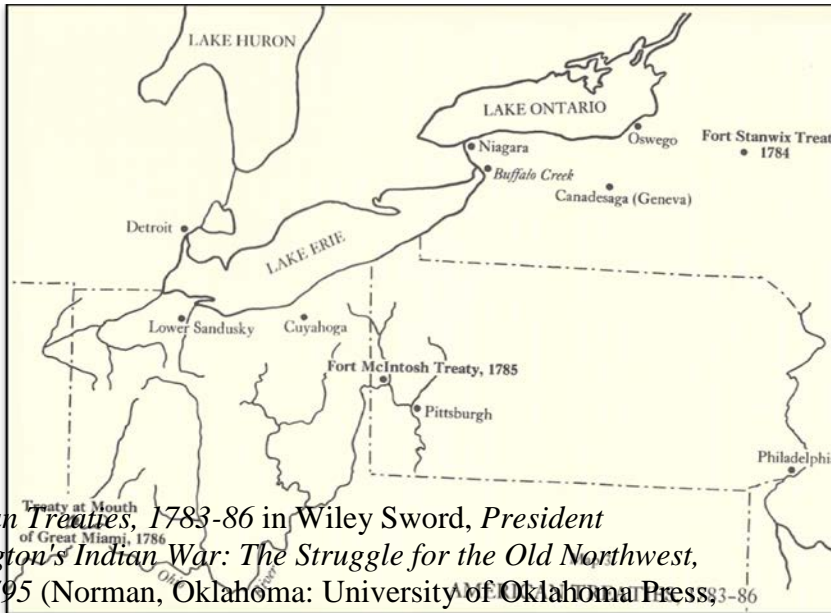
and Indiana.<sup>243</sup> Aware of the results of the Treaties of Fort Stanwix and Fort McIntosh, the Indians put up significant resistance at Fort Finney. The Miami outright refused to comply with the terms of the treaty and many of the Shawnee were strongly opposed to it as well. Apprehensive about making war with the Americans, however, resentful Shawnee leaders finally agreed to sign the treaty.

It was fortunate for the United States that all of the tribes they treated with agreed to their terms, for the United States did not have the military or monetary means necessary to go to war with the Native Americans. In fact, Congress' lack of funds was one of the major reasons that the United States vied for complete control of the Northwest Territory in the first place. At the end of the Revolutionary War the Continental Congress was about \$40 million in debt.<sup>244</sup> Under the Articles of Confederation, the United States' first constitutional document, the government did not have the ability to impose taxes on the American people. As such, the acquisition of funds was crucial for the federal government. By obtaining the Northwest Territory, the federal government could sell tracts of land to settlers and maintain profitable trade by

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<sup>243</sup> "Treaty With the Shawnee: 1786," Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/shaw1786.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/shaw1786.asp) (accessed November 13, 2015); Sword, *President Washington's Indian War*, 30.

<sup>244</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 36.



*American Treaties, 1783-86* in Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 22.

having access to the Mississippi River.<sup>245</sup> Additionally, without the money to fund an army to remove the Indians, the federal government would not be able to make good on their threats to go to war with the Indians, and needed to entice them to leave through peaceful means. United States Native American policy was entirely driven by the notion that securing peace with the Indians would be the easiest and cheapest way of acquiring the Northwest Territory.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 25.

## **Hostilities on the Frontier and the Miami Confederacy**

Soon after the conclusion of the Treaty of Fort Finney, violence emerged on the frontier. It became clear just how dissatisfied the Indians were with the treaty settlements. Henry Knox, Secretary of War under the Continental Congress and during Washington's presidency, was responsible for handling Indian affairs. In 1786, Revolutionary War veteran General Josiah Harmar wrote Knox to update him on the conditions in the Northwest Territory. In his letter, Harmar explained to Knox that land surveyors were eager to go out into the Northwest Territory and were requesting escorts from Harmar. Because settlers were already being attacked, Harmar feared that armed escorts would bring out more hostilities from the angered Indians: "The murders that have been committed lately upon the inhabitants passing up and down the Ohio, indicate great dissatisfaction prevailing amongst the Indians."<sup>247</sup>

In the end months of 1786, various Indian tribes organized a council in Sandusky, Ohio to discuss their dissatisfaction with the treaties made with them and relations with the United States. The Wyandot, Delaware, Shawnee, Ottawa, Chippewa, Miami, Potawatomi, Cherokee, Six Nations, and members of the Wabash

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<sup>247</sup> William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers: The Life and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair Soldier of the Revolutionary War; President of the Continental Congress; and Governor of the North-Western Territory with his Correspondence and other Papers* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Robert Clarke & Co, 1882), 2:14.

Confederacy were all present.<sup>248</sup> As each tribe had varying experiences with the United States, there was some inconsistency among their views. Some tribes, like the Delaware, Wyandot, and the Seneca of the Six Nations were willing to promote amiable relations with the United States. Joseph Brant, leader of the Mohawk of the Six Nations, was not willing to settle for the provisions made for his tribe in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, but was inclined to seek assistance in acquiring new land from the British in Canada rather than engage in war with the Americans. On the other hand, the Shawnee, Miami, and members of the Wabash Confederacy were adamant about fighting to protect their lands from the Americans.<sup>249</sup> These tribes, along with several Iroquois tribes, the Ojibwa, the Ottawa, and the Potawatomi, formed the Miami Confederacy, or the Northwest Confederacy.<sup>250</sup> The Miami Confederacy, which was united loosely under the leadership of Miami warrior chief Little Turtle, formed with the common purpose of preventing the United States from taking any lands past the Ohio River.<sup>251</sup>

Amidst these growing tensions, the United States drafted the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. The purpose of the Northwest

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<sup>248</sup> Sword, *President Washington's Indian War*, 41.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>250</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 96.

<sup>251</sup> Harvey Lewis Carter, *The Life and Times of Little Turtle: First Sagamore of the Wabash* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 61; Bert Anson, *The Miami Confederacy* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 105.



Ordinance was to dictate how the Northwest Territory might be organized and inducted into the United States. However, since the federal government was aware of Indian grievances, the Northwest Ordinance also affirmed that the United States would respect Indian rights in regards to assuming Indian lands. The ordinance dictated that the Northwest Territory be divided into no less than three and no more than five states. Once a piece of territory accumulated at least 60,000 free inhabitants the government would admit it into the United States on equal status with all other states.<sup>252</sup>

The ordinance also specifically stated that the "utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians" and that "their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent."<sup>253</sup> While historians such as Reginald Horsman have asserted that the language of the Northwest Ordinance indicated a shift in Indian policy at this time, the federal government's subsequent actions do not reflect the language of the Ordinance, and it seems that there was little shift in Native American policy during this period. The Ordinance indicated willingness to

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<sup>252</sup> "Northwest Ordinance," Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/nworder.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/nworder.asp) (accessed October 21, 2015).

<sup>253</sup> Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:36; *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, Class II, Indian Affairs*, edited by Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke (Washington DC: Gales and Seaton, 1832), online, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsp.html>, 2:9 (hereafter *American State Papers*).

negotiate with the Indians. However, rather than negotiate with the Indians, the federal government's simply tried to pay for the land that they previously asserted was conquered territory. While this change in technique certainly suggested a shift in attitude on the United States' part, their end goal of acquiring those lands by any means necessary remained the same.

Under the Northwest Ordinance, veteran of the American Revolution Arthur St. Clair became the governor of the Northwest Territory. Part of his initial instructions from Congress was to make treaties with the Indians should the situation require it. As hostilities had increased in recent months, it was clear that a treaty was necessary. St. Clair was directed to alleviate "all causes of controversy, so that peace and harmony may continue between the United States and the Indian tribes, the regulating trade, and settling boundaries." Congress authorized money specifically for the purpose of renewing a treaty with the Indians, hoping that compensation for the land would settle any animosity with the Indians. In order to protect United States interest out west, St. Clair's instructions further required him to maintain the statutes of the current treaties, "unless a change of boundary beneficial to the United States can be obtained." Such specifications indicated that the United States was not actually willing to negotiate with the Indians, but rather wanted to reaffirm their former treaties.<sup>254</sup> The

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<sup>254</sup> Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:37; *American State Papers*, 1:9.

United States' actions therefore did not necessarily match the language of their policies, and their treatment of the Indians remained essentially the same. Although members of the federal government may have thought that they were being more conciliatory in offering monetary compensation for the lands they assumed, the issue for the Indians was not just in the lack of compensation. Rather, the Indians were upset that the federal government assumed it had any right to their lands at all. The government's offer to pay for the lands actually did little to alleviate any animosity.

St. Clair met with delegates from the Six Nations, Delaware, Wyandot, Ottawa, Ojibwa, and Potawatomi in December, 1788. Though invited, the aggravated Shawnee and Miami tribes refused to negotiate land cession with the United States and refused to participate in this treaty council.<sup>255</sup> What the Indians desired out of this new treaty was a change in the land boundary back to the Ohio River.<sup>256</sup> St. Clair refused, saying that the British had ceded these lands to the United States and that the boundaries had been fixed by the Treaties of Fort Stanwix, Fort McIntosh, and Fort Finney. St. Clair concluded deliberations with the Indians by saying that the United States greatly desired peace with the Indians, but would go to war with them if necessary.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 58, 59.

<sup>256</sup> Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:110.

<sup>257</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 58; Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:110.

Although this treaty council offered the Indians another chance to speak their piece, St. Clair still offered the same ultimatum. Backed into a corner once more, these Indian tribes hesitantly agreed. In January of 1789, St. Clair signed two treaties, together known as the Treaty of Fort Harmar: one with the Six Nations, and one with the Wyandot, Delaware, Ottawa, Ojibwa, and Potawatomi. Though this treaty was another attempt by the United States to secure peace, it did nothing advantageous for either party. Rather, it simply served to reaffirm previous United States treaties and further anger the western Indian tribes.

### **Washington as President**

As the Miami Confederacy become more organized and aggravated by the new treaties, aggressions on the frontier continued to escalate. When Washington entered the presidency in 1789, the hostilities seemed to be at their peak. Indian relations were one of Washington's top priorities when he entered the presidency. His aim was to find a way to make peace with the Indians so that American citizens could begin to settle the Northwest Territory without fear of conflict.

Washington's military career during the mid 1700s gave him experience with Indians. As such, he was regarded as somewhat of an Indian expert in the years leading up to his presidency. Washington had always advocated that maintaining peace with the Indians was crucial if the United States wanted to

settle the Northwest Territory. He believed that military action should only be taken against the Indians as a last resort, as purchasing Indian lands would be both cheaper and involve less bloodshed.<sup>258</sup> Washington took this policy with him into his presidency, and with violence at its peak, he developed several initiatives to help secure peace with the Indians. Secretary of War Knox was perhaps the most influential man in regards to Indian policy during Washington's presidency. Washington and Knox worked well together developing these policies, as they were generally in agreement about how to handle Indian affairs. Both Washington and Knox agreed that all measures should be taken to promote peace and make treaties with the Indians rather than engage in war. They believed it would be morally wrong to force the Indians off their land without just cause. Knox had a particularly sympathetic view towards the Indians. In a letter to Washington, Knox expressed a desire protect Indian interests, as the Indians were the "prior occupants" of the land, and as such "possess[ed] the right of the Soil" in the Northwest Territory. He was adamant that these lands "cannot be taken from them unless by their free consent, or by the right of a just War..." To do otherwise "would be a gross violation of the fundamental Laws of Nature and of that distributive [sic] justice which is the glory of a nation."<sup>259</sup>

Knox, like Washington, saw great potential for the nation

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<sup>258</sup> Sword, *President Washington's Indian War*, 27.

<sup>259</sup> *GW Presidential Papers*, 2:491.

in possession of the Northwest Territory. However, he believed that there was little need to use force to acquire vast amounts of land from the Indians: "As the settlements of the whites shall approach near to the indian boundaries established by treaties, the game will be diminished and the lands being valuable to the indians only as hunting grounds, they will be willing to sell further tracts for small considerations..." As their resources were gradually depleted, Knox continued, the Indian populations would decrease, "enabl[ing] the Union to operate against them [in battle] with much greater prospect than at present."<sup>260</sup> Knox therefore asserted that making peace with the Indians was in the best interest of all, as going to war with them would hardly be worthwhile when the United States would likely be able to acquire more lands from them in the coming years.

In general, Washington's Indian policies involved strengthening the power of the federal government so that it could better handle Indian relations. One of Washington's main goals was to make sure that the federal government, not individual states, was in charge of handling all Indian relations and treaties. In a letter to Washington July, 1789, Knox confirmed his agreement that the "general Sovereignty must possess the right of making all treaties on the execution of violation of which depend peace or war."<sup>261</sup> Given the recent rise in hostilities on the frontier,

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 494.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 138.

Washington saw the demonstration of federal authority in Indian affairs as crucial. In his mind, centralization of federal power would enable the government to hold Indians and American citizens accountable for any violence they caused, thereby discouraging them from engaging in further hostilities.

There were, however, significant set-backs in Washington's efforts to ensure peace by promoting Indian confidence in the federal government. The federal government's failure to immediately engage in military combat with the Indians caused the citizens on the frontier to lose faith in the federal government's ability to protect them. They therefore implemented their own kind of punishment against the Indians, continuing more localized aggressions towards Indians. This in turn made the Indians question the federal government's sincerity and ability to uphold their promises of holding the frontiersmen responsible for killing Indians. Unfortunately, many of the victimized tribes were not actively hostile towards the United States. The Miami and Shawnee, two more western-based tribes, were particularly hostile towards citizens on the frontier, but angry frontiersmen generally attacked Indians indiscriminately. Governor St. Clair wrote Washington in September, 1789 explaining the situation: "It is not to be expected, sir, that the Kentucky people will or can submit patiently to the cruelties and depredations of those savages; they are in the habit of retaliation, perhaps, without attending precisely

to the nations from which the injuries are received..."<sup>262</sup> Thus, the hostilities on the frontier not only aggravated already existing animosity with the Indians, but also threatened the peaceful relations that the United States had managed to secure with more eastern-based tribes such as the Seneca.

While Washington and Knox both wanted to secure peace, neither was willing to compromise the overall well-being of the nation or the protection of its citizens. Washington had instructed St. Clair to use military force on the frontier only as a last resort, but by 1790, it was becoming increasingly clear that a last resort might be necessary to subdue the Indians.<sup>263</sup> In a "Summary Statement of the Situation of the Frontiers by the Secretary of War" Knox explained that Josiah Harmar had given numerous accounts of the "depredations of the Indians on the boats going down the Ohio..." Knox noted the "bad effect [these hostilities had] on the public mind...The result of this whole information shows the inefficiency of defensive operations against the banditti Shawnese and Cherokees, and some of the Wabash Indians on the north-west of the Ohio." He therefore concluded that a military expedition to punish the Indians and defend the frontier was the right course of action.<sup>264</sup> It was no secret that Washington wanted to build a stronger army when he entered the presidency. In his

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<sup>262</sup> Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:124.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>264</sup> Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:146.



first address to Congress in January of 1790, he formally proposed his goal of "of providing for the common defense." Washington was a firm believer that being "prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."<sup>265</sup> He hoped that by building up the national army he could intimidate the Indians into agreeing to peace with the United States.<sup>266</sup>

### **Harmar's Defeat**

Still hoping for a peaceful outcome, Congress nevertheless agreed to Washington's plan of using the army to intimidate the Indians. In 1790, Congress authorized an expansion of the army. Led by Josiah Harmar, the new army would have one thousand regulars and fifteen hundred militiamen from the states of Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.<sup>267</sup> By late 1790, the increasing conflict on the frontier made it clear that the Indians were not going to be intimidated into making peace, and the United States government would have to use force against them. Referring back to the Northwest Ordinance, Washington and Congress viewed this military expedition as a "just and lawful war," in which they would swiftly punish the Indians for their destruction on the frontier. In Knox's orders to Harmar on June 7, 1790, Knox stated

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<sup>265</sup> *GW Presidential Papers*, 4:544.

<sup>266</sup> *GW Presidential Papers*, 8:360; John Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 318.

<sup>267</sup> Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington*, 318.

that "No other remedy remains, but to extirpate, utterly, if possible, the [Indian] banditti."<sup>268</sup> The plan was for Harmar to lead the main body of troops west from Fort Washington to attack Miami villages along the Maumee River, while Major John Hamtramck came from Fort Knox in the west with three hundred regulars and three hundred Kentucky militiamen.<sup>269</sup>

As the United States prepared for their military expedition, the federal government came to the agreement that the British should be made aware of their plans. Since the British had not actually left their western forts after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the United States did not want the British to think the military expedition was aimed at pushing them out of the Northwest Territory and risk renewing hostilities with them. As such, Knox ordered St. Clair to contact the British commander at Detroit and explain that the expedition was purely for the purpose of punishing Indians who had been aggressive towards the United States.<sup>270</sup>

Although the British commander assured St. Clair that they were not concerned about this, they immediately notified British traders in Miami villages, who assisted the Indians by giving them supplies to prepare for an attack from the United States. When Harmar and his men reached the Miami villages in the middle of

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<sup>268</sup> *American State Papers*, 1:97.

<sup>269</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 65; Walsh, "The Defeat of Major General Arthur St. Clair," 20.

<sup>270</sup> Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:162; *American State Papers*, 1:96.

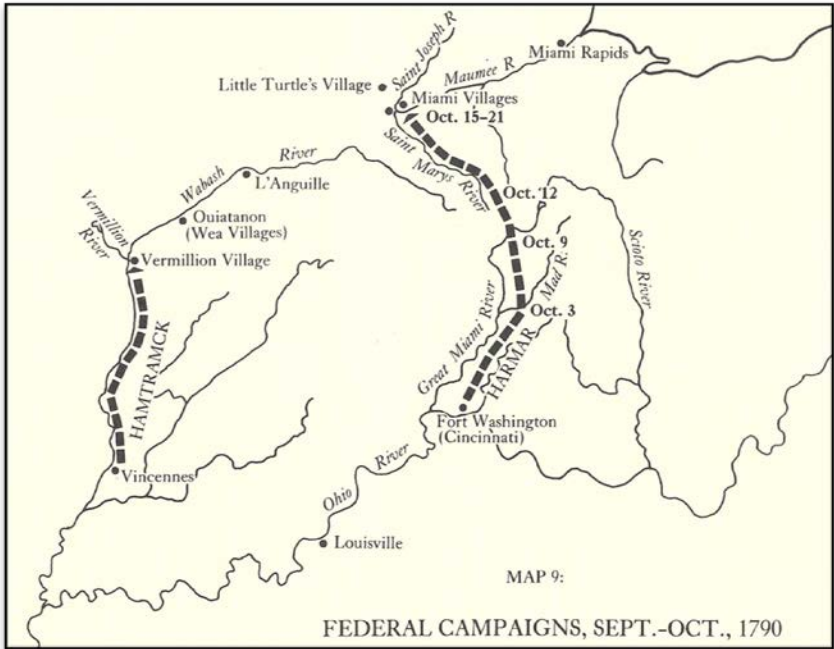
October, they found them abandoned, as the Indians had been warned ahead of time. The army burned the villages regardless, thinking that if they could not punish the Indians directly, they could at least destroy their homes and supplies. Meanwhile, Harmar sent Colonel John Hardin and approximately three hundred men to pursue the fleeing Indians. Instead of a swift subjugation of the Indians, Hardin found an ambush waiting for him and his men. Taken by surprise, the men lost all organization and dispersed. The militiamen fled the scene completely, leaving the regulars to fend for themselves. After a brutal attack that left almost two hundred dead and several dozen wounded, the regulars retreated back to the rest of the army.<sup>271</sup>

Washington was extremely angered by this loss and blamed the defeat on Harmar's perceived deficiencies. In a letter to Knox, Washington accused Harmar of being both a drunkard and an ineffective leader: "I expected *little* from the moment I heard he was *a drunkard*. I expected *less* as soon as I heard that on *this account* no confidence was reposed to him by the people of the Western Country—And I gave up *all hope* of Success, as soon as I

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<sup>271</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 66-67; Walsh, "The Defeat of Major General Arthur St. Clair," 21.

Figure 3



*Federal Campaigns, Sept.-Oct., 1790* in Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 90.

heard that there were disputes with *him* about command."<sup>272</sup> Despite Washington's fervor in his criticisms of Harmar, the responsibility of the defeat did not rest solely on Harmar's shoulders. In fact, most of Washington's assertions about Harmar's conduct were false. According to Washington biographer John Ferling, Washington was inclined to find scapegoats to blame

<sup>272</sup> *GW Presidential Papers*, 6:668.

when situations under his command deteriorated.<sup>273</sup> Harmar was certainly the easiest man to blame in this instance, and his reputation never fully recovered.

In truth, the failure of the expedition should be attributed to a myriad of factors, the most significant being the poor quality of the militia. The militia, comprised of ill-trained men not entirely fit for military work, made up the majority of the military force of this expedition. Their haste to abandon the battle as soon as they were under attack left the regulars severely outnumbered, which essentially forced them to retreat.<sup>274</sup> Moreover, the entire force was significantly weakened when Harmar authorized his troops to separate into different groups. Only a small portion of the available men were actually present during the Indian attack, as the rest had remained to burn the villages.<sup>275</sup> In the planning of this expedition, Congress specifically authorized the recruitment of more men so that Harmar would be prepared should the Indians have managed to accrue a strong force of warriors against them. Regardless of the reasoning behind Harmar's failure, hostilities on the frontier increased as a result of this direct attack on the Indians. Fear among frontier settlers was rising, and they demanded that the federal government act to protect them. The federal government hastily began plans for a new military expedition.

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<sup>273</sup> Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington*, 319.

<sup>274</sup> Walsh, "The Defeat of Major General Arthur St. Clair," 20-21; Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington*, 319.

<sup>275</sup> Walsh, "The Defeat of Major General Arthur St. Clair," 22.

## St. Clair's Defeat

Washington and Congress knew that they had to deal with the Indian problem immediately. Many Americans had not believed the Indians capable of raising a force able to defeat an organized American army. The results of the expedition proved otherwise and frontier settlers began to panic that they would be the victims of a mass Indian attack. Knox and Washington quickly set about planning for a second expedition. They appealed to Congress for an expansion of the army to three thousand men. This time they called for twelve hundred regulars, thirteen hundred volunteer levies, and five hundred rangers.<sup>276</sup> It was not too difficult for Washington and Knox to convince Congress that such an expansion was necessary, as both Harmar and Washington's administration had blamed the failure of the expedition at least partly on the inadequacy of the militia.

Harmar's failed expedition had threatened the federal government's reputation—it was now in jeopardy of being seen as incapable of protecting its citizens and ineffective in handling disputes. Yet, in some sense Harmar's defeat was advantageous to

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<sup>276</sup> A levy refers to a call for able-bodied men. While both the militia and volunteer levies consisted of non-professional soldiers, volunteer levies were comprised of men who joined the armed forces of their own accord, and were subject to military training. In contrast, the militia came together only when the need arose, and were not subject to the same standards as regulars or volunteers. As a separate entity, army rangers were developed by the British during the early colonial period. They were full-time soldiers trained specifically to work in frontier conditions to protect western forts against Indian raids. Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 71; *American State Papers*, 1:113.

Washington, as it enabled him to set the foundation for a reformation of the militia system. Washington's contemporaries had known his distaste for the militia since the Revolutionary War, and many had expected him to appeal for the creation of a large national army when he came into office. Although Washington avoided aligning with any particular political faction, like many of his Federalist contemporaries he desired a strong standing army to protect the nation and demonstrate the power of the federal government. However, Washington was aware of political tensions between the emerging Federalist and Democratic-Republican political parties. He did not want party alliances to divide the nation, and he avoided aligning with either party, despite his agreement with certain Federalist views. He knew that pushing for a standing army upon his entrance into the presidency would be viewed unfavorably by many citizens. Many Americans associated standing armies with martial law from their experiences with the presence of the British army during the Revolution.<sup>277</sup>

Washington hoped that by using more regulars and volunteers the army would be an adequately trained force to accomplish the goal of subduing the Indians. Unlike militiamen, regulars and volunteers were required to submit to traditional military discipline. These men would not only be better trained, but also act more professionally in the face of battle.<sup>278</sup> Washington

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<sup>277</sup> Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington*, 320.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

appointed St. Clair as major general of this new army, hoping that he would prove a better leader than Harmar.

St. Claire's plan was to leave Philadelphia in March, 1791, lead his army to Fort Washington in order to meet Kentucky militiamen, and then proceed with the attack in the Wabash Valley. However, St. Clair left Philadelphia later than planned and faced additional unforeseen delays, as he had difficulty acquiring sufficient numbers of men and adequate supplies. St. Clair did not reach Fort Washington until the middle of May, and even then not all the militia had arrived from other states. The troops were not fully convened until September, at which point it was late in the season to be embarking on a military expedition as they risked suffering through the winter months.<sup>279</sup> St. Clair, however, assured Knox in a letter on September 18, 1791 "that every possible exertion shall be made to bring the campaign to a speedy and happy issue."<sup>280</sup> Despite the delays St. Clair felt secure his ability to lead a successful expedition. He was certain of the superior military ability of the United States army. He felt, as did Knox and many of his other contemporaries, sure that the disjointed war tactics of the Indians would be no match for his disciplined army, even if the Indians managed to outnumber them.<sup>281</sup>

St. Clair should have not have so greatly underestimated his

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<sup>279</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 78-83.

<sup>280</sup> Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, 2:241.

<sup>281</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 108-109.



opponents; he and his men expected the Indians to be severely disorganized. But what they did not know was that the Indians, led by the Miami and Shawnee tribes, had gone to Detroit after the incident with Harmar to request assistance from the British. Blue Jacket, one of the Shawnee leaders, appealed to the British saying the United States had plans to take all their lands: "as a People we are determined to meet the approaches of an Enemy, who came not to check the Insolence of individuals, but with a premeditated design to root us out of our Land, which we and our forefathers and children were and are bound to defend, and which we are determined to do."<sup>282</sup> The commanding officers in Detroit told the Indians that they could offer no troops to support them, as they would risk getting into conflict with the United States. They did, however, offer the Indians supplies they needed to take on the American troops.

Not only were the Indians able to obtain British support, but they also managed to become much more organized than St. Clair, Knox, or Washington could have anticipated. Harmar's expedition had confirmed the fears of Indian tribes in the Wabash that the United States had the intention of usurping all western Indian lands. Other tribes, such as the Kickapoo, Wea, and Piankeshaw, who had been on the fence about combating the Americans were now convinced of American intentions and came

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<sup>282</sup> National Archives (U.K.), Colonial Office Records, Class 42, 73: 37-40, quoted in Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 105.

to the aid of the Miami and the Shawnee.<sup>283</sup> The desperate fear of losing their lands banned these tribes together. Having caught wind of the American army's plans, they made their way to the Miami villages to prepare to ambush the American army.

On November 4, 1791 as St. Clair and his men finally made their way to the Miami villages, they were met with a full-blown Indian attack.<sup>284</sup> The Indians completely surrounded the American army with organization that blindsided St. Clair and overwhelmed his men. The Indians used their traditional style of warfare and their knowledge of European war tactics to their advantage. The Indians were used to fighting as individuals, and they swiftly overtook American soldiers. They specifically targeted military officers, as they knew that without leadership the American soldiers would be completely disoriented and unable to fight as a unit.<sup>285</sup> Those who survived the attack retreated to Fort Jefferson on St. Clair's orders. The losses were devastating. Thirty-seven officers and nearly six hundred enlisted men were killed, while thirty-two officers and approximately two-hundred and fifty men were wounded.<sup>286</sup>

On November 9, after St. Clair and his men had made it back to Fort Washington, St. Clair wrote Knox to tell him of the terrible loss. Washington was furious about the results of this

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<sup>283</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 106.

<sup>284</sup> Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy*, 89.

<sup>285</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 119.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

second campaign. He was now in a difficult position and faced a great deal of criticism. How could he explain how the military expedition had failed a second time? While he was able to blame the incompetency of Harmar for the failure of the first expedition, he knew he could not blame St. Clair this time, as it would only show that he was unable to provide a capable general for this task.<sup>287</sup> Similarly, the militia could not be solely to blame, as much of the militia of the last expedition had been replaced by regulars for St. Clair's expedition.<sup>288</sup> Washington had to report to Congress news of the defeat, and a special committee was developed to investigate what led to the loss of the expedition.

As the committee sought to get to the bottom of the matter, newspapers such as the *New York Journal & Patriotic Register*, *Columbian Centinel*, *Connecticut Courant*, and *Maryland Gazette* all published accounts of St. Clair's Defeat, which stirred up a variety of public opinions.<sup>289</sup> A typical reaction to St. Clair's Defeat was a desire for revenge on the murderous Indians. A Kentucky resident wrote to a friend in Philadelphia, "The news of the defeat of the troops under Gov. St. Clair by the Indians, so far from disheartening has filled every man in Kentucky with a thirst for revenge."<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> *GW Presidential Papers*, 6:668; Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 322.

<sup>288</sup> Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington*, 322.

<sup>289</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 130.

<sup>290</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, December 21, 1791.

Some members of the public were angered that the United States had attempted such an incursion in the first place, and felt that the United States was causing unnecessary problems with the Indians: "Are we not already in possession of more lands than can be settled for a century at least? ... What better right have we to march through the centre of their country, than Great-Britain would have to march a body of troops through the centre of the United States?"<sup>291</sup> In speaking so vehemently against the Indian expeditions, this writer, under the pseudonym "Anti-Pizaro," accused the federal government of impeding on the rights of the Indians to acquire more lands. He also raised questions about the real motivations for such an excursion: "Is it to conquer more lands, or to serve as a pretence for augmenting the standing army?"<sup>292</sup> The public was clearly questioning the government's Indian policies and motivations in the Indian war. Many worried that it was part of a Federalist ploy to give the government more power.

Another segment, this time appearing in the *National Gazette*, seconded that sentiment:

The principles of the war it is hoped, will be thoroughly investigated, that the revenues of the States should not be wantonly expended in disgraceful campaigns. Americans having just

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<sup>291</sup> *Boston Gazette*, January 2, 1792.

<sup>292</sup> *Boston Gazette*, January 2, 1792.

freed themselves from an expensive war, it is our interest to promote friendship and harmony with all the world, and not to sacrifice our young men and our money, to acquire territory by war, while so much land remains unsettled, and which courts our cultivation under the auspices of peace.<sup>293</sup>

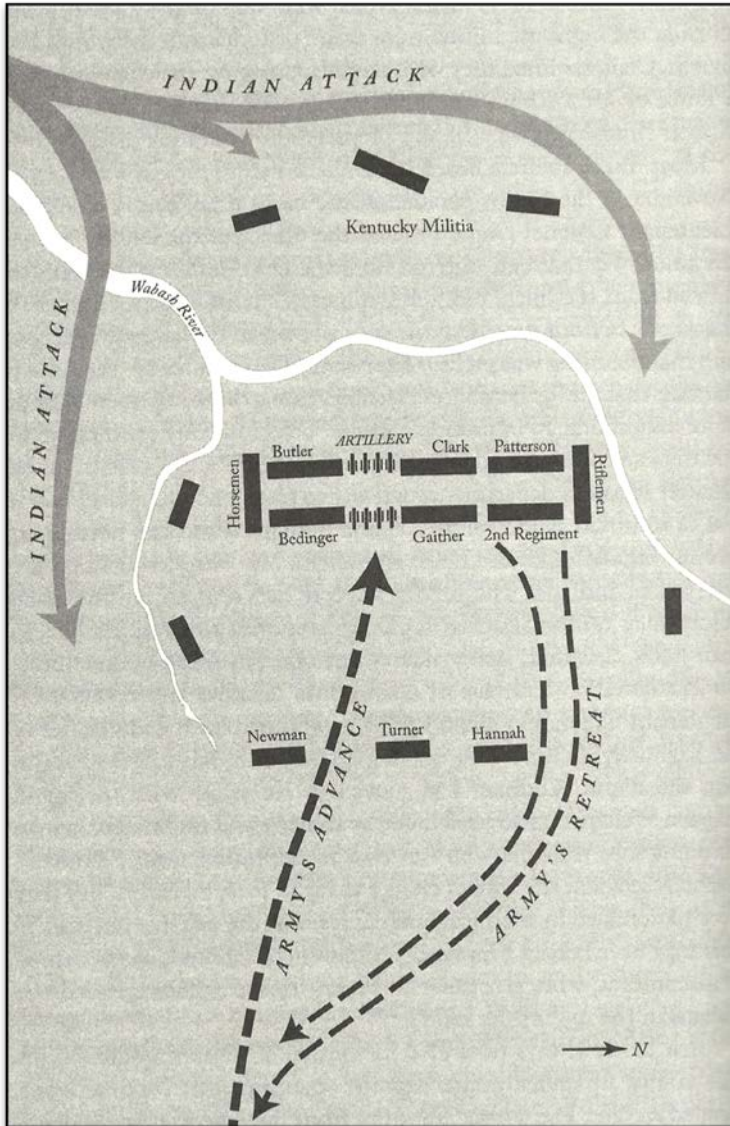
This author stated that the federal government's reckless ambitions to secure the Northwest Territory were a waste of both men and money. Moreover, he implied that engaging in an unnecessary war to acquire lands painted the United States in a negative light to other nations, making the United States seem greedy and uncompromising.

Yet, there was also a portion of the public who supported Washington and his Native American policies. Rather than asserting that the United States had selfish and unjust motives in sending soldiers into the Northwest Territory, these citizens defended Washington and the federal government, assuring readers that Washington had been forced into taking military action in order to protect the nation. In one article posted in the *Connecticut Gazette* gave an explanation of how treaties were attempted with the hostile Wabash Indians, but they declined the offer and continued their hostilities: "The campaign, therefore, of the last

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<sup>293</sup> *National Gazette*, January 2, 1792.

Figure 4



*St. Clair's Defeat Battle Map* in Colin G. Calloway, *The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 118.

and this year, were measures of necessity—The Indians had been invading our frontiers, and had killed many hundred innocent men, women and children..."<sup>294</sup> Citizens of this opinion were grateful that the government had taken action to protect them.

These inconsistent views about the Northwest Indian War are representative of the larger national debate at this time. Party alliances were becoming increasingly distinct, which resulted in starkly contrasting views about what the roles and responsibilities of the federal government should be. The special committee focused on many of these issues in their investigation of St. Clair's Defeat, questioning the amount of authority the federal government should have and what the responsibilities of elected officials were. Ultimately St. Clair was pardoned from any responsibility for the defeat. Congress and other elected officials were blamed for the delay in securing adequate funds for the expedition. Although it was not overtly stated, Washington and Knox also received a great deal of blame, as they had given the orders for St. Clair's campaign.<sup>295</sup> St. Clair's Defeat had brought on a great deal of criticism of the federal government.

### **Assertion of Federal Power and Wayne's Campaign**

It was clear at this point that there was a divide within the United States about whether this Indian war should have taken

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<sup>294</sup> *Connecticut Gazette*, January 5, 1792.

<sup>295</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 136-137.

place at all. Many people were questioning the moral validity of the war as well as the creation of an army to deal with the issue. The political divide between Democratic-Republicans and Federalists became much more distinct as Congress and Washington's administration debated what course of action to take.<sup>296</sup> The Democratic-Republicans thought that the federal government was out of its depth and abusing its power to take over the Northwest Territory, while the Federalists tended to support the power of the federal government. Throughout the debate Washington maintained that the federal government needed to be consistent and continue its aims to take control of the Northwest Territory.<sup>297</sup> Now more than ever he felt it was essential to the federal government's reputation that they succeed.

Congress tended to agree with Washington. After two failed expeditions, it would make the United States appear weak to simply give up. The federal government sincerely needed to prove its capability to its citizens. However, America's armed forces desperately needed to be salvaged after St. Clair's defeat and Congress feared that the frontier would experience the full extent of Indian wrath while they were trying to rebuild the army.<sup>298</sup> Therefore, while Washington and Knox worked on a plan for the new army, Congress authorized peace commissioners to meet with

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>298</sup> Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy*, 90.



the Indians early in 1792. The Shawnee and Miami attended the meeting, along with several of the tribes that allied with them. The Shawnee and Miami also managed to convince the Six Nations to negotiate as well, although they had minimal involvement with the Northwest Indian War.

It is unlikely that the federal government actually expected peace to come out of this meeting. Although it certainly would have been optimal for the United States for the Indians to concede to give up their lands peacefully, no one believed that to be a realistic outcome. British lieutenant governor of Upper Canada John Graves Simcoe indicated that he believed that the Indians and Americans commissioners had met for the same reason: not actually to secure peace, but to procrastinate. In fact, he believed that the meeting was only a way for both sides to be assured in their missions: for the Americans, that the Indians needed to be destroyed; for the Indians, that the United States must be stopped in their efforts to take Indians lands.<sup>299</sup>

The peace talk went exactly as expected: neither side was willing to compromise. The American commissioners attempted to assure the Indians that they wanted to make peace with them, while the Indians declared to the commissioners that if the United States did not abide by the Ohio River boundary line, there could be no peace. The commissioners held firm, saying that as the Indians'

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<sup>299</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 147.

land had been ceded in the Treaty of Paris. The Indians responded that they had never agreed to give possession of their lands to the king of England, so it was not his land to cede to the United States.<sup>300</sup> The Indians then declared that they would not leave the lands that were rightfully theirs. The American commissioners then resolved to return home, unable to make peace once more.

Meanwhile, Washington and Knox had been hard at work reforming the United States army. Now that circumstances demanded an army for the protection of the nation, Washington was able to develop a large standing army and reform the militia system, as he and his Federalist contemporaries had always wanted to do.<sup>301</sup> Knox developed a proposal for a new army of five thousand men to be enlisted for three years. In his proposal, Knox asserted that use of the militia for situations such as this would not be sufficient: "while it is acknowledged that mounted militia may be very proper for sudden enterprises, of short duration, it is conceived that militia are utterly unsuitable to carry on and terminate the war in which we are engaged, with honor and success."<sup>302</sup> Knox and Washington also reorganized the army from an infantry, cavalry, and artillery into four sublegions, each commanded by a brigadier general. Washington appointed General Anthony Wayne, another veteran of the Revolution, to command

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<sup>300</sup> *American State Papers*, 1:142.

<sup>301</sup> Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington*, 322.

<sup>302</sup> *American State Papers*, 1:199.

this army.

As for reforming the militia, Congress passed two acts that changed militia regulations. The first gave the president the ability to call upon the state militias when the nation was in jeopardy. The second act required all capable free white men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to enroll in the militia. Overall, these military reforms strengthened the power of the federal government, as they gave the government much more military authority.

With this new force under his command, General Wayne arrived at Fort Washington in May, 1793 and began to prepare for the expedition. From the beginning this campaign went much more smoothly than the others. By the end of December Wayne and his men had made their way to the site of St. Clair's Defeat, established Fort Greenville, and set themselves up to remain there for the winter.<sup>303</sup> In June, the Indians attempted an attack on the fort, but were fought off by the American army. The Potawatomi, Ojibwa, and Ottawa tribes were discouraged by this unsuccessful attack and abandoned the rest of the Miami Confederacy, greatly reducing the military power of their union. The army under Wayne's command was far more prepared for frontier fighting than that of either St. Clair or Harmar. To further weaken the Indian forces, Wayne's plan was to target the Indian villages' food and supplies as he and his army made their way along the Auglaize

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<sup>303</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 148; Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy*, 99.

River. By August, Wayne and his men held the center of the Miami Confederacy at the intersection of the Maumee and Auglaize Rivers.

On August 19, the Indians prepared to meet the American army. The battle that came to be known as the Battle of Fallen Timbers took place the following morning. When the battle occurred, it was clear the Indians were severely outnumbered. This time the American army's organization and discipline were more than adequate to take on the Indians. The Americans quickly overtook the Indians, who retreated and sought assistance from the British at Fort Miami. The British, despite their previous assistance, were now engaged in the French Revolution in Europe and unwilling to risk conflict with the Americans. They refused to help the Indians, leaving them to fend for themselves.<sup>304</sup> Thus, Wayne's army was easily able to overtake the retreating Indians. The Battle of Fallen Timbers was, finally, an American victory.

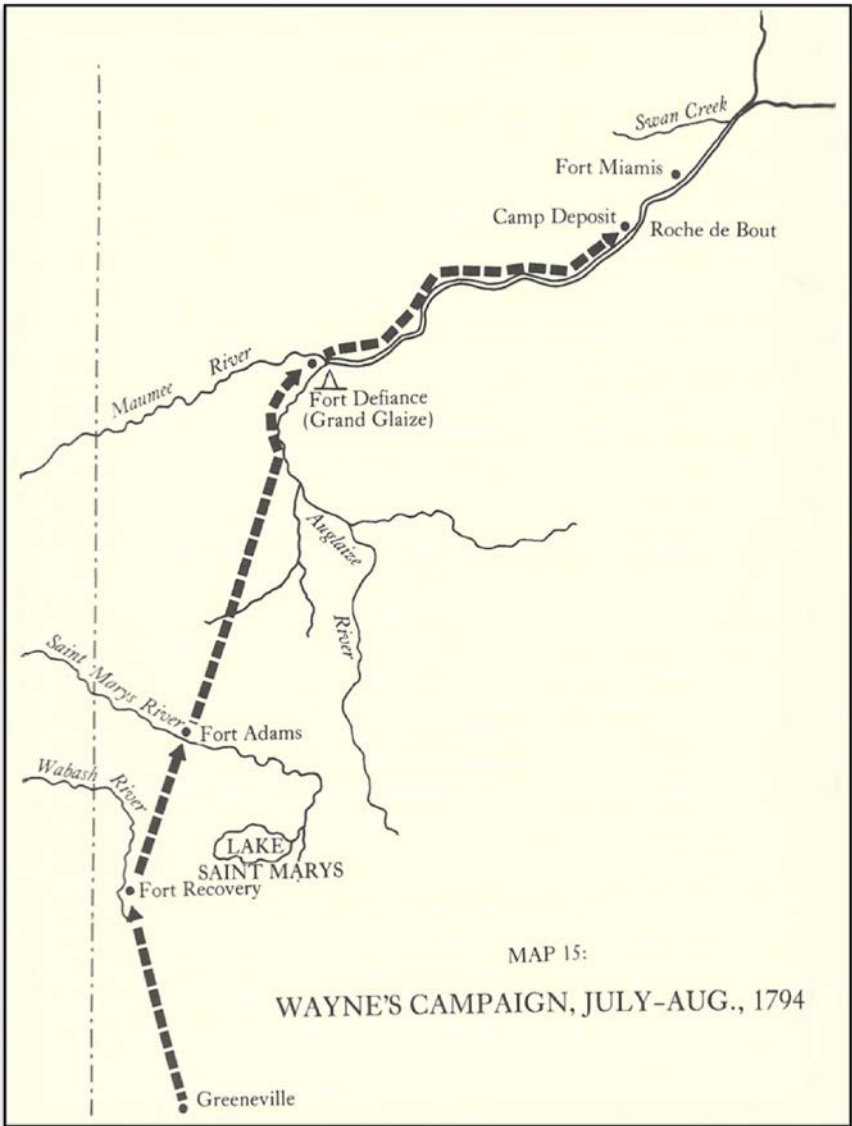
In December of 1794, Wayne met with the Indian tribes to discuss peace. They agreed to meet in June of 1795 at Greenville to set a formal treaty.<sup>305</sup> That summer, the Indians officially signed the Treaty of Greenville that waived their rights to two-thirds of Ohio and some smaller pieces of land in Indiana. Leaders of the Shawnee, Wyandot, Ottawa, and Delaware all signed the document. The Northwest Indian War was finally over and the

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<sup>304</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 150.

<sup>305</sup> Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy*, 99.

Figure 5



*Wayne's Campaign, July-Aug., 1790* in Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 274.

federal government had demonstrated its authority. To uphold authority in the Northwest Territory, the federal government maintained a military presence on the frontier to supply forts that protected western trade.<sup>306</sup> Around the same time, in November, 1794, United States delegate John Jay successfully negotiated a treaty with Britain. Jay's Treaty, as it was known, required Britain to finally relinquish its posts on the frontiers. With both treaties secured, the Americans finally had complete access to the Northwest Territory.

### **Conclusion**

What Washington and the United States federal government failed to realize was that from the moment the Treaty of Paris was signed, conflict with the Indians was inevitable. So long as Indian policy operated under the assumption that the United States was the sovereign power in the Northwest Territory, Indian tribes were going to resist. The Indians had never recognized Great Britain as the previous sovereign power in the Northwest Territory, and thus felt the United States had no valid claim to the lands, especially since the Indians had no desire to give up those lands. The federal government wanted the impossible: they wanted the lands in the Northwest Territory and they wanted them peacefully. Their unwillingness to compromise

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<sup>306</sup> Calloway, *The Victory with No Name*, 151.

any of the lands in the Northwest Territory combined with their lack of respect for Indian rights to those lands set up explosive tensions that no amount of peace treaties could alleviate.

When Washington entered the presidency, his plan to secure peace with the Indians revolved around the strengthening of the federal government. Mainly, he wanted both the Indians and the individual states to recognize the federal government as the authority on Indian affairs, and to strengthen the United States' military force in order to enforce the federal government's power. As violence escalated on the frontier, the demands of citizens for protection from the federal government erupted. However, the new nation's fragile state meant the federal government had little military power or funds to accomplish this. Two failed military expeditions against the Indians resulted in a federal reform of the army and militia system, significantly strengthening the power of the federal government. Without the violence of the Northwest Indian War, the demands for protection from United States citizens would not have driven Congress to make such federal reforms.

In this way, the events of the Northwest Indian War ultimately contributed to determining the role of the federal government in the early republic. With their demands for protection, American citizens on the frontier inadvertently conceded to a more centralized, more powerful government. Much to the chagrin of many of these citizens, the desire for a government that had the strength to protect them also created a

government with a capable force to use against them. When the Whiskey Rebellion erupted in Western Pennsylvania, Washington was able to quell the violent insurrection by calling upon the state militias in July, 1794. Such a use of force served to illustrate the newfound capabilities of the federal government to enforce their laws and policies throughout the nation.

Congress was right in asserting that the fate of the nation was tied to the acquisition of the Northwest Territory; yet, it was tied in unforeseeable ways. Beyond economic security, the events of the Northwest Indian War enabled Washington to achieve some of his goals for the nation. Washington secured a stronger, more centralized government by calling for consolidation of Indian affairs under the federal government and the creation of a federal army to protect the nation. Doing so ultimately allowed the United States to finally achieve victory in the Northwest Indian War. These policies certainly sparked contention among both citizens and Indians, raising questions as to the validity and justification of the United States' actions during the Northwest Indian War, the morality of which continues to be debated. Nevertheless, such a victory proved to American citizens, Indians, and European powers looking on that the United States was not only a force to be reckoned with, but worthy of "the respect of the world."



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