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ALEXANDER HAMILTON'S FLORIDA POLICY

by GILBERT L. LYCAN*

ALEXANDER HAMILTON had a greater interest in Florida and spoke of it more often than any other prominent American of his period. While still living in the West Indies, he worked for Beckman and Cruger at Christiansed, and during a part of that time he was in charge of their commercial activities.¹ Whenever he looked at a map of North America, which he often did in the course of his activities, he saw first of all the peninsula of Florida pointing out toward his homeland. Throughout his life Hamilton was aware of the importance of Florida in the future of the United States.

Arriving in New York in 1772, to continue his education, he soon became embroiled in the rising conflict between the colonies and England. The agitation was not entirely new to him, for the Stamp Act of 1765 had been stoutly resisted in the West Indies, and his patron, Dr. Hugh Knox, was a vocal opponent of the act. When Dr. Myles Cooper, president of King's College, where Hamilton was enrolled as a student, published an article signed "A Westchester Farmer," condemning and ridiculing the actions of the First Continental Congress, Hamilton replied by publishing "The Farmer Refuted" and "The Full Vindication of Congress."² Florida was mentioned by both correspondents. Cooper held that the action to cut off trade with Britain and the West Indies would be ineffective because the needs of the islands could be supplied through imports from Nova Scotia, Canada, and Florida. Hamilton, with his clearer knowledge of the West Indies economy and with some information on Florida, pointed out that Cooper's sug-

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1. The few facts known about Hamilton's parentage and childhood are given by Broadus Mitchell, *Alexander Hamilton*, 2 vols. (New York, 1962), I, 1-36.
2. Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, 12 vols. (New York, 1904), I, 3-177.

gestion was impractical. He then ventured onto less firm ground by expressing the hope that Florida would “erelong” join in the opposition to Britain. Apparently Hamilton’s knowledge of the political situation in Florida at that time was limited. What could Florida do in the controversy? The Florida “land monopolizers,”³ were recent arrivals who were so dependent on British favors and assistance that they were not likely to come out in opposition. Many settlers, such as those who made up the Turnbull settlement at New Smyrna, had bitter complaints against their landlords; but they eagerly joined the armed forces of Britain when given a chance.⁴ Soon after the Revolution began, disaffected loyalists began trekking into East and West Florida.

Hamilton’s Florida policy of later years was marked by his attitude toward Spain, and this was shaped by the changing conditions through the years. As the Revolution approached, Hamilton felt sure France and Spain, because of their opposition to England, would support America. To think otherwise, he said, would be to assume that those nations were inattentive to their interests and forgetful of their customary imperialistic ambitions.⁵ When these two countries failed to take quick action, Hamilton became disgusted with their reluctance to enter the conflict. He expressed only a sense of disappointment toward France, for he appreciated even her early surreptitious assistance, but he was acrimonious in his references to Spain.⁶

Toward the close of the war, Hamilton represented New York in the Continental Congress, and from that vantage point, he helped prepare the instructions being sent to the peace emissaries in Paris. He would not object to Spanish reacquisition of the Floridas if it were agreed that the northern border of those provinces were drawn at the thirty-first parallel, and if Spain recognized America’s right of free navigation on the Mississippi with a free port of deposit. He criticized the negotiators for agreeing at one time for a more northerly boundary for Florida if Britain should hold that territory: he insisted that

3. Charlton W. Tebeau and Ruby Leach Carson, *Florida from Indian Trail to Space Age*. 3 vols. (Delray Beach, 1965), I, 70.

4. *Ibid.*, I, 74-75.

5. “The Farmer Refuted,” in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, I, 164.

6. Hamilton to Robert Morris, April 20, 1781, in *ibid.*, III, 359.

the United States should not show favoritism for the common enemy.⁷

During the mid-1780s, Hamilton had little to say about Florida. The fiery liberator of Spanish America, Francisco de Miranda, spent time with Hamilton in 1784 laying plans for a future revolution to free all Spain's and Portugal's American dominions, and this is reflected in Hamilton's Florida policy during the crucial years 1798-1799.⁸ From Miranda he **also** acquired a deeper antipathy for the Spanish ways of governing.

Hamilton was quite active in his Florida policy while serving out a second term in Congress in 1787. He was a member of the committee concerned with foreign affairs. All its resolutions are in his handwriting, though it is not assumed that he alone determined the contents in every case. Congress protested to Spain because slaves from the United States were given asylum in the Floridas, and it urged a mutual policy of forcibly returning slaves who crossed the border in either direction.⁹ Apparently Hamilton supported this action, although he had previously expressed intense opposition to slavery. He must have assumed that no action harmful to blacks would follow and that the complaint would publicize Spain's weakness and America's interest in the Floridas. In accordance with a resolution of Hamilton's committee, the Congress also expressed the right of American citizens to navigate freely the Mississippi.¹⁰

In the Nootka Sound controversy of 1790, Spain and Great Britain threatened to go to war with each other. This served as an occasion for Washington and his advisors to take a long, hard look at the nation's foreign policy.¹¹ Both Hamilton

7. Francis Wharton, ed., *Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, 6 vols. (Washington, 1889), VI, 338-40.

8. William Spence Robertson, "Francisco de Miranda and the Revolutionizing of Spanish America," *American History Association, Annual Report for 1907* (1909), I, 195, 251. An indication of other distinguished Americans with whom Miranda conferred may be gained by checking his calling cards, social notes, etc., when he was in the United States. See Vincente Davila, ed., *Archivo del General Miranda*, 15 vols. (Caracas, 1929-1938), V, 244-79, XV, 73-79; Hamilton to Miranda, August 22, 1798 in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, X, 316.

9. Entries, September 15, 16, 1788, in Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 34 vols. (Washington, 1904-1937), XXXIV, 527,534-35.

10. Committee report, Continental Congress, August 25, 1788, in *ibid.*, XXXIV, 458-60.

11. Washington to Hamilton, October 10, 1790, in John C. Fitzgerald, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 39 vols. (Washington, 1931-1944), XXXI, 132.

and Jefferson advised the President to move swiftly to obtain every possible diplomatic advantage from the situation.¹² They thought it might be possible to induce the British to relinquish the Northwest posts and the area she was holding south of the Great Lakes, and Spain to cede her gulf territory as the price for American neutrality. If this failed, both considered seriously the possibilities of supporting either side if war came. Hamilton knew that the Floridas and Louisiana would have to be acquired if the United States was to continue as a united country. He urged the President to increase the country's military strength. Jefferson said nothing about military preparations though his attitude seemed more hostile, and he seemed to dread war less than Hamilton.

Hamilton saw that it might be harmful if Britain came into possession of the territories contiguous to the United States. Yet he detested Spanish intrigues in the West and her unwillingness to allow free navigation on the Mississippi. He held that Spain's aid during the Revolution was so meager and so reluctantly given that it placed the United States under no obligation. War with Spain, he told Washington, should not be a very serious undertaking, and it might become unavoidable if she persistently refused to relax her hold on the Floridas.

Jefferson instructed William Carmichael, America's chargé d'affaires in Madrid, to notify the Spanish minister that there would be no negotiation unless American citizens were granted full navigation rights on the Mississippi. Spain's arguments as to their right to a Florida boundary north of the thirty-first degree did not merit "the respect of an answer." Carmichael was to negotiate only concerning American rights in New Orleans and a complete cession of the Floridas. It would be in Spain's interest to turn over the Floridas in exchange for an American guarantee of Spain's rights to all territory west of the Mississippi. This would eliminate all points of friction between the countries and would make the United States a friend. Then if the north-

12. Frederick Jackson Turner, "English Policy Toward America in 1790-1791," *American Historical Review*, VII (July 1902), 706-35, VIII (October 1902), 78-86; Hamilton's detailed opinion, September 15, 1790, is given by Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, IV, 313-42. For all the opinions see Worthington C. Ford's *The United States and Spain in 1790* (Brooklyn, 1890), *passim*.

ern controversy should lead to war between Spain and Britain, American neutrality would be "very partial" in Spain's favor, or the United States would enter the conflict "on the side of the H[ouse] of Bourbon." As Jefferson saw it, Spain, by giving up Florida, that "narrow strip of barren, detached, and expensive country . . . secures the rest of her territory, and makes an ally."¹³

It was at this time that Jefferson announced that it would not be to "our interest to cross the Mississippi for ages. And [it] will never be our interest to remain united with those who do."¹⁴ He was serious in this, and was willing to pledge the United States never to take any territory west of the Mississippi. At no time in Hamilton's life did he look with equanimity upon the idea of accepting the Mississippi as the final westernmost boundary of the United States.

The passing of the Noottha Sound controversy did not mean that the country could take its eyes off Florida. Jefferson continued to press forward on the navigation problem, appealing always to the lofty principles of justice. British officials spoke often of the likelihood of war between the United States and Spain, and their agent, George Beckwith, after frequent conversations with Hamilton, reported to London in 1791 that the United States would "break with [Spain] tomorrow, if their condition admitted of it."¹⁵ The British consul at Charleston, G. Miller, advised his government against seizing the Floridas in case of war with Spain. He described the Floridas as a barren area, and East Florida, he thought, would especially be a "poor acquisition to any power."¹⁶ London accepted as accurate the assumption that the United States would soon go to war to obtain the coveted territory, and George Hammond, Britain's minister to the United States, was instructed in 1791 to learn all he could of America's policy toward Spain. He was informed that Britain would not try to keep America from getting the Florida territory.¹⁷

13. Jefferson to William Carmichael, August 2, 1790, in A.A. Liscomb and A.E. Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 20 vols. (Washington, 1903-1904), VII, 71-72.

14. Jefferson to Carmichael, August 22, 1790, in *ibid.*, XVII, 306.

15. March 3, 1791, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, 4. London, Library of Congress photostat.

16. G. Miller to the Duke of Leeds, September 3, 1790, in *ibid.*

17. Bernard Mayo, ed., *Instructions to the British Ministers to the United States, 1791-1812* (Washington, 1941), 16-7.

The French Revolution had a major impact on American foreign policy. Colonel W. S. Smith, John Adams's son-in-law, brought the startling news from Paris in 1792 of a plan to liberate Spain's American empire. The French, according to Smith, would not object to the United States taking Florida if in turn the Americans would cooperate with France.¹⁸ Jefferson, falling in with the plan, began protesting more vociferously against Spanish encouragement of Indian attacks on white frontiersmen.¹⁹ Spain, he claimed, was "so evidently picking a quarrel with us, that we see a war absolutely inevitable with her."²⁰ Jefferson was apparently pleased by the new turn of European diplomacy. He promptly ordered the American representatives at Madrid to forego making any agreements to guarantee Spain's territory west of the Mississippi. His previous offer to guarantee Louisiana to Spain was based on the fear that Great Britain might seize it.²¹ He seemed totally undisturbed by the thought of France taking over the same region together with areas to the south.

The spirited French minister Genet then entered the picture. With Britain in the war beginning in 1793, and with early French military reverses, it was quite impossible for the revolutionaries to dispatch an expeditionary force to America. Genet, however, laid before Jefferson a grandiose plan for moving ahead with the attack. With no ships, men, or money from his own government, he would take the offensive against Florida, Louisiana, and perhaps also Canada, Mexico, and South America! He planned to recruit settlers from the western frontier, "brave Republicans" from South Carolina, and he hoped to receive aid from the Indians.²² To finance this plan, he would turn to the United States.²³

18. "The Anas," in Liscomb and Bergh, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, I, 334-35.

19. Jefferson to Carmichael and William Short, May 31, 1793, in *ibid.*, I, 104.

20. Jefferson to James Monroe, June 28, 1793, in *ibid.*, IX, 144. Italics are in the original.

21. *Ibid.*, IX, 55-56.

22. Genet to Jefferson, December 25, 1793, *American State Papers, Foreign Relations*, I, 311; John H. Wolfe, *Jeffersonian Democracy in South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1940), 73-74.

23. Genet's official instructions are given in Frederick Jackson Turner, *Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States, 1791-1797*, American Historical Association, *Annual Report* for 1903 (1904), II,

Alexander Hamilton stopped the show. In spite of his eagerness to acquire Florida, he opposed this kind of a deal with France. Nor would he countenance cooperation with the French revolutionaries, whom he had come to detest.²⁴ Jefferson interceded on Genet's behalf, but Hamilton remained adamant, and President Washington supported him.²⁵

Genet moved ahead with his plans. Jefferson warned him against recruiting Americans on United States soil, but indicated that he did not care what kind of insurrections were stirred up in Louisisana. This was an open invitation to Genet to continue with his efforts.²⁶ The French minister became acquainted with a great many Americans, and in the summer of 1793 it seemed quite possible that he would be able to seize Louisiana and Florida. He expected the American privateersmen whom he had commissioned to cooperate with attacking land forces from Georgia. The latter would be commanded by Samuel Hammond of George with a commission of colonel "In Command of the Revolutionary Legion of the Floridas."²⁷

It was all to no avail. Money was essential, and Hamilton held the purse strings. He was more positive than Jefferson in warning against recruitment of Americans by Genet.²⁸ But he had no time to gloat over his victory. Even while he was taking the wily Genet in hand, a furor arose because of British molestation of American neutral commerce. Hamilton was aghast at the aggressive measures of Britain, and he was quick to assert that they would not be tolerated. He urged his own government to prepare for war, while at the same time he also began searching for possibilities of a peaceful solution. War with Britain, Hamilton knew, would mean also war with Spain. In one of his "Americanus" essays, he warned that the British operating from Canada and the Spanish in Florida could stir up "a general Indian war" that "would not fail to spread deso-

24. Hamilton to Washington, November 19, 1792, in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, IV, 363-65.

25. Jefferson to Washington, June 6, 1793, in Liscomb and Bergh, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, IX, 114-17.

26. Jefferson's memo concerning a conference with Genet, July 5, 1793, "The Anas," *ibid.*, I, 361-62.

27. Frederick Jackson Turner. "The Policy of France Toward the Mississippi Valley in the Period of Washington and Adams," *American Historical Review*, X (January 1905), 261.

28. Hamilton to Washington, May 15, 1793, in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, IV, 410-12.

lation throughout our frontier."²⁹ It would not be easy for the United States to seize Florida, he said, so long as the British navy was available to defend these provinces. His advice to the nation was, emphatically, prepare for war but work for peace.

It was Hamilton, more than any other person, who convinced Washington to send John Jay to London to work out an arrangement with Britain, and Hamilton wrote Jay's essential instructions. According to one authority, Jay's treaty might well be called "Hamilton's Treaty."³⁰ Upon his insistence, the treaty reiterated the mutual guarantee of free navigation on the Mississippi.³¹ British navigation on the Mississippi would not be injurious to the United States, but by mentioning it in the treaty he felt that it might somehow weaken Spain's position.³²

Spain was alarmed over the Anglo-American negotiations. Consequently, Thomas Pinckney in 1795 scored a diplomatic triumph in negotiating a treaty in which Spain conceded America's right of navigation on the Mississippi with New Orleans as a port of deposit. Spain also accepted the claim of the United States as to the northern border of Florida.³³ These points, Hamilton wrote, were "advantages of real magnitude and importance" and made him "very happy."³⁴

The Florida question was, nevertheless, far from being settled. Article IV of Pinckney's treaty stated that navigation in the Mississippi should be free only to Spain's subjects and "the citizens of the United States." Manuel de Godoy, the Spanish minister, hoped the use of the word "only" would associate the United States with Spain in excluding Britain from the Mississippi. This was not the American intention, as was made clear

29. 'Americanus,' No. 2, February 8, 1794, in *ibid.*, V, 87.

30. Samuel F. Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New York, 1923), 271.

31. For a full text of the treaty, see Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States, 1776-1883*, 8 vols. (Washington, 1931-1948), II, 245-74.

32. Washington asked for Hamilton's written opinion on all parts of the treaty. Hamilton went diligently to the heart of the matter in a long letter to the President, July 9, 1795, in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, V, 138-81.

33. For a thorough account of the negotiations, see Samuel F. Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty, America's Advantage from Europe's Distress* (New Haven, 1960), *passim*.

34. Hamilton's "The Public Conduct and character of John Adams," in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, VII, 318; Hamilton to Rufus King, May 4, 1796, in *ibid.*, X, 163. For the text of Pinckney's treaty, see Miller, *Treaties and other International Acts*, II, 318-38.

by the Anglo-American agreement in 1796.³⁵ This so disappointed Godoy that he ordered his agents in the Floridas to suspend execution of Pinckney's treaty. Navigation on the Mississippi was allowed to continue, but the Spaniards, through non-cooperation and by stirring up Indian hostility toward the American surveying party, stopped the process of marking the new northern boundary of Florida. This brought forth a renewed chorus of American complaints regarding Spanish perfidy, procrastination, and ill will.³⁶ And now a new and disturbing element entered American considerations— the belief that Spain was at the point of ceding Louisiana and Florida to the French. In 1795, the Peace of Basle was negotiated with France, which looked toward a renewal of the old alliance between the two countries.³⁷ It was widely assumed in Europe and America that this would render Spain dependent upon France. How, otherwise, could she maintain her empire against a vengeful England?

During the winter of 1796-1797 there were reports from many quarters that France had taken possession of Florida or was at the point of doing so. This was believed by some American officials in Europe, including John Quincy Adams, by British officials in London and America, and by most of the leading Federalists in the United States.³⁸ Some Republican leaders in the United States vehemently denied that America's Revolutionary War ally would be so rude as to seize these strategic territories. James Monroe, for instance, wrote from Paris that the French foreign office had assured him it was not interested in the gulf regions except possibly to keep Britain out of the area.³⁹

35. *Ibid.*, II, 346-47.

36. Arthur P. Whitaker, "The Retrocession of Louisiana in Spanish Policy," *American Historical Review*, XXXIX (April 1934), 460-62.

37. E. Wilson Lyon, *Louisiana in French Diplomacy* (Norman, 1934), 83.

38. William Barry Grove (North Carolina), to James Hogg, June 24, December 18, 1797, in Henry Gilbert Wagstaff, ed., "Letters of William Barry Grove," *James Sprunt Historical Publications*, Vol. IX, 2, 62, 65; Fisher Ames to Hamilton, January 26, 1797, in John C. Hamilton, ed., *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, 7 vols. (New York, 1850-1851), VI, 200; Oliver Wolcott to John Adams, April 25, 1797, in George Gibbs, ed., *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams*, 2 vols. (New York, 1846), I, 513.

39. Monroe to Short, May 20, 1795; Monroe to Timothy Pickering, September 10, 1796, in S.M. Hamilton, ed., *The Writings of James Monroe*, 7 vols. (New York, 1889-1903), II, 289-90, III, 62.

What did the French really think, and what policy were they actually pursuing? The French minister to the United States, the Comte de Moustier, recommended in 1789 the reacquisition of Louisiana, east and west of the Mississippi, which in his view included Florida.⁴⁰ In 1796 General Victor Collot, former governor of Guadeloupe, made a ten month's survey of the Ohio and Mississippi regions, and afterwards he also advised his government to obtain the territory all the way eastward to the Allegheny Mountains and to fortify the passes against the United States.⁴¹ By 1796 the French government had definitely adopted this as a national goal. For Tallyrand it was a personal ambition as well as a national goal to seize Spain's gulf territories and to take the Ohio valley and everything up to the Alleghenies in order to have a firm checkrein on the United States.⁴² He could not move immediately, for he had to find a way around the British navy.

France keenly resented Jay's treaty, looking upon it as a violation of the traditional France-American alliance.⁴³ Her naval forces were ordered to treat American commerce harshly.⁴⁴ By 1797 this action had become so offensive that it had destroyed the alliance, and the two nations were moving toward war with each other. In 1798 Congress, in the face of stout Republican opposition, enacted measures that led to what has been called a "limited war." There was some action at sea; American seamen defeated the French vessels that had escaped the British navy.⁴⁵

Hamilton strongly supported the resistance measures, and he charged that France was aiming at taking over Florida and Louisiana in order to cripple American independence. Yet he opposed actual war with France until every reasonable effort for peaceful accommodation had been made.⁴⁶ In doing this he had to argue against several of his Federalist colleagues, who

40. E. Wilson Lyon, "Moustier's Memoir of Louisiana," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXII (September 1935), 251-66.
41. Durand Echeverria, transl., "General Collot's Plan for a Reconnaissance of the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys, 1796," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, IX (October 1952), 513-16.
42. Turner, "The Policy of France Toward the Mississippi Valley," 249.
43. Alphonse Bertrand, "Les Etats-Unis et la Révolution Française," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 5th Series, XXXIII (May 15, 1906), 427.
44. *American State Papers, Foreign Relations*, I, 745.
45. Gardner W. Allen, *Our Naval War with France* (Boston, 1909), *passim*.
46. Hamilton to Washington, November 19, 1796, in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, X, 208-09.

saw both national and party advantages in a French war.⁴⁷ In this situation Hamilton again rose above party considerations.

Following the XYZ Affair, when Talleyrand refused to talk peace with the American commissioners but asked for bribes and made threats, it appeared obvious to most Americans, including Hamilton, that war was no longer avoidable. Congress voted funds to raise an army, and President Adams asked Washington to come out of retirement to head this force. Washington successfully insisted that Hamilton be made second in command, and that as inspector-general, Hamilton be given the responsibility for organizing the army.⁴⁸ Hamilton would fight for no small stakes. Fearing a French invasion through Spain's territories on the gulf, he decided to seize those areas for the United States. While the British navy was holding the Atlantic against the French and Spaniards, Hamilton saw his chance to move against Louisiana and Florida.⁴⁹ Britain practically begged for an alliance with the United States,⁵⁰ but Hamilton would not agree to it. From first to last, he positively turned his back on a British alliance, but he was willing to accept the cooperation of the British naval units in the gulf.⁵¹ Britain indicated readiness to make this a cooperative venture without insisting on an alliance.⁵²

In the meantime, Hamilton was secretly building and equipping an army on the Ohio for a descent upon New Orleans.⁵³ For strategic reasons, he would strike New Orleans first, though he indicated that Florida was of greater value. This was probably because Florida was so frequently on his mind. Likely also he had often contemplated the ease and certainty of the

47. Hamilton to Wolcott, November 22, 1796, in *ibid.*, 209-14; Hamilton to King December 16, 1796, in *ibid.*, 215-17.

48. Mitchell, *Alexander Hamilton*, II, 427-53.

49. Hamilton to General James Gunn, December 22, 1798, in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton* VII, 46; Hamilton to Harrison Gray Otis, January 26, 1799, in *ibid.*, X, 338-39.

50. Grenville to Liston, December 8, 1798, in Mayo, *Instructions to British Ministers*, 165.

51. Hamilton to Pickering, March 27, 1798, in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, X, 280.

52. Grenville to Liston, June 8, December 8, 1798, in Mayo, *Instructions to British Ministers*, 165.

53. Hamilton to General James Wilkinson, April 15, 1799, in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton* VII, 75-76.

acquisition of Louisiana once Florida was safely in American hands.

Hamilton made General James Wilkinson his next in command in the West even though it was widely rumored that the general was a traitor, or at least had been receiving money from Spanish authorities for carrying out treasonable activities. Hamilton and Adams refused to believe the accusations.⁵⁴ Washington at first hesitated, then went along with Hamilton in the matter.⁵⁵ James McHenry, secretary of war, was convinced that Wilkinson was a traitor, and he begged Hamilton to have nothing to do with him.⁵⁶

Wilkinson was promoted to the rank of major general, and Hamilton took him fully into his confidence. Subsequent historical research has proved that Wilkinson had been working with the Spaniards for pay, although he cut off his relations with them at this time and seemed to work loyally to help Hamilton carry out the expedition.⁵⁷ Together they prepared for an attack on New Orleans or Pensacola. Hamilton asked Wilkinson to gather as much information as possible concerning "western inhabitants," the Indians and Spaniards, and the best manner for "attacking the two Floridas."⁵⁸

Hamilton was apprehensive that Britain might be defeated in her war with France or might leave the conflict through sheer weariness.⁵⁹ In that case, a French invasion would be an immediate danger. It was reported in Congress that France already had an army of 5,000 men, mostly Negroes, in the West Indies, commanded by Victor Hugues.⁶⁰ Washington and Hamilton felt

54. Hamilton to Adams, September 7, 1799, in James Wilkinson, *Memoirs of My Own Times*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1816), II, 158; Adams to Wilkinson, February 4, 1798, in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1850-1856), VIII, 563-64.
55. Washington to Hamilton; June 25, 1799, in Fitzgerald, *Writings of George Washington*, XXXVIX, 246.
56. James McHenry to Hamilton, June 27, 1799, in Hamilton, *Works of Alexander Hamilton*, V, 283.
57. James Ripley Jacobs, *Tarnished Warrior* (New York, 1938), 166.
58. Hamilton to Wilkinson, April 15, 1799, in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, VII, 75-76.
59. Hamilton's essay, "The Strand," No. VI, April 19, 1798, in *ibid.*, VI, 303; William B. Giles (Virginia), March 29, 1798, *Annals of Congress, 1789-1824*, 42 vols. (Washington, 1834-1856), VIII, 1352.
60. Robert Goodloe Harper (South Carolina), April 24, 1798, *ibid.*, VIII, 1530-31.

that any French invasion would come in the South, most likely through New Orleans or Florida.⁶¹

Hamilton's plan of action was kept so well under wraps that some aspects of it are not clear even now to the historian. Wilkinson recommended a military buildup at Loftus Heights on the Mississippi from which to "carry a coup-de-main against the capital below."⁶² Washington and Hamilton thought this point was too close to the Spaniards and would alert them prematurely to the movement being planned.⁶³ It was decided to bring the forces together far up on the Ohio, from which point, Washington said, it would be possible to "descend the river like lightning" and hit the enemy unawares.⁶⁴ The project worked out by Hamilton and Wilkinson called for seventy-five boats, each to carry forty men with "baggage and stores."⁶⁵ Thus Hamilton proposed to move out on the high waters in the spring of 1800 with an army of 3,000 men to attack the Spaniards at St. Louis and New Orleans. From New Orleans it would sweep eastward to enfold Florida with the assistance of the British navy which was being offered on almost any terms the Americans might desire.

Apparently much of Hamilton's lifetime ambition was about to be fulfilled. In 1790 he had perceived that the permanence of the national union required the acquisition of Florida. This acquisition, it seemed, was about to be made. In 1774 he had hoped Florida would "erelong" join in American resistance to Britain. Was the union about to occur?

The climax was in the plan and the preparation— not in the world of actual events. President Adams supported the navy but starved the army. Vice-President Jefferson saw, nevertheless, that the only way to stop Hamilton was to prevent the French attacks on American commerce. This he thought he could do by informing the French government of Hamilton's and Washington's plans. The generals had tried desperately to keep their

61. Washington to Adams, July 4, 1798; Washington to Pickering, October 18, 1798; Washington to McHenry, July 11, 1789, in Fitzgerald, *Writings of George Washington*, XXXVI, 313, 324, 497.

62. Wilkerson to Hamilton, April 15, 1799, Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress Manuscripts Division, Vol. 39.

63. Hamilton to Washington, September 9, 1799, in Lodge, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, VII, 124.

64. Washington to Hamilton, September 15, 1799, in Fitzgerald, *Writings of George Washington*, XXXVII, 364.

65. Hamilton to McHenry, October 29, 1799, Hamilton Papers, Vol. 58.

secret, even by camouflaging appropriation bills, but they could not keep their plans hidden from Jefferson. Learning that Victor duPont, whom President Adams had refused to receive as a consul from France, was returning to Europe, Jefferson asked him to inform Talleyrand that his country's attacks on American commerce were ruining the pro-French Republican Party and that Hamilton was preparing to march on New Orleans.⁶⁶ Talleyrand immediately saw that he must win the good will of the United States or see his own Louisiana-Florida dream vanish,⁶⁷ and he begged Adams for a renewal of peace negotiations.

Adams and many of his friends thought there was but a slight chance that France would grant acceptable terms, and it was humiliating to the President to send yet another peace commission to France after the repeated rebuffs he had met. But Adams had come to dislike Hamilton, and he was willing to go to almost any lengths to keep him from vaulting to the high level of esteem that would surely follow a gulf victory. Adams named William R. Davie, Oliver Ellsworth, and William Vans Murray as his new peace emissaries.⁶⁸ Hamilton's activities were immediately halted. Without funds he could not build the boats or the fortifications thought necessary, and the Mississippi question fell into other hands.⁶⁹

Peace with France the following year opened the way for Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase in 1803.⁷⁰ Numerous Federalist leaders, influenced by party considerations or sectionalism, opposed the purchase. Timothy Pickering protested against "the purchase of an immense territory which we did not want, and at such a price."⁷¹ Party preference did not go that far with Hamilton. "It is a noble bargain," he affirmed, and he used

66. Whitaker, "The Retrocession of Louisiana in Spanish Policy," 467; E. Wilson Lyon, "The Directory and the United States," *American Historical Review*, XLIII (April 1938), 529; J.A. James, "Louisiana as a Factor in American Diplomacy, 1795-1800," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, I (June 1914), 54.

67. Lyon, "The Directory and the United States," 518.

68. *American State Papers, Foreign Relations*, II, 239-40; Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Life of John Adams*, I, 347-547, in *Writings of John Adams*.

69. Miller, *Treaties and other International Acts*, II, 457-79.

70. *Ibid.*, 498-505.

71. Pickering to Caleb Strong, November 22, 1803, Timothy Pickering Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

his influence energetically to obtain ratification of the treaty.⁷²

Indeed this did not fulfill Hamilton's dream concerning Florida, but it was an important step in that direction. Before his life ended the following year, he must have reflected often on how he had helped to guide the nation through his publications, his correspondence, his congressional resolutions, and his counsel, toward the eventual acquisition of that part of North America that lay closest to his boyhood home, the peninsula of Florida.

72. Hamilton's views on the treaty were expressed in editorials in the *New York Evening Post*, see especially the issue, July 5, 1803.