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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolution of offensive and defensive maritime economic warfare, and the Royal Navy's use of commercial and naval blockades and mercantile convoys during successive wars, particularly its successful use by Britain in the Anglo-American war of 1812-15. Its legality, tactical and strategic development and contemporary government policy, including impressment are studied. Comparison is made of the nature and development of the British and American economies, their vulnerability to economic warfare and the expediency of its use by Britain against the United States discussed. Legal and practical constraints upon British convoys and blockades are studied and practical solutions reviewed. Economic aspects of the causes, conduct and effects of the war are surveyed, including the impact of Britain's commercial blockade on American commercial, fiscal, financial, economic and political infrastructures, and therefore the United States ability and preparedness to continue fighting. The effectiveness of the naval blockade supplementing Britain's commercial blockade of the United States, is also assessed.

The long-standing problem of the relative effects of British commercial blockade and the at times contemporaneous American legislative 'restrictive system', is resolved by comparison of current New England commodity prices at specific times. Prices before the repeal of Madison's second Embargo are compared with subsequent prices, and with those after the British blockades are later extended to neutral trade with New England.

The effectiveness of British economic warfare on the American economy under two successive commanders is evaluated. An objective

assessment of the strategy's eventual impact on the war's outcome and later policies is made, and of how far each belligerent's war aims were met by the negotiated peace. The effectiveness of Britain's use of economic warfare against the United States has long been seriously under-estimated.



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Source: Foreign Secretary Lord Hawksberry to Anthony Merry, British Minister at Washington, 16 September 1803, in Mayo B. ed., *Instructions to British Ministers to the United States 1791-1812*, Washington, Annual Report to the American History Association, 1936, 3 vols., vol. III, p.200.

All quotations retain the original spelling and punctuation.

## **Introduction.**

“[T]he noiseless, steady, exhausting pressure with which sea power acts,[was] cutting off the resources of the enemy while maintaining its own, supporting war in scenes in which it does not itself appear or appears only in the background, and striking blows only at rare intervals.”(1)

Careful study of the War of 1812 between Britain and the United States began almost as soon as it ended in February 1815. Having been described then in America as a “second war of independence”, the war remains both important and controversial. From the outset, each study tended to concentrate on particular aspects of the war. In 1817, William James, a British lawyer-turned historian was meticulous in refuting some of the more extravagant contemporary American naval claims in his *Full and Correct Account of the chief Naval Occurrences of the Late War...*(2) Since then, almost every separate action has been minutely dissected, and its naval and military significance analysed at length.

Alfred Mahan’s *Sea Power in Its Relations to the War of 1812*, published in Boston in 1905, also dealt in detail with the war’s early single-ship actions, which caught the public imagination then and since.(3) Mahan’s description and evaluation of British maritime blockades against the United States, was part of his argument in favour of “a naval force adequate to the protection of our commerce”.(4) He attributed the bankruptcy of New England merchants to British maritime blockade, but stopped short of admitting the eventual insolvency of the American government. He quoted a “distinguished naval officer”, who noted the “stagnation” of “both foreign and domestic commerce”, and who endorsed the exaggerated claim that American coastal trade had been “entirely annihilated”, together causing the

merchant's inability to continue funding the war, and "the cause of that *impending* bankruptcy with which the Government was *at one time threatened*."(5) Mahan then reverted to his theme; the need for a large American fleet.

Also in 1905, Theodore Roosevelt's chapter on the naval war of 1812 in Clowes' *History of the Royal Navy*, forcefully advocated the United States' "possession of a great fighting navy."(6) Citing Henry Adam's examples, Roosevelt noted that "the unceasing pressure of the British fleet" on America's "extended seaboard", had "created the wildest inequalities in the prices of commodities in different parts of the county."(7) Roosevelt conceded that, "throughout the last year of the war, the blockade was so vigorous that the shipping rotted at the wharves of the seaports and grass grew in the business quarters of the trading towns". He did not however discuss the impact of the loss of American foreign trade on tax revenues and government borrowing, or the Madison administration's resultant bankruptcy and abandonment of its original war aims.(8)

In 1969, Reginald Horsman's *War of 1812* briefly discussed, in the course of a general history of the war, how its American financing was "essentially unsound". Citing an authority on Gallatin, the American Secretary of the Treasury in 1812, and Henry Adam's history of Madison's administration, Horsman outlined the outcome of each successive attempt of the United States government to borrow sufficient funds to continue the war.(9) Like Adams, he conceded that when the last attempt failed, "the country was bankrupt", and that by 1814, the government was unable to pay the interest on its debts. Horsman however, attributed the American



government's financial difficulties to the lack of preparedness amongst New England's Federalist minority to lend the proceeds of their trade, increased by their deliberate exclusion from Britain's initial maritime blockades. In doing so, Horsman provided an incomplete and unjust explanation, and although coming closest to the connection between British blockades and American financial collapse, left much unexplained, which the present study will rectify.

By 1983, J.C.A. Stagg justifiably felt that, "Certainly, the [American] Treasury was increasingly embarrassed by the lack of funds to finance the war, but the reasons for this were broadly political in nature, and not really the fault of the department itself."<sup>(10)</sup> He did not go on to attribute the erosion of tax revenue, the dislocation of the economy and the government's eventual inability to borrow further, to the loss of American foreign trade through British maritime blockade. Of the final Ghent peace treaty, Stagg conceded that, "the time of making it [was] more fortunate than the peace itself."<sup>(11)</sup>

In 2006, Ian Toll traced the need for the American Navy's eponymous *Six Frigates* without reflecting far on the impact of their inability to leave port at will, or more importantly, the fiscal and financial consequences of their failure to lift the British commercial blockade of the United States until the peace.<sup>(12)</sup> Jon Latimer's *1812 – War with America* of 2007, discusses the role of British "raids and blockades" in hindering the American war effort, and in diverting American attention from the land war over the possession of Canada, as well as in confining to harbour much of the

American navy, but again without dwelling long, or in detail, on the fiscal and financial consequences of the blockades.(13)

Recent studies include Wade Dudley's attempt to quantify the relative efficiencies of Britain's maritime blockades in a "comparative analysis" of those against France, between 1793 and 1802 and between 1803 and 1814, and of the United States between 1812 and 1815.(14) Valid quantification of the effectiveness of blockades so geographically dissimilar is almost certainly impossible when important factors apply to only one of the two locations of the blockades. The British blockade of Brest, conducted by vessels released in turn for repair and re-supply to Torbay or Plymouth, has to be compared with the initial blockade of the Chesapeake and Delaware, and eventually all of the 2,000 mile American eastern seaboard, by vessels repairable only by the limited facilities of Halifax, Nova Scotia, or Bermuda, or by re-crossing the Atlantic.

Inevitable contact with the American shore involved a greater risk of desertion than rarer landings in France, and imposed an unavoidable constraint on British inshore operations against the United States, applicable only there. Apparently objective 'scores', attributed by Dudley to the consequences of each blockade, purport to measure their effectiveness, although attempted quantification of the "public outrage" induced by each blockade must surely be largely subjective. The assertion that London's increased marine insurance rates indicate a significant risk to British overseas trade from American warships, including privateers, is apparently contradicted by Rodger's finding that generally, rates were, "no higher between 1812 and 1814 than they had been between 1810 and 1811".(15)

Dudley's conclusion that the British blockades of the United States were comparatively unsuccessful, neither bears close examination, nor appraises their consequences.

In 1991, Nicholas Tracy's *Attack on Maritime Trade* appeared to agree with President Madison's legalistic argument that, since some American vessels successfully evaded the British blockading squadrons, the blockades themselves were ineffective and therefore illegal, and should be discontinued.<sup>(16)</sup> But, no complete blockade of the entire American coastline, 'close' or 'distant', was ever either feasible or contemplated. If however, the British naval blockade could contain enough of the United States navy to prevent any lifting of the Royal Navy's commercial blockade until the peace, and prevent American interference with British landings almost anywhere on the enemy coast, then by any standards, it was efficient enough. If the British commercial blockade was efficient enough to exploit the vulnerability of the import-dependent American tax-gathering system, and expose the irrationality of lending further to a government unable to pay its present debts, then comparison with other blockades is unnecessary. If the blockades have combined to dislocate the American agrarian, commercial, fiscal, financial and therefore political infrastructures, such as to make peace necessary for national survival, they have performed their task. Whether or not this was the case, will be investigated by what follows.

It would appear that the results of the long-term imposition on the United States of British maritime blockades, both commercial and naval, have not been sufficiently discussed, and therefore, their possible effectiveness seriously under-estimated. Whether or not the application of Britain's sea and

naval power to its new enemy was successful, while its war against Napoleonic France continued, deserves further attention. The purpose of the present study therefore, is to investigate the link between the British maritime blockades of the United States, their fiscal, financial, economic and political consequences, and the subsequent preparedness of the American administration to end the war of 1812 on terms significantly favourable to Britain, a task not before undertaken at sufficient depth.

Chapter 1 defines the theory and practice of maritime economic warfare, in the form of offensive blockades and defensive convoys, crucial manifestations of British seapower. It outlines the legal and practical development of blockade and its use in a succession of British wars, with its implied conflict with neutrals, including, by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, an emergent United States. Chapter 2 discusses the practical and legal constraints on the use of these forms of economic warfare, and the potential solutions then available. Chapter 3 notes the interdependence of the economies of Britain and the United States after American independence, and the implications of their respective stages of economic, fiscal and financial development. It detects the vulnerability of the American agrarian economy, especially with the administration's dependence on foreign trade for raising its revenue and borrowing funds, especially when in conflict with the world's greatest exponent of maritime economic warfare. It compares the economic, fiscal and financial infrastructures of the two economies and their potential capacity for use in any prolonged conflict.

Chapter 4 traces the development of Britain's economic warfare against the United States in the North Atlantic and the Caribbean, under

Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren, from his assumption of command in August 1812, until his replacement in April 1814. Chapter 5 discusses the implementation of maritime economic warfare by his successor, Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, from April 1814, until the end of the war in February 1815, by which time hostilities had also reached the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific. Chapters 6 and 7 examine in turn the respective effectiveness of Britain's economic warfare against America under Warren's and Cochrane's leadership, tracing in each case its implications for the economy and administration of the United States, and its capacity to continue the war.

Empirical evidence for the impact of the progressive application of the commercial blockade of the United States, is presented in Chapter 7, found by monitoring changes in the prices of commodities such as sugar, and of the American government's securities, such as Treasury notes.<sup>(17)</sup> Comparison of changes in commodity and security prices, and the chronology of major political and maritime events will therefore measure the relative effects of embargo and blockade, a recurrent and difficult problem in assessing the significance of British economic warfare in North America. An objective assessment of the effectiveness of Britain's economic warfare against the United States is reached in a Conclusion.

The extent to which Britain's seapower – the use of a merchant fleet of more than two million tons – was able to continue to support Britain's overseas trade, including its vital trade with British North America and the West Indies during the war with the United States, forms part of the enquiry. The study investigates how far British trade protection allowed the export of significant quantities of Britain's manufacturing output, clearly crucial to

Britain's continued ability to finance its war efforts, and the maintenance of international communication, on which Britain's predominant financial position partly depended. This study will also attempt to resolve whether by the successful convoying of merchantmen, British naval power continued to facilitate the importation, not only of crucial raw materials, but also of colonial produce then processed into important re-exports.

Whether or not the Royal Navy could at the same time destroy or capture sufficient American merchant vessels to make a significant impact on the United States' crucial customs duties, the American administration's largest single source of tax revenue, and its ability to finance the war, is therefore a vital part of the study. Whether or not the British commercial blockade could sufficiently deplete the private incomes from which savings might be lent to the American government, or so far lower employment as to erode the Republican Party's electoral strength, will also be addressed. The study will investigate whether prolonged and widespread British dislocation of American trade would interfere sufficiently with the United States' money supply, and the everyday value of currency in both government and private transactions, to erode the user's trust in the current administration, or even in the federal structure of American political Union. The work will ask how far the inflation apparently caused by commercial blockade would reduce American financial support for war, already seen by some, especially in New England, as an ill-advised method of addressing concerns over relations with Britain.

In short, this study will determine the level of effectiveness of British maritime strategies, both the defensive convoy protection and the aggressive

commercial and naval blockades. In particular, it will investigate how far the blockades contributed to producing a satisfactory conclusion to the war for Britain through their fiscal and economic impact. In doing so it will examine the part of the Royal Navy in North America between 1812-15 in providing an early example of remarkably successful economic warfare.

## **Chapter 1.**

### **Convoys and Blockades: The Evolution of Maritime Economic Warfare.**

“Fleets employed to cover a coast, are not only precarious in their exertions, which depend much upon winds, but are miserably confined as to all the effects of naval war. Those effects are only felt when our fleets can keep the sea to protect our commerce and annoy that of our enemies, as well as to defend our distant possessions, and to cover descents and continued incursions.” Wm Eden, MP., Commissioner for Conciliation with America, 1778-9. (1)

### **Definitions: The Theory and Practice of Economic Warfare**

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, maritime blockade was the offensive arm of economic warfare, used against an enemy in conjunction with the convoy protection of a nation's own overseas trade. ‘Offensive blockade’ was used to describe the interception of an enemy's merchant, transport or naval vessels, usually on their entering or leaving harbour. Defensive economic warfare involved the gathering of merchant vessels to sail as convoys under the armed protection of as many warships as could be spared. Belligerents with sufficient naval means were increasingly expected to impose a policy of ‘stop and search’ on all vessels found in specified areas, and those carrying goods ‘interdicted’ by proclamation as ‘contraband’, were at best turned back, or otherwise detained. Crews and cargoes thought likely to benefit an enemy were either subject to an enforced sale, or subject to law, confiscated. At the beginning of each European war, legislation had been needed to legitimise what otherwise would have constituted piracy, almost universally condemned, but nonetheless still practised in some parts of the world. As each war began, the British Parliament had passed Prize Acts under which a High Court of Admiralty could declare vessels found breaching blockades to be legally ‘prizes of war’.



Vessels engaged in offensive naval or commercial blockade would often have been well placed to take other measures, such as the interception of an opponent's diplomatic communications or personnel, perhaps gaining foresight of an enemy's intentions, or gathering useful intelligence about the effectiveness of their government's own measures. In time, an effective blockade might leave an enemy both economically and diplomatically isolated, potentially deprived of military, financial, logistical, diplomatic or moral support. The psychological pressure of such isolation might eventually increase an enemy's willingness to negotiate.

A maritime power could impose a commercial blockade of an enemy's ports to hinder their trade. A naval or 'military' blockade, could reduce, if not preclude their ability to send out warships to lift a commercial blockade, or dispatch transports with troops to fight elsewhere. Overseas communication could be delayed or prevented. Used together by a belligerent with sufficient maritime resources, in the long run, such blockades were likely to prove effective. For neutrals however, it was at best inconvenient and costly, and at worst a breach of their maritime sovereignty and as such, deeply resented. Traditionally, the practice had evolved that neutrals should be given sufficient prior notice by proclamation in an official publication, in Britain's case the *London Gazette*, to allow neutral vessels to avoid confrontation. By what was sometimes referred to as the "Law of Nations", maritime blockades were also to be conducted throughout by a naval force large enough for it to be uninterrupted, and evenly applied to all those whose interests might be damaged by them. An insufficiently strong or intermittent blockading force would lead to accusations of it being an illegal, 'paper

blockade', said to contravene the putative "Law of Nations". The legitimacy of such a body of law however, was not universally agreed.

In practice, blockading squadrons would routinely be expected to perform several roles at once, with perhaps different degrees of importance. A naval blockade would aim for the incarceration of an enemy's warships in harbour, ideally to take no further part in the war. A maritime commercial blockade would seek to deprive an enemy, not only of the physical resources and economic benefits of imports, but also of the profits from the export of a domestic surplus, or processed re-exports, and therefore the revenue from the taxation of overseas trade, such as shipping registration and enrolment fees, lighthouse dues, or the customs duties on imports. Governments frequently placed duties on the importation of essentials like salt, or luxuries such as wine. The demand for such goods was often price and income-inelastic, such taxes were therefore reliable, and cheap to administer, but vulnerable to foreign interference. By prolonged and widespread interference with an enemy's overseas trade, maritime powers could realistically expect to inflict, comparatively cheaply, sufficiently serious economic damage on an enemy to impair their ability to continue a war.

In such wars at sea, 'public' warships were often supplemented by 'privateers', armed and often heavily-manned, privately-owned warships, primarily intended to make shared profits by capturing enemy merchant vessels, although sometimes also carrying cargoes. Their hostile actions were legitimised by government-issued 'letters of marque'.<sup>(2)</sup> They commonly complemented the activities of state-owned warships provided by

governments, or nominally in Britain's case, the Crown. Privateers will be, generally, outside the scope of this work.

Royal Naval prizes sent into Halifax, Nova Scotia between 1812 and 1815 are shown as Appendix A, Table 1. In measuring the effectiveness of the Royal Navy's economic warfare and its blockades of the United States, all prizes of privateers have been excluded from this list, and from calculations based on the totals. Fay Kert's comparison of British prize tonnages taken into Halifax after capture by privateer and Royal Naval vessels throughout the war, shows that privateers appear to have concentrated on taking smaller enemy vessels.<sup>(3)</sup> In 1813, for example privateers took an almost 6% greater share of the total tonnage of vessels under 100 tons than the Royal Navy, but took only 7.7% of the Royal Navy's capture of vessels over 200 tons. All enemy vessels of over 200 tons were taken in 1814 and 1815 by Royal Naval vessels, as distinct from privateers.

The priority for privateers was profit making, their tactical decisions being based on expediency, even risk avoidance, rather than the strategic aims of their national government, beyond its definition of 'enemy' and 'neutral'. Those operating privateers were less accountable than naval officers commanding warships, and links with government policy more likely to be found in official correspondence than in the largely unrecorded views of those simply seeking profit. Since this study will concentrate on the effectiveness of the traditional British government policy of economic warfare, especially blockade, it will focus on the activities of the British Royal Navy, or those of the 'public' warships of the United States Navy, and the commercial vessels of both countries. It will attempt to measure the economic, fiscal, financial

and political effects of Britain's blockades of the United States as the major part of the economic warfare waged by the Royal Navy between 1812 and 1815.

### **Vice Admiralty Courts: The Process of Law**

Captured vessels were usually sent under a prize crew into a port of the captor's country, in either homeland or colony, to be 'libelled' and brought before a specialist court to be tried. For British prizes, this would be in one of thirty Vice-Admiralty Courts established in such ports around the world. The prize would normally be brought under the jurisdiction of the Court nearest to the point of capture. Judges expert in maritime law would hear evidence and legal argument before deciding whether or not a vessel should be 'condemned' as in breach of a properly constituted blockade. Such a vessel, and probably its cargo, would be liable to confiscation and subsequent sale, or if found to be within its rights when captured, restored to its legitimate owners. The legal process was inevitably lengthy and expensive.

Eventually, the net proceeds of sale at auction were shared on a sliding scale based on seniority and responsibility. According to scales revised in 1808, captains would receive two-eighths of the prize money, less a third paid to directing flag officers. Naval lieutenants, masters, physicians, and captains of marines would share another eighth. Midshipmen and senior petty offices such as gunners, bosuns and carpenters would receive shares of a further eighth. The remaining half of the prize money was divided between

petty officers and ratings, a distribution system which successfully motivated blockading operations until 1815.(4)

Once condemned, particularly when new, vessels taken as prizes could legally be taken into the blockading force, often as tenders to larger vessels, useful for entering harbours and penetrating estuaries. Less properly, captured cargoes were sometimes immediately confiscated at sea, and diverted to the captor's own use. Other prizes were burned, or even blown-up, to avoid the captor's need to allocate a prize crew, with the real risks of under-manning. Often unpopular with crews deprived of prize-money, such tactics nevertheless effectively reduced the cost and inconvenience of maritime blockade. Governments often paid 'head money' to captors as an incentive for the capture of enemy crew members, often highly and expensively trained seamen, further reducing the opponent's ability to continue fighting.

Captured enemy vessels and cargoes were not infrequently, although often illegally, released on payment of a cash ransom, paid in specie, money in precious metal form. Such vessels could complete their present interrupted voyage, but might be captured again on a subsequent voyage, adding further to the illicit rewards of maritime blockade. Conversely, blockading vessels would often intercept and re-capture vessels of the same nationality as themselves or their allies, releasing their crews from often lengthy captivity, and making prisoners of the enemy's prize crew.

## **Close and Distant Blockade**

Close blockade could be conducted 'inshore', defined as being within sight of land. Especially when long enemy coastlines were to be blockaded, small, shallow-draught vessels could more easily avoid natural obstacles, and could prove useful in penetrating estuaries and inlets. Light, handy vessels could intercept coastal shipping and fishing vessels, interrupt communications, and gather intelligence by observing activity in enemy harbours, reporting to heavier forces further offshore, which could be summoned to prevent enemy attempts to enter or leave port. Distant blockade, conducted by larger vessels better able to withstand heavier seas, possibly remaining beyond the horizon, could cover a wider stretch of enemy coastline, and perhaps several ports. Their sometimes unseen but continual presence could exert psychological pressure on those blockaded. In good visibility, patrolling squadrons of far separated vessels, signalling to each other with flags by day and lights by night, could detect enemy activity within distances of up to thirty miles. By 1812, such blockades had been used by Britain since January 1793, often with great effect against both Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, broken by the Peace of Amiens for only 14 months, between March 1802 and May 1803.

## **Convoys and Blockades: The Evolution of Maritime Economic Warfare**

The use of maritime blockade however, had long been controversial. The denial of free passage at sea to enemies or commercial rivals had been practised in medieval Europe by those maritime powers able to enforce

claims of sovereignty over neighbouring and quite distant seas. Venice enforced its ownership of the Adriatic, Denmark and Sweden had disputed control of the Baltic until agreeing to share it in 1622, while the English had claimed sovereignty of the 'British Seas' from the coasts of Norway to those of Spain. Formalised maritime rights were initially based on accumulated decisions taken around the Mediterranean known as the 'Consolato del Mare', the Consulate of the Sea, first published in 1494, and long widely accepted.

(5)

However, in 1604, the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius applied international and 'natural' law, as distinct from traditional or ecclesiastical rulings, to maritime prize taking, and in 1633, re-published *De Mari Libero*, which argued that seas were free for common use, a principle welcomed by neutrals.(6) English writers however, including John Sheldon and John Boroughs re-asserted the national right to exclusive control of defined areas of sea. Sir John Borough's *The Sovereignty of the British Seas Proved by Records* had been written in 1633, but not published until 1651. It was followed by Charles Malloy's *Treatise of Affairs Maritime and of Commerce*, first published in 1676, and regularly reprinted to become, "the standard English language interpretation of international maritime law". Malloy's *Treatise* is described as, "one of the most extreme legal arguments for England's sovereignty of the sea, which he claimed extended from Cape Finisterre to Van Staten in Norway." (7) This body of legal opinion, especially where it concerned the maritime rights of neutrals, was to become significant on both sides of the Atlantic.

Maritime blockade had played a practical part in English politics between 1649-53 when used in eradicating resistance to the Commonwealth by containing a small royalist naval force under Prince Rupert. Successively blockaded in a number of ports, the royalist force was eventually disbanded in 1653. Only after the English republic's navy had blockaded the port of Dunkirk in 1652, had it obtained the diplomatic recognition of France.(8) Maritime blockade could be diplomatically powerful.

It was during the first Anglo-Dutch war of 1652-4 that maritime economic warfare developed characteristics later to become familiar in North American waters. Competing Dutch merchantmen were obliged to pass through the North Sea and English Channel where they were vulnerable to attacks from English warships. The Dutch countered this *de facto* commercial blockade by attacking English warships with their own, and by convoying their merchantmen with some success. Contact between the rival warships led to successive fleet actions, but Dutch commerce had been temporarily disrupted. Although Dutch seaborne trade was to recover quickly after the Treaty of Westminster ended the war in 1654, a workable English strategy of commercial blockade had been developed.(9) Britain had by this time established the basics of its offensive and defensive maritime economic warfare. Any of the enemy's trade was contraband, and the defence of Britain's trade was a naval responsibility, to be implemented respectively by commercial blockade, protected by complementary naval blockade, and by the convoy protection of merchant vessels, principles to be further developed in a succession of future wars.



English blockade of the Spanish coast was less successfully attempted during Cromwell's war with Spain, although some New World silver was seized in the Canaries, reducing Spanish capacity to finance war elsewhere. A blockade of Dutch commerce in the Channel had been resumed in a second Anglo-Dutch war between 1665-7, together with the destruction, north of Texel in 1666, of 150 Dutch merchant vessels estimated to be worth the equivalent of over a million pounds.(10) During the following year however, English trade suffered Dutch harassment, and the Royal Navy, defeat on the Medway.(11) A third Anglo- Dutch war had begun in 1672, again partly aimed at curtailing Dutch maritime trade, having first disposed of the Dutch fleet in battle. In 1673, after indecisive preliminaries, an attempt to blockade the Dutch coast and impound a Dutch East India Company convoy had failed. Although another Treaty of Westminster in 1674 had ended this less successful attempt at commercial blockade, if properly financed, as Charles II's had not been, the strategy remained potentially viable and effective.(12) Furthermore, the rights of belligerents under international law, to attack merchant vessels and limit the trading activities of neutral shipping in wartime, were clarified in 1697, after a neutral Swedish fleet carrying war supplies through the Channel to France was captured by the Royal Navy.(13)

During the War of Spanish Succession, from 1709-13, the Tories advocated direct maritime attacks on enemy trade as an alternative to a Continental policy which implied a standing army to which they were opposed, and on which a strong central government relied, as in Cromwell's time. Although "corn was contraband", the corollary of naval blockade was still limited by practicalities. "Naval developments, particularly in the field of

hygiene and supply, had not yet reached a point where close and continuous blockade of enemy bases, which in the new circumstances was bound to be an important strategic requirement, was practicable".(14) During the eighteenth century, this lack of logistical support was to become less of a limiting factor in the employment of maritime blockades, and their significance as a strategy. Royal dockyards were steadily developed in Britain throughout the century. Furthermore, "Throughout the eighteenth century, in spite of government procrastination in providing proper facilities, the superiority of the navy's victualling service afforded significant operational advantages." Among these advantages was the feasibility of maritime commercial blockade.(15) The prospect of prolonged maritime blockade in North America however, would not become practicable until further port facilities were created in Nova Scotia and Bermuda, facilitated by the accelerating growth of Britain's economic and financial strength.

During England's war with France between 1744-8, Admiral Martin had had twelve ships with which "to annoy the enemy's ships and commerce" to be found on the French trading routes south-west of Ushant.(16) With France the enemy, more ready access to the Atlantic had been required than that offered by the ports of south-eastern England, and Britain's western harbours and dockyard facilities had become strategically invaluable. The workforce of the Royal Dockyard at Plymouth had "doubled in size between 1739 and 1748, overtaking that at Woolwich", and had continued to grow. Real fear of French invasion between 1744 and 1759, together with the increasing need to defend distant colonies, promoted Plymouth dockyard's continued growth.(17) Thereafter, the availability of repair and re-victualling

facilities in western England, acted as a ‘force multiplier’, making the Royal Navy’s close blockade of the French a practical proposition.

The use of maritime economic warfare in the eighteenth century inevitably affected neutrals. In wartime, they could potentially replace a belligerent’s carrying trade, interdicted by their enemy’s commercial blockade, even if such trade had been forbidden to them by protective legislation in peacetime. Britain sought to clarify its own position by a doctrine known as ‘the Rule of 1756’, which maintained that trade closed to neutrals in peacetime could not be conducted in wartime, thereby profitably nullifying a British blockade. According to this ‘rule’, trade between enemy colonies and their home ports, was forbidden to neutrals. As the volume and range of seaborne trade increased, this British position was to become increasingly important.

Maritime economic warfare had been employed by Britain against France during the course of the Seven Years War. On 19 February 1757, Walter Titley, the English Minister at Copenhagen, had written to Robert D’Arcy, Earl of Holderness, Secretary of State for the Northern Department, that, “the only way to prevent” French “Superiority over us...is to drain the French of Men & Money by a War upon the Continent, while England cuts off the chief sources of their Wealth by destroying their Trade & Navigation.” It should be, “By this Method, & this only...as Her Finances, (tho’ Great) are certainly not sufficient to carry on a successful War on both Elements at once.” He added, however that Holderness knew best, “how far this Scheme may be practicable; and whether England, on whom the weight of the whole

Machine must repose, is able to support it".(18) Maritime blockade was again considered practicable, and the necessary Prize Act passed.

The continuous blockade of the Brittany coast by the ships of Admiral Sir Edward Hawke had been made possible by relieving ships in rotation for re-fitting and re-supply in south-west England. Having escaped blockade in a gale, the French took refuge in Quiberon Bay, but were caught and decisively beaten there by Hawke on 20 November 1759. French invasion of Britain having been averted, the blockade thereafter decimated French seaborne trade and prevented the reinforcement of overseas colonies. Pondicherry in French-held India, was captured in January 1761 after naval blockade since the previous spring. Similarly, blockades had contributed to successes in relieving Gibraltar, and on the St Lawrence.(19) The blockade of the French coast during 1759 had interrupted coastal shipping so effectively that their Atlantic dockyards were deprived of timber, seamen and supplies, the ports of trade and the French government of revenue.(20) During the Seven Years War, including those taken in 1755, the Royal Navy captured 959 enemy vessels, of which almost 83% were condemned as lawful prize.(21) Maritime blockade had been proved practicable.

### **Blockade and the War of American Independence**

Discussion of the potential of both naval and commercial maritime blockades became urgently topical with the outbreak of rebellion in Britain's American Colonies during the 1770's, culminating in the War of American Independence. Before the fighting had begun in earnest, the British Secretary at War, Lord Barrington, had considered blockade especially appropriate

when considering the transport and communication difficulties imposed by great distances. In December 1774 he wrote,

A conquest by land is unnecessary when the country can be reduced first to distress, and then to obedience, by our Marine totally interrupting all commerce and fishery and even seizing all the ships in the ports with very little expense and bloodshed.

(22)

A memorandum apparently written in July 1775 by Rear-Admiral Sir Hugh Palliser, British commander in North America until 1774, had estimated that a minimum of fifty vessels would be needed on the coasts of America “to annoy the rebellious provinces”. Crucially, these should “attend the operations of the army” as well as convoy, blockade and ‘cruising’ duties. Palliser thought that, “A less number of ships...will be insufficient”, and that more would be needed if rebellion spread beyond New England. In the event, Rear-Admiral Thomas Graves was to have only twenty-seven, excluding three surveying ships.(23) By Dec 1777, the Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote to Prime Minister Lord North that, “Lord Howe has had this year about 90 ships of all sorts”, and that “with a force properly stationed” in America, “could have made it very difficult for the Americans to receive their supplies, carry on their trade, and fit out privateers to annoy the trade of Great Britain. The contrary has been the case.”(24)

Conventionally, Kennedy argues that, “the Royal Navy could control the eastern seaboard and river estuaries; but further west the rebels could act with impunity.”(25) But, as much then as later, the bulk of accumulated wealth to pay for imports was concentrated in the Colonial coastal and estuarial towns. While at least initially self-sufficient in food, until the end of

1777, nine-tenths of the rebel's manufactured weapons, ammunition and gunpowder, as well as textiles and footwear, would have to be imported from France into these eastern ports.(26) Foreign reinforcements would always have to be brought by sea. Therefore, even a Royal Navy in need of modernisation and expansion as in 1775-6, could have made a more useful contribution in the crucial early stages of this American war by applying economic warfare. Freed of its priority to protect army transports and supplies, the Royal Navy could have been concentrating primarily on depriving its opponents of French manufactures. Rodger argues that blockade "would rather encourage than suppress rebellion".(27) It may, however, have proved economically effective. A promised end to blockades, together with fiscal, political and commercial concessions from London, could well have brought the rebellion to an earlier negotiated settlement.

Admittedly, without expansion, Britain's North America squadrons would have struggled to cope with the number of Colonial ports, harbours and undeveloped creeks. Equally, as Rodger points out, such blockades would inevitably have had to include the Caribbean, since the prevailing clockwise Atlantic winds and currents meant that European ships customarily dropped down to around latitude 15 degrees North to cross the ocean, passing close to the French, Dutch and Danish West Indies and the Bahamas. British searching of neutral ships for contraband would have risked widening the war.

Nonetheless, especially at the outset, a "more effective use might have been made of an unchallenged supremacy at sea".(28) By Glete's calculations, Britain's naval strength in 1775 exceeded that of either France

or Spain, both in total, and in their respective numbers of battleships and cruisers. The navies of France and Spain combined, however, had six more battleships than Britain in 1775, and twelve more by 1780. While the number of British battleships stayed at 117 between 1775 and 1780, the French fleet of battleships grew from 59 to 70, an increase approaching 20%. The total of French warships had grown by 38%, compared with Britain's 26%. Over the same period, the number of British cruisers increased from 82 to 111, while the cruisers of France and Spain combined rose from 65 to 92, a bigger increase than Britain's. However, the number of Britain's 'small ships' more than doubled in the same time, from 28 to 58.(29) These may have been precisely the weapons most suitable for both blockade and convoy protection in Britain's American war.

Earlier explanations as to why "the British fleet could have imposed a total ban on American ports but, instead, ... rode at anchor in New York harbour", have been modified.(30) Syrett argues that, although British blockades of the American eastern seaboard were feasible, the Royal Navy's cooperation in amphibious military operations against Charleston, New York and Philadelphia, was given priority at the outset, precluding effective blockade.(31) Priorities would change later in this war, and in Britain's later wars in North America.

Buel notes that, until the end of 1777, Admiral Richard Howe put his naval resources at the disposal of his brother Sir William, commander of the British land forces.(32) The British need to deal American armies a decisive blow before foreign intervention became conclusive, gave land campaigns precedence over maritime blockade, at best, a slow and cumulative process.

Later Parliamentary prohibition of this ancillary naval role allowed the British maritime blockades of 1782 to be made sufficiently effective in disrupting coastal shipping for the Continental economy to be damaged by inflation. Difficulties in raising revenue by taxing commerce, also damaged the American Confederation's cause.(33) Belatedly effective maritime blockade came too late to prevent the loss of the American Colonies to Britain in 1783. Valuable experience of successful blockade of the American eastern seaboard nonetheless remained amongst those who had conducted it. Moreover, the development of the Royal Navy's western bases had continued. The workforce at Plymouth's Royal Dockyard had increased by more than 70% between 1711 and 1782, moving it from fifth to first place in the size of its skilled dockyard labour.(34)

In 1780, British maritime blockade had been sufficiently effective to provoke opposition in northern Europe. Russia, Denmark and Sweden, combined as a League of Armed Neutrality, had threatening war if the Royal Navy continued to interfere with neutral vessels, declaring that "a blockade would be recognised only...where it constituted literally a physical barrier to entry into a neutral port".(35) The coalition, and its threat, had however dissolved for the time being, in 1781. The legal position countries adopted tended to reflect their naval potential.

### **The Royal Navy's Blockade of France, 1793-1812.**

When France declared war on Britain on 1 February 1793, Parliament enacted the necessary Prize Acts in 1793 and 1798 to facilitate



Britain's use of its maritime blockade strategy.(36) The main purposes of the Royal Navy's blockades had been to prevent the combination of France's Brest and Toulon fleets and the invasion of Britain, as well as to deprive France of its unhindered access to world trade. There had been no Brest fleet at Trafalgar.(37) The blockades had made the sea-transport of French troops extremely difficult, precluding any large-scale, or successful invasion of Britain and Ireland, so that British blockade could be aimed, primarily, at the economic isolation of France.

After 1800, St Vincent had revived the use of close blockade of the French in the Channel.(38) The effectiveness of the British blockade meant that neither the naval protection of French colonies, nor the dispatch of reinforcements to colonial garrisons had proved possible. As a result, France had been deprived of all its overseas possessions, with their raw materials, tropical produce and protected markets for manufactures. This policy had been recommended to Parliament by Henry Dundas, later Lord Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty, in March 1801.(39) The loss of colonial markets had reduced French manufactured exports, thereby stimulating demand for British manufactured goods. Although not as precisely quantified at the time, the blockades had reduced French customs receipts by four-fifths between 1807-09.(40) The Royal Navy's blockades of France had preserved British political autonomy, and heavily damaged the French economy.(41)

According to French sources, the British maritime blockade of France had quickly proved successful. As early as 1797, the head of the French Bureau of Commerce had written,

The former sources of our prosperity are either lost or dried up. Our agricultural, manufacturing and industrial power is almost extinct...The maritime war paralyses our distant navigation and even diminishes considerably that of our coasts; so that a great number of French ships remain inactive, and perhaps decaying in our ports.

(42)

As well as in daily newspapers of varying quality and allegiance, details of the Royal Navy's blockading activities were discussed in such specialised periodicals as the *Naval Chronicle*, published in London since 1799. British reports were often reproduced in contemporary American publications, particularly in New England. The public in both Britain and the United States were therefore familiar with the maritime commercial and naval blockades of Britain's enemies. In Britain, blockade was evidently supported, both by influential newspaper editors and office-holders alike.

As a result however, the controversies surrounding the use of maritime commercial blockade were again sharpened by other trading nations, largely focussed on the definition of contraband, and the treatment of neutrals found to be carrying it. Britain's specific difficulties with the United States centred on American wartime trade with France and the shipment of French colonial produce. Precisely what constituted enemy property, liable to confiscation or diversion, had long been contentious. The inclusion of weapons and ammunition had always seemed unambiguous, and the confiscation of specie not unexpected, but foodstuffs, clothing and footwear, timber and building materials for example, which could be for either military or civilian use, were debatable.

A lack of clarity either in the orders of policy-makers, or those charged with implementing them, may have contributed to what in retrospect looks like the loss of a valuable opportunity for effective economic warfare earlier in Britain's war with France. Although in an Atlantic action on the "Glorious First of June" in 1794, Admiral Lord Howe captured six French ships of the line while a seventh sank, the valuable convoy of 116 merchantmen which they had been protecting, laden with much-needed American wheat, had been allowed to reach Brest unharmed. An opportunity for gaining military and political advantage by fostering hardship and unrest amongst the civilian population of France had apparently been lost, when more than British public jubilation might have been achieved.(43)

Sustained maritime blockades became an ever more practical proposition as repair and victualling facilities were further developed in a greater number of harbours in Britain and abroad.(44) British governments were both politically prepared and economically able to allocate the necessary funds, victuals, naval and manpower resources to prolonged blockades. As O'Brien demonstrates, a relatively wide tax-base and sound financial institutions made heavy taxation and enormous long-term government borrowing feasible.(45) Occasional alarms apart, Britain's fiduciary paper currency and monetary mechanisms were reliable. Administrative facilities, with accumulated skills and experience, and a comparative absence of corruption, made logistical support systems possible. Britain's wealth from a developing science-based agriculture and internal transport, advanced work-force specialisation, world-wide trade and increasing industrialisation underpinned a national capacity to support campaigns of maritime blockade.

Furthermore, Britain's blockade of an enemy's trade coincided with a desire to protect the market for its own carrying trade. Britain's merchant fleet was the world's largest, importing raw materials and supporting an imperative need for outlets for its increasing surplus output of manufactured goods and re-exports. Britain's total registered shipping first exceeded 2 million tons in 1804. By 1804-6, Britain's seaborne trade imported over 40% of its food, and enabled its textile manufacturers to export almost 60% of their output. Between 1772 – 1804, Britain's total imports had grown by 50.3%, and total exports by 111.44%. War with France had so far failed to cause significant damage to British trade. Between 1792-1804 alone, British imports had increased by almost 49%, and total exports by 50.4%. Complementing the protective use of convoys, made compulsory in 1793, stringently so after 1803, Britain could use naval blockade to confine to port those enemy vessels which might otherwise have attacked its merchant vessels engaged in such trade all over the world, on which its prosperity, and therefore its ability to continue fighting, ultimately depended.(46)

### **The Problem of Neutrals**

Britain's maritime blockade of France inevitably involved contact with neutral merchant vessels of various nationalities, and gave rise to irreconcilable interpretations of maritime law. By December 1800, the French had contrived a revival of the concept of 'Armed Neutrality' amongst the countries of northern Europe including Denmark, Russia and Sweden, as a means of countering the British blockade. The Danish fleet had been seen in Britain as the most capable of enforcing French requirements in the Baltic.

Diplomacy having failed, on 2 April 1801, the Royal Navy destroyed the Danish fleet at anchor off Copenhagen, significantly weakening a European threat to the effectiveness of the British commercial blockade of France.

The elimination of French trade with their overseas possessions made an important contribution to Britain's avoidance of defeat, and towards securing the sound British economy essential to hopes of eventual victory. While inflicting serious economic damage on France, Britain's economy could benefit, remaining sufficiently viable to subsidise Prussia and Holland, paying out a further £35m to allies between 1810-15.(47) The great danger for a belligerent power investing in the maritime blockade of an enemy with overseas trade and possessions, was that the enemy's displaced merchant fleet would simply be replaced by that of a neutral eager to profit from the vacancy. The American merchant marine had expanded rapidly since 1800, exceeding a million tons by 1807.(48) If French merchantmen were to be replaced by American vessels, the expensive commercial blockade of both French homeland and colonies would be nullified. On renewal of war with France, prize law as interpreted in England ruled that the "goods of an enemy on board the ship of a neutral might be taken, while the goods of a neutral on board the ship of an enemy should be restored."(49) Britain insisted that French cargoes on American ships were liable to seizure, but Americans argued that any such cargo, unless obvious contraband, was immune from confiscation or diversion. "Free ships" they argued, made for "free goods". Controversy became sufficiently acrimonious for Sir Christopher Robinson's work reporting on "the Cases argued and determined by Sir William Scott in

the High Court of Admiralty”, published in London in 1799, to be re-published in 1800, in Philadelphia.(50)

It was now that Scott distinguished between naval blockade of immediate strategic importance, and maritime commercial blockade. He wrote in 1800 that,

A blockade may be more or less rigorous, either for the single purpose of watching the military operations of the enemy, and preventing the egress of his fleet...or on an extended scale, to cut off all access of neutral vessels to that interdicted place; which is strictly and properly a blockade, for the other is in truth no blockade at all, as far as neutrals are concerned. (51)

The first was later to prove effective, and of great significance outside Brest, and both, used together, were to be decisive when employed by the Royal Navy in North America between 1812 and 1815.

From the outset, Britain had again sought to enforce the Rule of 1756, thought to be applicable to American carriers replacing blockaded French merchant vessels. Initially Britain had condoned its breach by American vessels on “discontinuous voyages”, ostensibly importing goods from the French West Indies to the southern United States, unloading, but immediately reloading, and re-exporting them to Europe. Shippers paid customs duties on the ‘imports’, which the American government had customarily re-imbursed as “drawback”, a rebate less administrative costs. This conciliatory policy, formalised by a British Admiralty Court decision involving the American vessel *Polly* in 1800, had however contributed to a marked increase in American shipping between the Caribbean and Europe.

American re-exports had increased almost thirty times, from \$1.8m in 1792, to \$53.2m in 1805, causing concern to Britain's West India Committee, which represented sugar growers, merchants and shippers, as well as to the British government.(52)

An Admiralty Court ruling on the detained American vessel *Essex* in May 1805, had then reversed a policy which had seemed to threaten the effectiveness of the British maritime blockade of France. Sir William Scott ruled that the routine American re-imburement of customs duty as 'drawback', meant that such French colonial goods had not legally been imported into the United States, and were not therefore neutral American goods, but liable to British confiscation. Some Americans referred indignantly to their trade being as controlled by Britain as it had been before independence, and James Monroe, the American Minister in London, went so far as to demand financial compensation from the British government for lost trade.

However, after a brief flurry of detentions of American vessels by the Royal Navy, during which American insurance rates rose and shipper's profits fell, a newly elected British government under Grenville and Fox, in effect reversed the *Essex* ruling. The "Fox Blockade" of northern Europe, proclaimed in May 1806, was absolute only between the Seine and Ostend, and was taken by its lack of reference to American 're-exports', to imply that such discontinuous voyages could be resumed. (53) Monroe however, although initially impressed by British pragmatism, began to assert that only American force would prevent such British interference in future.

## **The Continental System, and Orders in Council**

Economic warfare between Britain and France had escalated after January 1806, with France increasingly using her domination of other European countries to strike at British trade. In February 1806 the French had procured the exclusion of British vessels from Prussian ports, adding to Britain's list of enemies. In November 1806, after Prussia had itself been defeated by the French, the Berlin Decree had launched a Continental System designed to close all European ports to British vessels. In reply, in January 1807, the first of fourteen successive British Orders in Council had extended the naval blockade of France, and eventually declared all ships trading in ports from which British vessels were excluded, liable to capture. Spencer Perceval had succinctly summarised the purpose of Britain's measures as, "The objects of the Orders in Council were not to destroy the trade of the Continent, but to force the Continent to trade with us."(54)

A short-lived alliance between Britain, Russia and Prussia had ended with the defeat of Russian and Prussian armies at Freidland. The resultant Treaty of Tilsit in July 1807, had recruited Russian co-operation into the economic warfare against Britain, in which the Prussians were again included. In September 1807, the Royal Navy had only dissuaded Denmark from joining economic war against Britain, by a second bombardment of Copenhagen. Britain's fifth Order in Council, made on 11 November 1807, had in effect forced trade in neutral vessels with French dominated Europe, to pass through British ports, with the transit fees paid adding to British revenues. In December 1807, Napoleon's Milan Decree had sought to extend the Continental System by detaining neutral vessels, often American, which



had traded with Britain. It was further widened the following year by its inclusion of the ports of Spain and Portugal. Nonetheless, some in Britain saw the profitable expansion of neutral American maritime trade as an opportunistic and unprincipled exploitation of the British pre-occupation with an undemocratic European tyrant. Given Britain's earlier relationship with Americans, actual co-operation was probably too much to expect, but not perhaps the avoidance of active opposition. An attempt by the Americans to resist European interference in their neutral trade with economic pressure, by passing a Non-Importation Act in April 1806, had greatly harmed Anglo-American relations.(55)

### **The Issue of Impressment**

Bad feeling between the governments of the United States and Britain were further aggravated by the impressment by the Royal Navy of apparently British seamen from American merchant vessels at sea. Desertion from the Royal Navy had long been a major problem, despite being a capital offence.(56) Therefore, the "allegiance" of British seamen found on neutral vessels was, according to the Prince Regent, "no optional duty which they can decline or resume at pleasure", but "began with their birth and can only terminate with their existence".(57) Nevertheless, higher wages, better conditions and a reduced risk of impressment, had so much encouraged the transfer of British merchant seamen that, by 1807, of 55,000 seamen engaged in American overseas trade, "not less than 40% were British born".(58) Their loss would be a serious economic handicap, and a Republican Congressman

had denounced their reclamation by the Royal Navy, as an “odious and tyrannic practice”.(59)

Accounts of the number of allegedly British seamen impressed from American vessels, had varied. Hezekiah Niles, a Baltimore journalist, estimated that 6,257 seamen, mostly American, had been impressed into the Royal Navy by 1812.(60) After the war, the British lawyer-turned-historian William James, cited a Boston newspaper’s account of a Congressional speech, to reduce the number to 156.(61) Perhaps more credibly, William Dudley’s “conservative estimate” of 9,991 American seamen impressed between 1796 and 1 January 1812, “compensates for duplication of names”.(62) The British Foreign Office did investigate some authenticated mistakes, although repatriations appear to have been few.(63)

Some Royal Naval officers reclaimed apparently British seamen whenever opportunity arose, their decisions complicated by the “similarity of language and manners”, the availability of false naturalisation papers, and the American need for trained seamen.(64) The British search for deserters however had political implications when the examination of coastal vessels involved the violation of American territorial waters, and even the exchange of gunfire between British and American warships. When in June 1807, deserters from the British squadron off Chesapeake Bay had joined American vessels, including USS *Chesapeake*, then leaving for sea, HMS *Leopard* had been ordered to retrieve them. When the *Chesapeake*’s captain had refused permission to board, *Leopard* opened fire, killing three Americans. Three of the four men taken from the *Chesapeake* were found to be American and released, the fourth, a British subject was hanged.

News of the incident reaching Washington had strengthened President Jefferson's determination that an Anglo-American treaty "of amity commerce and navigation", which had been signed on 31 December 1806, should not be submitted for Senate approval.<sup>(65)</sup> The Monroe-Pinkney treaty had settled all outstanding trade issues, but attempts to agree on clauses defining legitimate impressment had failed, and despite the allocation of extra time, the treaty was never ratified. In March 1807, a return to Tory government in Britain had hardened attitudes, and meant that Foreign Secretary Canning would not agree to any re-negotiation. War had probably been averted by the Admiralty's recall of the North America station's commander, Vice-Admiral George Berkeley, tacit agreement that British impressment policy could not include the stopping of neutral warships. Britain was eventually to offer financial compensation, but not before Jefferson, in July 1807, had excluded British warships from all American waters.

### **A Tradition of British Blockade**

On the morning of 6 August 1807, an editorial in London's *Morning Post* expressed exasperation with American maritime, commercial and foreign policy, and volunteered its opinion that, "Three weeks of blockade of the Delaware and Boston Harbour would make our presumptuous rivals repent of their puerile public conduct."<sup>(66)</sup> That any section of British public opinion should recommend so unambiguously the blockade of a transatlantic partner turned rival, while still engaged in a prolonged war with France,

measured the breakdown of a markedly interdependent commercial relationship.

However, from the outset, independent Americans had been aware of their vulnerability to British maritime economic warfare. Perhaps partly as a result, Secretary of the Treasury Gallatin wrote from Washington to President Jefferson on 25 July 1807 that, “All those places which deserve the name of towns, & which, by the shipping they contain, or as deposits of produce & merchandise, offer a temptation of plunder or destruction, ought to have at least a battery to protect them against attack by a single frigate or other small force.”(67) Specifically, he thought “the practicality of preventing an enemy from keeping possession of the Chesapeake by anything short of a superior naval force”, should be “inquired into”. He realised that the United States could not deploy such a force since earlier in the year, Jefferson had made it clear that he preferred gunboats, suitable only for sheltered waters, and in February, Congress had ordered an additional two hundred.(68)

Gallatin thought that the risk to,

Charleston...next to New York, the greatest deposit of domestic produce in wartime, may be greater still...the Potomac may be easily defended. But, an active enemy might land at Annapolis, march to the city, and re-embark before the militia could be collected to repel him...Washington will be an object, in order to destroy the ships & naval stores, but particularly as a stroke which would give the enemy reputation & attach disgrace to the United States. (69)

Gallatin next raised the possibility of an American pre-emptive strike, timed for “this autumn” or “this winter”, that is, of 1807.

But, as long as the British hold Halifax they will be able, by the superiority of their naval force, to blockade during the greater part of the year, all our principal seaports, and particularly New York, including the Sound, Philadelphia, the Chesapeake and Charleston. If we take it, the difficulty to refit and obtain refreshment will greatly diminish that evil, and enable us to draw some advantage from our small navy on our own coast. (70)

Gallatin's intention seems to have been the permanent occupation of at least part of Canada, rather than as a bargaining-chip in any future negotiation over British naval encroachments into American territorial waters or about impressment. The Americans would surely have realised that having once captured Halifax, any future withdrawal from it could result in an immediate resumption of the British practice to which they had previously objected.

Gallatin next discussed war finance. Gross customs revenue for 1806 had been \$14.6m, and given American neutrality, was likely to exceed \$15m in 1807.(71) Gallatin estimated that these "present imposts" would be reduced by war to about \$8m. This could be rectified by "additional duties and taxes" of \$2.5m, income from government land sales worth \$0.5m and the call for a loan of \$7m, a subtotal of \$10m, making available, if the loan call was successful, about \$18m.(72) He next discussed practicalities. "As for transports on the coast of Maine for [attacks on] New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the embargo by Congress will give enough to us" – the envisaged legislative ban on American overseas trade would make available sufficient merchant ships to transport troops to the Maritime Provinces.(73) In the event, Jefferson's Embargo was not to be put into effect until December 1807.(74) A swift American attack on Britain's lightly held Halifax naval

base, while Britain was heavily engaged in its war with France, might just conceivably have resulted in a precipitate peace based on *uti possidetis*, each signatory keeping what it held when the fighting stopped. Influential though Gallatin may have been, Jefferson evidently had not thought so.

### **Jefferson's Embargo**

In December 1807, Jefferson had made an attempt to impose on Britain a fundamental change of policy by the use of economic sanctions in the form of an Embargo on all American seaborne trade with Britain. He had intended cutting off the American export of crucial raw materials like cotton, and the importation of British manufactured goods. In the event, Jefferson's Embargo was to cause greater economic harm to the United States than to its intended victim, and cause irreparable damage to his political career and subsequent reputation, having left office in March 1809, according to one British historian, "a beaten man".(75) British vessels nevertheless remained excluded from American waters, and trade with Britain forbidden by a Non-Intercourse Act.(76)

Both Jefferson and James Madison, his Secretary of State, had believed that American trade restrictions would force both European belligerents to respect 'neutral rights', although the far greater extent of Anglo-American trade had meant that Britain would be more affected than France. Despite Jefferson's experience, having succeeded to the Presidency in 1809, Madison had signed Macon's No 2 Bill on 1 May 1810, which had offered resumed trade to whichever European power repealed its restrictions

on neutral trade. Napoleon's deceptive Cadore Letter to the American Minister in Paris, apparently dated 5 August 1810, had made it look as if France had done so, thereby ensuring that after 2 February 1811, American trade restrictions applied solely to Britain.(77)

Furthermore, in an effort to monitor British vessels and to reduce impressment from coastal shipping, United States warships had increasingly patrolled the American eastern seaboard. On 16 May 1811, the American heavy frigate *President* had been sent from Annapolis to investigate reports of both British and French warships stopping American vessels offshore. In darkness, gunfire was exchanged between the *President* and the British sloop *Little Belt*. The smaller vessel was badly damaged. Nine British seamen were killed and twenty-three others wounded. Diplomatic relations between Britain and the United States were further strained. The incident had apparently been triggered by American opposition to impressment rather than interference with neutral American trade.(78) But if, as Tracy argues, the incident was seen by contemporary Americans as, "a sign of the growing tendency in the United States to resist British exercise of maritime commercial control, even if it put the republic in the balance on the side of the Buonapartist Empire", then, at least until the defeat of Napoleon, further Anglo-American conflict was, if not inevitable, then extremely likely.(79)

### **Madison's Addresses to Congress**

By 5 November 1811, Madison was complaining in his Presidential Message to Congress that, "our coasts and the mouths of our harbours have again witnessed scenes, not less derogatory to the dearest of our natural

rights, than vexatious to the regular course of our trade. Among the occurrences produced by British ships of war hovering on our coasts”, he specifically mentioned the *Little Belt* incident, “rendered unavoidable” by the British sloop having fired first on the heavy frigate, “being therefore alone chargeable with the blood unfortunately shed in maintaining the honour of the American flag”.(80) Britain’s Orders in Council, and opposition to American designs on the Spanish territories in West and East Florida, had been added to Madison’s catalogue of complaints, making war between a neutral engaged in trade, and a belligerent imposing maritime blockade on a third party, seem ever more likely.

Madison had then announced that American “gunboats have, in particular harbours, been ordered into use. The ships of war before in commission, with the addition of a frigate, have been chiefly employed as a cruising guard to the rights of our coast.” “[T]he British Cabinet”, he concluded, “perseveres ...in the execution, brought home to the threshold of our territory, of measures which...have the character, as well as the effect, of war on our lawful commerce”.(81)

On 1 June 1812, Madison had again addressed Congress, and complained that British efforts to prevent neutral American carriers nullifying the blockade of France meant that, “British cruisers have also been...violating the rights and peace of our Coasts. They hover over and harass our entering and departing Commerce...and have wantonly spilt American blood within the sanctuary of our territorial jurisdiction”.(82) He had ignored the violation of territorial jurisdiction involved in the United States annexation of Spanish West Florida in October 1810, which had lead to Britain’s reinforcement of



its North America squadron, and left unmentioned the current American designs on East Florida.(83) He also accused “British traders and garrisons” with arming and inciting the ‘Indians’, “connecting their hostility with that influence” in explaining renewed warfare on America’s northwest frontiers. Alternative explanations for the possession of British muskets by the indigenous tribes were not explored, although it was not apparently until November 1812, with the war already begun, that the British government was to supplement the same “articles which were sent out last year with the Addition of 2000 Light Musquets adapted for the use of the Indian tribes”.(84)

Madison had not mentioned that Republican ‘War Hawks’ argued that renewed hostility with northwest frontier ‘Indians’ would provide the pretext for the United States’ invasion of Canada, which they thought could be completed before Britain could respond with sufficient strength, particularly once the naval base at Halifax, Nova Scotia had been seized.(85) Jefferson told Madison that the occupation of Quebec in 1812 and Halifax in 1813, would allow “the final expulsion of England from the American continent”.(86) While still at war with France, and with Baltic supplies vulnerable, Britain could not afford to abandon Canadian bases or supplies of timber, naval stores and provisions.(87)

John Morier, Britain’s chargé d’affaires in Washington, had long suspected the Madison administration of “eager Subserviency to France”, and had in January 1811, reported as much to the Foreign Office in London.(88) Twelve days later he described a letter written to the American Secretary of State Robert Smith, as, “a pretty plain declaration that the French government

& that of the US, regarding Britain as their common enemy, are united in pursuing certain measures against her.” He described Smith as having “displayed evident Symptoms of a Fear of Displeasing the French.”(89)

### **The Declaration of War**

On 10 April 1812 Foreign Secretary Castlereagh reminded Augustus Foster, the British Minister in Washington, of the likely origins of the war. Since the Americans “co-operated with France by prohibiting, in concurrence with her, the importation of British produce and manufactures into the Ports of America...and continue to exclude British Commerce and British Ships of War from her Ports, while they are open to those of the enemy, it is then clear that we are at issue with America upon principles which, upon the part of this Govt. you are not at liberty to compromise.”(90)

Castlereagh nevertheless thought that war was not yet inevitable. “It is more probable that the near aspect [that] the question has now assumed may awaken them to the \*\*\*\*\* folly of attempting either to force or intimidate Gr. Br., & that alarmed at the danger seen to themselves of the former attempt and the hopelessness of the latter, they may see an opportunity of receding without disgrace.”(91) Far from seeking any such opportunity, Madison had referred the question to the House Foreign Relations Committee, which supported a declaration of war. The House of Representatives voted for war, but the Senate delayed its approval, although eventually agreed. Ironically, as the House of Commons considered the revocation of the Orders in Council as

far as America was concerned, on 18 June 1812, the United States declared war on Britain.(92)

A week before war was declared, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Robert Dundas, Lord Melville, had written to Admiral Lord Keith,

The American Government are proceeding [at] great lengths in the way of provocation, with a view probably to local objects & to produce irritation against this Country...undoubtedly such dangerous conduct may involve us in a quarrel.

Local British diplomats, naval and military commanders, he thought, “seem to be using their utmost endeavour to guard against such an extremity; but it may be beyond their power to avert.”(93) He was soon to be proved right.

The possible use of maritime economic warfare and blockade was seldom far from either public minds or those of British decision-makers. The strategy seemed equally applicable to the Mediterranean as to America. Earlier in the year, the Foreign Office had instructed the Admiralty to “institute a strict and rigorous Blockade of the Islands of Corfu, Trano & Paxo & their several Dependencies on the Coast of Albania”.(94) It would now seem that just such a policy would need to be applied to the United States.

Unsurprisingly therefore, when in June 1812, mutual Anglo-American irritation culminated in an American declaration of war, the British Admiralty was in due course instructed to implement just such a policy of naval and commercial blockades of the United States. By 21 November 1812, after a fruitless British attempt to restore peace, the Secretary of State for War, Lord Bathurst, had ordered a precisely similar blockade of the American

Atlantic seaboard, to start “forthwith” with, specifically, “a strict and rigorous Blockade of the Ports and Harbors of the Bay of the Chesapeake and of the River Delaware”.(95) By 27 November, the Admiralty had relayed the order to its Commander-in-Chief of the “United Command” of the West Indies and North America, Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren. On 26 December 1812, their Lordships reinforced the order with a further letter calling for “a complete and vigorous Blockade”.(96)

The outbreak of war with the United States hardened attitudes and suspended much further debate in Britain on the legality of maritime blockade. British public opinion largely reflected the government’s determination that Britain could,

never acknowledge any blockade to be illegal which has been duly notified, and is supplied by an adequate force, merely upon the ground of its extent, or because the ports or coasts blockaded are not at the same time invested by land. (97)

Therefore, by the Spring of 1813, despite Britain’s preoccupation with the ongoing Great War against Napoleon, the Royal Navy began its maritime blockades of the United States in earnest. From the outset however, in the event of the States bordering on British North America seceding from the Union, their trade with Britain, “shall not be interrupted”, but “allowed to be carried on without molestation”.(98)

Both before and after the American declaration of war, Melville received a great deal of unsought advice, some potentially useful.(99) One letter of January 1813, from Admiral Sir Henry Stanhope, a veteran of the War of American Independence, was better informed than most.(100) He

recommended a survey of the warships laid up 'in ordinary' and selection of the best to be cut down as 58 gunned *razees*. He realised that British attacks on "Sea Port Towns" would, for the present, be "unavailable and disastrous without such a Land Force as the Circumstances of the Country could not perhaps readily admit". He would however "effectually blockade them by such a well connected Chain of commanding Force as They should not be able to oppose, composed of small Squadrons under the Command of active and intelligent officers". Knowing from personal experience that "the Coast of America in its vast Extent, has innumerable small Harbours and Inlets as well for Trade as for the building and equipping of Armed vessels", he recommended "keeping them in perpetual Alarm" by using Marines for feint and genuine attacks on coastal targets, before "the speediest Reembarkation". Over the remaining two years of war, much of this advice was to be followed with great effect.

## **Chapter 2: Constraints and Solutions.**

“I think the fact is that the Admiralty have merely humbugged Sir J... They have equally tricked him in withdrawing reinforcements and most shamefully neglected the squadron in the West Indies, and on this Coast. What the devil they intend is hard to divine, but certain it is to say that our navy will be disgraced and our trade ultimately ruined unless very speedy addition is made to every division in these seas.” George Hulbert, Flag Secretary and Prize Agent to Admiral Sir John Warren, to his brother John Hulbert, 2 January 1813.(1)

### **War at a Distance**

If the Royal Navy was to impose the hardships of economic warfare on the enemy, its new war would generally have to be fought across the Atlantic. There, its main North America base at Halifax, Nova Scotia, was almost 2,500 miles from London or Liverpool, and over 600 miles from New York, the United States major port and commercial centre. As shown by Map 1, it would need bases at St John’s, Newfoundland and St John, New Brunswick to contribute to the defence of Canada. It would also have to use its base in Bermuda, itself 650 miles from the nearest American mainland at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. This however, was 700 miles from New York, and 1,000 from Savannah, Georgia. Prevailing winds, currents and trade routes all meant that vessels from Europe would frequently approach North America from the Caribbean, and the West Indies would therefore be involved in Britain’s war with the United States. Bases in Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Antigua in the Leeward Islands, would also be needed.

It would take the first Commander-in-Chief of a new United Command of North America and the West Indies, Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren, six and a half weeks to reach his post from Portsmouth, typically encountering contrary winds and autumnal gales.(2) On arrival, he would be responsible for British naval and diplomatic affairs over an American eastern

seaboard of over 2,000 miles, without taking into account major estuaries and innumerable creeks and inlets, or the circumference of many major islands like Long Island off New York.

Geographically therefore, Warren's responsibilities would range from Newfoundland and New Brunswick, at latitude 48 degrees north, to include the entire American eastern seaboard to the Mississippi estuaries, Mobile and New Orleans, and extend across the Caribbean to the Leeward Islands to latitude 12 degrees north. Even during Britain's engagement in a world-wide war against the French Empire, this vast area represented an intimidating responsibility, and for all but the most able and energetic, itself an intellectual burden and psychological constraint on decision-making. Decisions on one area would affect others, often far distant and beyond reach, in ways difficult to predict. Although far from being the oldest serving naval Commander in Chief, this might well have been a daunting prospect for a man aged 59 when appointed. Even after receiving some urgently needed reinforcements, Warren reminded the First Lord of the Admiralty in late December 1813 that, "The Extent of this Coast however is immense; that to shut up all ports would require Twice my Numbers."<sup>(3)</sup>

Delays in communication over such distances would present a major problem both before and throughout the war. Dispatches from the American coast might occasionally reach Liverpool or Plymouth in a minimum of 24 days, but still need express overland transport to London before governmental decisions were possible. Any initial advantage gained by rapid eastward transit would be offset by the six week westward voyage with any reply.<sup>(4)</sup> Within the North American theatre, written communications, often

necessarily duplicated to safeguard against loss or delay, could take weeks to reach those expected to implement them. Such delays would have to be allowed for in the transmission of political instructions relayed by the Admiralty in London to the commander-in-chief, and in his tactical orders to subordinates.

Before the American declaration of war, Foreign Secretary Castlereagh's instructions to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on 9 May 1812, ponderously attempted to cover every eventuality, "in consideration of the length of time that must necessarily elapse between any hostile measures on the part of the United States and any orders which the commanders of His My's Ships & Vessels upon their coasts could receive from your Lordships." British commanders in North America were to have "Instructions & Authority to repel any hostile aggression", but were "at the same time to take especial care that they commit no Act of Aggression".

If warlike American intentions were "certified to them" by documentary evidence, they were to "pursue such measures either offensive or defensive as may be most effective for annoying the Enemy", and "protecting the Trade of His My's Subjects". Castlereagh reiterated to their Lordships that they must "strictly command and enjoin the Commanders...to exercise all possible forbearance".(5) This constraint so impressed itself on Vice-Admiral Herbert Sawyer, C in C North America at Halifax that, even after HMS *Belvidera* had been attacked by USS *President*, on 23 June, and lives lost on both sides, he was to release the three American prizes the *Belvidera* took as she made good her escape to Nova Scotia. When *Belvidera* reached Halifax on 27 June, Sawyer had not received any official



confirmation of war, and so remained cautiously averse to any risk of reprimand.

The lack of rapid transatlantic communication had itself contributed to the outbreak of the war. Britain's eventual acceptance of Napoleon's apparent renunciation of the French Berlin and Milan decrees, which had attempted the economic isolation of Britain, would lead to Parliament's revocation of Britain's retaliatory Orders in Council.<sup>(6)</sup> Two-thirds of Madison's catalogue of complaints against Britain to Congress on 1 June 1812, had been his denunciation of the Orders, and in the absence of diplomatic progress, on 18 June 1812, the United States had declared war. Unknown to Congress, Parliament was to revoke the Orders as far as America was concerned, on 23 June, to be effective from 1 August. The issue of Royal Naval impressment of Americans at sea however, remained unresolved, and subsequent British attempts at armistice were to come to nothing. Most of the American maritime trade that Britain would seek to disrupt was to be found on the United States eastern coastline at some stage of the transaction, and therefore for the British, this was to be a war fought at a distance.

When the United States declared war on Britain in June 1812, the Royal Navy was, from the outset, constrained by the number of vessels it could keep in North America. The fact was well recognised in Britain, with the war against France in its nineteenth year. Despite a British numerical superiority in warships, demands were such that shortages became critical. On 17 June 1812, Admiral George Hope, of the Board of Admiralty, confided **privately** to Admiral Lord Keith, that intelligence grew of a build-up of **French warships** at Aix Roads, causing such anxiety that a pre-emptive strike

was contemplated. “We are bringing forward frigates as fast as we can, but how it will be possible to keep up the system of Blockade [of France] as he increases his Force, is beyond my comprehension for it is totally impossible to increase our navy in that ratio.” Nevertheless, he added, “America...at this moment is very doubtful & we must provide for whatever may happen there.”

(7)

That Britain’s Royal Navy was overstretched was also recognised by some in Congress. Recommending American naval expansion to the House in January 1812, Republican Representative Langdon Cheves rejected the argument that an American navy would inevitably be overwhelmed by the Royal Navy. A British fleet with “the high sounding number of a thousand ships appals the mind”, but was “a great misconception” when subjected to “an examination of its actual force and the numerous requisitions which are made upon it”.(8)

Furthermore, in his speech opposing American naval expansion, fellow Republican Adam Seyburt was mistaken in asserting that Halifax, Nova Scotia and Bermuda could “afford every facility to fit and repair” British vessels in North America. Therefore, he had wrongly argued, that the 29 British vessels in Halifax and Newfoundland, specified in his copy of Steel’s List for July 1811, alone constituted “a force in itself very superior to that of all the vessels belonging to the American navy”.(9) In common with the Royal Navy’s Caribbean bases, neither Halifax nor Bermuda had dry-dock facilities, and in other respects, like the persistent shortage of skilled labour, Britain’s naval bases in North America were far from ideal. Vessels needing major repair would have to return to Britain.(10)

A later list of the “active sea-going material of the Royal navy, exclusive of harbour vessels and inefficient or non-fighting ships”, compiled from earlier sources, reduced Britain’s effective fleet still further. According to Clowes, Britain had in 1811, a total of 657 vessels, of which 124 were ships of the line. By 1812, continued hard use had reduced these figures to 623 and 120 respectively.(11) In reply to Warren’s persistent pleas for reinforcements, the Admiralty insisted, that by 10 February 1813, his ‘United Command’ had no less than 97 vessels, including “Eleven Sail of the Line”, 34 frigates, 38 sloops and 12 smaller craft, so generous a proportion as to be creating strain elsewhere. He had, the Admiralty insisted, a force “much greater in proportion than the National Navy of the Enemy...would seem to warrant”. Therefore, “it may not be possible to maintain on the Coast of America for any length of time a force so disproportionate to the Enemy as that which, with a view of enabling you to strike some decisive blow, they have now placed under your orders”.(12) The American navy however, was not conveniently concentrated to facilitate any immediate ‘decisive blow’, nor would blockade produce immediate results. The Admiralty’s ill-considered criticism shows, at least, a confusion of objectives.

If, by then, Warren had indeed been sent “about one seventh of all the Sea going Vessels in the British Navy”, the Royal Navy would have had a total of 679 vessels.(13) In fact, not all of the vessels promised had arrived, and others were so unfit for use on arrival as to need immediate repair. On such an extended coastline, all those vessels available to him would not even allow Warren to place, “all of the Enemy’s Ports in a state of close and permanent Blockade”.(14)

Furthermore, during the first six months of the war the number of vessels available for blockading or any other duties, was to be depleted by a succession of unexpected British defeats in single ship actions. The defeat of HMS *Guerriere*, 38, by USS *Constitution*, 44, on 19 August 1812 had come before Warren's arrival in Halifax, and was not therefore due to his personal "want of due precaution", but other "naval Disasters" were to follow, and did indeed "make a strong impression on the public mind", both then and since.(15) The loss of the *Macedonian* to the American heavy frigate *United States* followed on 25 October 1812. The defeat of HMS *Java* also by the *Constitution*, although under a different commander, came on 29 December 1812. These major defeats were accompanied by those of smaller British vessels. On 14 August 1812, HMS *Alert*, 16, had surrendered to the American frigate *Essex*, 32, to be followed on 13 October by the schooner *Laura*, 10. The *Frolic*, 18, was taken by the *Wasp*, also of 18 guns, on 18 October, and although later recaptured, had been amongst those British vessels unavailable between August and December 1812.(16) Moreover, on 10 September 1813, an entire British squadron of six vessels was to be lost in a fleet action with nine American vessels on Lake Erie, a defeat, which in the event, the Americans proved unable to exploit fully.(17)

Nonetheless, these surrenders came as a profound shock to naval professionals, politicians, newspaper editors and the nation as a whole, many of whom had come to regard the Royal Navy as practically invincible. Complacency, a preference for paint and polish and in some cases an absence of regular gun-drill, were each to contribute to a series of British ships striking their colours to American opponents. At the resultant court-martial,

the loss of the *Peacock* to the USS *Hornet*, on 24 February 1813, was attributed at least in part to a “want of skill in directing the Fire, owing to an omission of the Practice of exercising the crew in the use of the Guns for the last three Years...”.(18) Warren ordered that “times of exercising the Great Guns and small Arms be always entered in the Ships Log conformable to the General printed Instructions.”(19) The Admiralty later issued a circular order that the scouring of iron stanchions and ring bolts should be “gradually discontinued” and replaced by “exercise at Arms”.(20) The early defeats were to some extent redressed in British minds by the capture, on 1 June 1813, of the American frigate *Chesapeake* by the British frigate *Shannon*, where gun drill had long been exemplary. More importantly however, these actions did not prevent the Royal Navy’s now persistent application of an increasingly effective commercial blockade of the American population.

Less unexpectedly, navigational hazards would also reduce the number of British vessels available on the North America and West Indies stations. The first was the sloop *Emulous* from the Halifax squadron, grounded and lost on Cape Sable on 2 August 1812, soon to be followed by the loss of the schooner *Chub*. A more serious loss on 5 October 1812 was that of the sixth rate *Barbadoes*, 24, newly transferred to the Leeward Islands squadron, and carrying £60,000 as the payroll for Halifax Dockyard.(21) Another significant loss was that of the frigate *Southampton*, 32, of the Jamaica squadron, which struck a Caribbean reef on 27 November 1812, together with *Vixen*, an American prize taken five days before.(22) On 5 December 1812, the brig *Plumper*, carrying £70,000 from Halifax to St John, New Brunswick, was lost off Point Lepreau.(23) For British blockading

squadrons, and the American vessels attempting to evade them, shifting sandbars were to pose a navigational problem throughout the war.

### **The Navy Estimates**

In Britain, Parliament regularly made the necessary financial provision for warship building, manning the Royal Navy, and for repairing wear and tear. Annual estimates of the cost of its operations across the world were debated and voted on. The 'ordinary estimate' for ships and dockyard facilities was fixed at £1.6m in 1811, and £1.4m in 1812. It was to exceed £1.7m for both 1813 and 1814, and approach £2.3m in 1815.<sup>(24)</sup> 'Extra' estimated expenditure, customarily intended for meeting increased maintenance and adding new ships, exceeded £2m in 1811, but was reduced to £1.7m in 1812. It was to rise by more than 66% in 1813, to more than £2.8m, and to remain above £2m for the following year.<sup>(25)</sup> The annual parliamentary vote for the number of seamen and marines was a financial formula which provided theoretically for 145,000 men in both 1811 and 1812. Having fallen to 140,000 in 1813, this was to reach a total of 207,400 in 1814. In practice, these figures meant that around 130,000 men were financially allowed for between 1812 and 1814.<sup>(26)</sup>

Ultimately, financial constraints governed the logistical support for the war in North America as elsewhere, and determined the supplies of provisions, and ordnance. The Navy Estimate fixed annually by the House of Commons had reached £19.8m in 1811, and despite having fallen slightly to £19.3m in 1812 was to reach a record £20m in 1813. It reverted to £19.3m for 1814. Clearly, Britain's economic strength and relative financial and fiscal

efficiency was such that as well as the political will, the necessary finance, although customarily in arrears, was nevertheless available to fight the Americans as well as the French between 1812 and 1815.(27)

According to the Admiralty, on his arrival at Halifax on 26 September 1812, Warren's United Command was to be comprised of 83 named 'Ships in Sea Pay'. Some however, were in urgent need of refurbishment or repair. Thirty-seven were based either at Halifax or Newfoundland, and the rest in the Caribbean.(28) Among them were the elderly 64 gunned *Africa*, launched as long before as 1781, and the obsolescent *Antelope*, 50. Eight frigates, with between 38 and 32 guns, were supplemented by 25 brigs and sloops with less than twenty guns, and by two receiving ships.

The Royal Navy in North America was opposed by a United States Navy of 17 vessels, of which seven were frigates.(29) Three were heavy frigates, nominally of 44 guns but mounting more, the practise of most sailing navies. Sturdily constructed, with crucial parts of southern 'live' oak, they had proved resistant to damage, and were usually fast enough to outsail potentially superior opposition, such as a British 74, in all but the heaviest seas. Three further frigates were rated as having 36 guns, and a fourth with 32. Ten years of Republican opposition to naval expansion and economising on maintenance had however contributed to a deterioration in their condition. Two frigates, the *Boston* and the *New York* were found to be beyond repair, and another, the *Adams* was razeed into a 28 gun corvette.(30) Only eight other sloops and brigs, carrying between 18 and 12 guns had been built since 1800, including the brig *Viper*, added as recently as 1810. Flotillas of

gunboats intended to guard harbours and estuaries had been built, but had proved unusable beyond sheltered waters, and were unpopular and difficult to man. Seagoing traditions in American coastal regions meant that skill levels in the United States 'public' vessels were often very high, and morale had been raised by American naval successes against North African pirates and in the Quasi War against France between 1797 and 1801.(31) By December 1812, the United States Navy had lost to the Royal Navy nothing bigger than the *Wasp*, 18.(32)

Despite its comparatively small size, the United States Navy formed a significant constraint on both British strategic planning and tactical operations. It posed a potential threat to British seaborne trade, especially in the early stages of a maritime economic war, with voyages begun before its declaration still incomplete. British vessels used to convoy economically important merchant ships could not at the same time be used to blockade American ports. British vessels stopping to deal with one American threat to a merchant convoy, could not guard it as it sailed on, against the possibility of attack by other American vessels, including privateers. Even with relatively small numbers, American warships presented the British with a problem of priorities.

### **Re-Provisioning, Refit and Repair**

Whatever the number of British warships available on the North American station, they would inevitably need continual re-provisioning, refit and repair, and their crews time to recover from the cumulative effects of illness and injury, especially after action or bad weather. Theoretically, only a



third of the force available might be deployed at any one time since one third might be under repair and another third in transit to or from its base. In practice, operational necessity and the expertise of specialist crew members such as sailmakers, riggers and carpenters would make it possible to postpone a return to port. Copper sheathing, routinely applied to the hulls of Royal Naval vessels since about 1779, offered protection against marine worms and weed growth, and had increased the time before hull-cleaning was again necessary.(33) Nevertheless, in October 1813, Warren had reported to the Admiralty that one-fifth of his force was either on passage, or needed refitting or heavy repair.(34)

An acute shortage of food and water might make return imperative, and occasionally this factor is evidently a constraint on Britain's implementation of maritime economic warfare. One of the most serious potential limits to a strategy of blockade which, in order to be both legal and effective required a continuous presence, was the need of blockading crews for provisions. To a great extent however, the basic supplies of food and drink for blockading squadrons was to be provided by the Victualling Board's provisioning service, which has been described as "the most important triumph of eighteenth-century British naval administration", and which continued its work into the early years of the following century.(35) Failing or contrary winds might take a squadron off station, or prolong a passage to another, but generally the crew's needs for food and drink were reliably and efficiently catered for. The availability of basic foodstuffs allowed the Royal Navy in North America to remain "on station, performing the tasks of seapower".(36)

Provisioning agents in Halifax and Bermuda would make local purchases to supplement supplies of preserved food sent out from Britain by contractors such as Andrew Belcher, responsible in 1813 for victualling the North America station. (37) Salt-beef, salt-pork, split-peas, butter and cheese was sent out in casks, with bagged biscuit. ‘Strong’ beer and spirits, including rum, complemented or replaced often long-stored water, while fresh meat, milk and eggs might be supplied by livestock kept aboard. Provisions might be acquired by *ad hoc* arrangements made offshore, such as fishing over the side, or by the confiscation of an enemy cargo.

Shortages might be resolved with illicit American supplies, bought or taken from the shore, from visiting boats, or from those encountered at sea. Profit-seeking Americans had long been a handicap to the United States war effort. Madison’s second embargo attempted to reduce if not eradicate “the palpable and criminal intercourse held with the enemy’s forces blockading or invading the waters and shores of the United States”.(38)

While in Massachusetts Bay in October 1813, Captain Hayes of the razee *Majestic* found that, “The Inhabitants of Province Town are disposed to be on friendly terms, and have promised to allow the ships to take water from their Wells and on reasonable terms will supply them with fish Fruit and Vegetables & also good firewood.” In return, Hayes provided “a note to several Owners of Schooners going for a Cargo, stating the assistance afforded the *Majestic* and recommending their being permitted to pass.”(39) The Royal Navy’s need for food and water therefore occasionally prevented the achievement of a completely impervious commercial blockade of the United States.

## **Recruitment and Desertion**

Recruiting and retaining sufficient manpower was a problem in both navies, especially limiting operations involving contact with the shore.

Although better paid than British crews, American seamen transferred from the sea to gunboats or the Lakes, and so deprived of their bounties or incentives, tended to desert or fail to re-enlist on completion of their agreed term. As the war progressed, and British commercial blockade increased unemployment amongst American merchant seamen, the problem for the United States Navy might have been eased but for the dissatisfaction caused by lack of pay other than in Treasury notes subject to up to 25% discount.

(40)

Between 1811 –13, 29,405 men were press-ganged into the Royal Navy, but in the same period, 27,300 deserted.(41) Recruitment and retention was so great a problem for the navy in Britain that even when ships were newly available, crews were hard to find. On 4 June 1813, Melville wrote to Warren that, “Some of our Fir Frigates have been launched, and others are coming forward. The whole will probably be completed in the course of this year, but we have great Difficulty in procuring men for them.”(42) For the British, desertion was such a lasting concern that soon after arriving in Halifax, Warren had issued a proclamation promising deserters leniency, and encouraging British seamen in American service to return. It was something his predecessor had already tried, although with little success in either case. Warren went further. He wrote asking Melville to suggest to the Prince Regent that a royal pardon of deserters would prove effective.(43)

The desertion problem may have been worsened by low morale caused partly by delay in the distribution of prize money. On 5 November 1812, Warren wrote to Melville that such delay caused,

a bad effect among the Seamen as the Contrast is too great for their feelings to observe the Americans as Capturing, Condemning Selling and Dividing the profits of the British ships [taken] & that not one of the enemy vessels brought in by their Exertions has as yet been bestowed upon them. (44)

After the early months of 1813, even unshared prizes, which formed the majority, took a year to settle.(45) Adjudication for the sixth of prizes shared between a number of captors took longer. As Warren's accounts were later to show, some disputes remained unresolved until long after the war, by which time some beneficiaries were untraceable, or possibly dead.(46) Especially when commanders sank or burned prizes in order to avoid delays and the need for sending away prize crews when already shorthanded, blockade duty became unprofitable and unpopular with both officers and men. A motive for remaining in naval service was gone, and blockade appeared to vacillate between tedium, danger and disappointment.(47)

The problem remained no less acute in 1814. In both January and February, Niles' *Weekly Register*, a Baltimore periodical, mentioned the "mass desertions" of British seamen from *Albion*, *Superb* and *Newcastle*.(48) This may not have been merely propaganda, since on 25 June 1814, Rear-Admiral George Cockburn was to write to Warren's successor, Vice-Admiral Alexander Cochrane that, although blockade "this last Month has cost the Enemy around us more than a Million of Dollars", desertion remained a

problem, with “Many instances of our Marines walking over to the Enemy”.

(49) A “significant number” of deserting British seamen evidently enlisted in the United States Navy or in American privateers, despite the risk of capital punishment if captured, or at less hazard, into the American merchant service.(50)

It is often more or less explicitly suggested that a major constraint on the Royal Navy’s use of maritime economic warfare in North America and West Indies between 1812 and 1815 was the mediocre, or even poor quality, of some British naval personnel. Individual captains and lieutenants are often praised for their competence and courage, such as Broke of the *Shannon*. He is rightly admired for his innovation and dedication to gun-drill, vindicated on 1 June 1813 by his swift defeat of the *Chesapeake*. Nonetheless, criticism is made of both Sawyer and Warren, and some of the seamen and marines they commanded, with the implication that twenty years of almost continuous war with France had by then involved some scraping of Britain’s barrel of manpower.(51)

Warren himself however had been selected as commander-in-chief from a number of possibilities. Sir Alexander Cochrane, his eventual successor, had written to Lord Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty in April 1812. “Should the Embargo said to have taken place in America end in a War and there is a vacancy for that Command they have the offer of my services having a perfect knowledge of the Coast from my having served there in the American War and five years since while France aided the United States.” Having been Governor of Guadeloupe after contributing to its capture in 1810, he added, “Should my services be required in the Western World either

here or on the Coast of America I will be ready in twenty four hours notice to embark on board any ships that may be sent for me".(52)

Warren was nonetheless preferred, partly because of his diplomatic experience as plenipotentiary extraordinary to St Petersburg between 1802-4, apparently thought likely to equip him for dealing with the potential armistice to which the British government hoped the Americans might agree on learning of the revocation of its Orders in Council, as far as they affected America. Furthermore, Warren's service record was impressive. As well as having dealt successfully with an earlier French threat to Ireland, Warren had expertise in precisely the sort of economic warfare now to be employed against America. Warren had earlier commanded one of the independent squadrons engaged in the blockade of France, which, "with the best young captains and a free hand to cruise" had in doing so "won a large share of glory and prize money". The effect of these squadrons "on French coasting trade [had] reduced Brest by 1795 to near starvation".(53)

Warren's success however had led, perhaps inevitably, to a reputation for acquisitiveness. By 1806, he seems to have made an enemy of a somewhat misanthropic Admiral of the Fleet, Earl St Vincent, who felt that "Sir JW is a mere partisan, preferring prize money to the public good at all times".(54) Earlier in the year he had accused Warren of duplicity and greed, writing that he would, "intrigue for a chief command...He wants money and will not be contented with the small pittance likely to be the lot of the puisne flag officer in this fleet".(55) By November 1806, others shared a poor view of Warren, one writing that he was "indefensible", and "now good for nothing but fine weather & easy sailing & is no longer enough in earnest about the

duties of his profession to go through them with credit to himself & advantage to the service". The writer, Thomas Grenville, then First Lord of the Admiralty, added that he was "very sorry for it".(56) But, even if wholly deserved, Warren's reputation might seem to have made him well-suited for a war based on the capture of as much American commercial property at sea as possible, and the destruction of strategically important infrastructure ashore.

On 17 June 1812, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh's "Most Secret" letter had told Warren that, "In a few days you will receive some formal Documents upon the Subject, with Instructions as to your Conduct towards the American Govt", in advance of his appointment to the 'United Command' on 3 August. At least initially, Warren clearly enjoyed not only the respect and confidence of Melville, the current First Lord, and the Admiralty's political representative in the Cabinet, but also that of Castlereagh, whom he met in early August 1812, to receive his instructions in person.(57)

However, success in maritime commercial blockade was necessarily a slow and cumulative process, and criticism of Warren's operational conduct was renewed in the tone and substance of First Secretary of the Admiralty Croker's letters, conveying their Lordship's disappointment at the lack of prompt success against the United States Navy. Croker commented on Warren's lack of "judicious arrangement" of "adequate" resources.(58) Many subsequent historians have taken their cue from these observations without making sufficient allowance for the complexity of the circumstances and the timescale in which Warren was expected to succeed. The self-interested machinations of the West India Committee was eventually to secure re-

separation of the United Command, and Warren's displacement by Cochrane, just as the temporary end of the war in Europe eased Britain's shortage of vessels and manpower.

The prevalence of sickness amongst naval personnel at every level also limited British operations in North America. At Halifax, Vice-Admiral Sawyer did not long survive Warren's arrival. On 7 October 1812, Warren used Sawyer's poor health as the ostensible reason for suggesting his removal.<sup>(59)</sup> Warren's secretary and prize agent George Hulbert welcomed Sawyer's replacement as second in command by Rear-Admiral Sir George Cockburn. "The change is favourable to Sir J and instead of an old woman he has got a devilish active fellow and just such as he wanted".<sup>(60)</sup> By 3 March 1813, Cockburn's squadron was blockading the Chesapeake. Blockading operations there however, were curtailed for 1813, as early as 6 September, when Warren was obliged to leave Lynnhaven Bay for Halifax, "as the men have been afflicted with a fever and ague sometimes prevalent in this Climate". Warren's postscript added that he too had "been unwell" but hoped that "a few weeks in Nova Scotia will recover my health".<sup>(61)</sup>

The climates found in various parts of the Warren's 'United Command' may well have exacerbated the shortage of those available for duty. The problem of sickness was again experienced the following year when almost 44% of two battalions of Royal Marines raiding the Chesapeake in November 1814 were thought by Captain Barrie of the *Dragon* to be "such poor things naturally and so very sick that I shall be able to do little with them."<sup>(62)</sup>



Warren's shortages of vessels and manpower, especially at the initial stages of the war, were all the more severe when seen in relation to the wide range of responsibilities imposed upon him by the Cabinet, where naval views were represented by the First Lord, Viscount Melville. The 'pleasure' of the Prince Regent and Privy Council, agreed by the Cabinet, and sent as instructions by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, were duly transmitted as orders from Melville and the Board of Admiralty. Warren was made responsible for exploring the possibilities of an armistice, "as was [e]nunciated by Lord Castlereagh", in early August. Before sailing on 14 August, Warren was supplied by the Foreign Office, via the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, with precise instructions, and an agreed draft letter to Madison, or Secretary of State Monroe, "should he find it suited to circumstances at the time of his arrival off the Coast".(63)

On his arrival at Halifax, Warren found that 46 American vessels, over half of them full-rigged ships, had been detained before 17 September under the terms of the General Embargo on American shipping which the British government had applied on 31 July, "in any of the ports, harbours or roads within any part of his Majesty's domains".(64) But Castlereagh's "secret instructions" of 6 August, given to Warren before he left, were to "make a proposition to the American government". In the event of the Americans revoking their letters of marque, Warren was to suspend hostilities.(65) Since American prizes taken between May and 1 August were "to be restored less costs", energetic pursuit of further American prizes was effectually constrained by the wait for an American answer, as well as by

Warren's need to employ his limited resources to protect British merchant vessels from American privateers. While waiting, Warren noted that no revocation of American letters of marque appeared, and that privateers were still being equipped and manned.(66)

Warren had sent his letter to Madison, via Secretary of State Monroe, on 30 September 1812, but was not to receive Monroe's answer until 16 November.(67) Until receipt of Monroe's reply, full-scale implementation of the Royal Navy's commercial blockade had been greatly restrained by the British diplomatic effort, for which Warren had in part, been selected.

Whereas 110 American vessels had been detained in Halifax harbour, or brought in for adjudication between the declaration of war on 18 June and Warren's armistice proposal of 30 September, only eight had been captured during October and none at all in November, while Warren waited for an American reply. Only two had been taken during December while news spread that the Americans had, in effect, again chosen war.(68)

If in November, a two-month delay in a British response was to be avoided, Warren had had to make an appropriate decision on Monroe's reply. In the event, the American answer made any armistice conditional on a prior British abandonment of impressment. Deciding that this was unacceptable, Warren resumed the maritime blockade. Britain could not reasonably have been expected to concede any of its sovereign rights before negotiations began. Warren's naval initiative had been limited by political instructions which, while imposing heavy responsibilities, had left him ample scope for serious error.

### **‘Licences without Number’**

Similarly, Warren had to deal with the complexities of neutral vessels carrying ‘Letters of Protection’ against British detention, often called ‘Commercial Licences for Trading with the Enemy’. These were issued, with varying degrees of propriety, to neutral shippers including Americans, to export American flour and grain to British armies in Canada, the Iberian Peninsula, Gibraltar and the British West Indies, as well as to the civilian populations. By allowing neutral and even United States merchant vessels out of some American ports, and by permitting their eventual return, even if only in ballast, such licences were held by some to render all British blockades illegal, even when neutrals were warned by proclamation. Some Americans argued that, “by the maritime law, any blockade abrogated all licences to trade; if otherwise the blockade was to be deemed to be broken”.(69) Those boarded could claim vociferously that Britain could issue licences, or proclaim blockades, but not both. In any case, licences seemed to Warren to have proliferated “beyond all idea for Spain Gibr & the West Indies from the Americas”, having been issued, not only by Augustus Foster, the British Minister in Washington, but also from Halifax by Vice-Admiral Sawyer, by Andrew Allen the former British Consul in Boston, and from Britain, by the Home Secretary, Viscount Sidmouth. By October 1812, Warren had successfully sought Sawyer’s replacement, and Allen’s conduct was being officially questioned.(70) By February 1813, Warren felt that it was “impossible to Institute a Blockade of the Enemies Ports in the Face of Neutral Licences and protections without Number”, a situation “which

required from the Admiralty clear and explicit Instructions to enable me to act with Effect”.(71)

Such licences were familiar to all concerned since officially, an average of almost 10,000 a year had been issued between 1807 - 1811 alone, part of a total of 53,156, valid for up to nine months.(72) A conciliatory British offer in May 1812, to share equally with American applicants the number of licences issued for trade with Europe, had come to nothing. By the end of August 1812, another 500 had been issued. The number of licences encountered by British blockading squadrons had also been increased by convincing forgeries, openly on sale in American cities for up to \$5,000, complicating the day-to-day decisions of boarding officers.(73) Such British difficulties in the early months of the war contributed to something approaching American complacency. On 11 September 1812, John Maybin, a Philadelphia commercial agent, wrote,

I believe with some of our Merchants the Confidence they have that the British Cruisers will not Molest them going to Lisbon and Cadiz – others have a Pas[s]port under the Authority from Admiral Sawyer & Mr Foster – for which I am told they pay one Dollar per Barrel. (74)

Warren’s frustration is occasionally evident, possibly straining his relations with London. As late as August 1813, he complained to Melville that, “The swarm of Licences to Neutral Flags to the Eastern States renders the warships of no avail & is beyond an idea in consequence.”(75)

Vessels flying false colours also constrained British commercial blockade at sea, with potentially career damaging reprimands awaited junior

officers guilty of creating misunderstandings with, for example, Russian, Swedish and Danish neutrals. “If the war is to proceed, Warren wrote, “it should be with activity against the South”, which had sent “to Sea Numbers of Ships under Spanish, Portuguese and of late obtained Swedish Colours from St Bartholemews: the property is thus covered...”.(76) If commercial blockade of the United States was to be effective, the problems posed by both unrestricted licences and the use of false colours would have to be resolved.

Warren himself felt a lack of unequivocal instructions, and on 7 October 1812, asked Melville for unambiguous orders. He seems to have felt particularly aggrieved after meeting a newly arrived American agent for prisoners of war who “enquired if I had been informed that Orders by the King and Council had been issued in England to permit all Ships with Supplies of Provisions to The Peninsula to pass free, which I answered in the negative having received no Instructions on that Head.”(77) Warren’s inherently ambiguous orders were a major constraint on the operation of an impervious commercial blockade. By April 1814, the problems brought by licences had been largely resolved for his successor by the end of Wellington’s need for American grain and flour, the re-separation of Warren’s United Command, and the extension of the British blockade to include the ports of New England.

### **The Demands of Convoy**

Especially during the early stages of the war, the reconciliation of the simultaneous demands of both offensive and defensive maritime economic warfare in North America, constituted a real constraint on each. By March

1813, the *Times* had castigated both government and Admiralty for the loss of “Five hundred merchantmen and three frigates” to American warships.(78)

From the outset however, the Admiralty had revoked almost all existing licences to sail without convoy protection, and given Warren “positive direction that no Merchant Vessels should be permitted to sail without Convoy and that frequent and regular protection should be afforded between the different Ports” of Warren’s command.(79)

The West India Committee, a powerful pressure group representing growers, merchants and shippers, regularly reminded government and Admiralty that British merchant vessels would need protection in the Caribbean, and during their voyages to and from Britain. As a result, Melville wrote, in part reassuringly, to Warren from London that,

The clamour has been great here, though apparently unfounded, on your withdrawing a large portion of the West India force to the northward. The provision of sufficient convoys between Quebec & Halifax & the West Indies will not escape your attention. (80)

Other vessels trading between Canada and Britain would also have to be convoyed. The need to defend British trade from American attack was undeniable, but placed a strain on Warren’s limited resources. By September 1813, earlier losses, vessels on “numerous Blockades” and “Others gone home with Convoys”, had together produced “the greatest Difficulty...to answer these Several Demands of Service.” Warren would “find it difficult to preserve & relieve the several Blockades and to guard the Islands & furnish the Convoys constantly Demanded & Ships”.(81)

Warren had little choice. He had been provided with an abstract of the 1798 Convoy Act, which it was “their Lordships intention to enforce”, and reminding him that “no persons” were “authorized to grant Licences to Sail without Convoy.” It specified severe penalties for masters leaving a convoy without permission.(82) For shippers, costly delay in assembling convoys was partly offset by reduced insurance premiums, but for Warren there were few advantages. One solution was to use vessels returning to Britain for repair, or to order vessels to complete a convoy duty before returning to patrol. Another was to allow escorts to leave a convoy just long enough to burn or sink a capture before rejoining the slower merchantmen. In December 1812, the *Shannon*, ordered to escort a convoy bound for Britain, had been “prowling about, half convoying and half cruising and very angry at our want of success” hoping to “dismiss our merchantmen in a week or ten days” and “then stride about more freely”.(83)

The possibility of separate squadrons of American warships escaping simultaneously in order to join forces to lift the British blockade of a major American port formed another constraint on the allocation of Warren’s blockading squadrons. Too great a concentration at one port, might leave another blockading squadron vulnerable. In early June 1813, an anxious Melville wrote privately to Warren trusting that his “Squadrons off New York and Boston will be on their guard against being caught between two fires by the junction of the Enemy from those Ports”. Melville hoped that he would soon “learn that your most important object, the blockading [of] the Enemy’s Ships of War in their Ports has been attained, as also the other objects of putting a total stop to their Trade and Annoyance of their Coast”.(84) The

first was clearly vital in order to achieve the second and third objectives while unmolested by American warships, particularly any acting in concert.

Warren's solution was to ensure, as far as possible, that at least one 74 and several frigates were stationed at each important port. Although a welcome change from equivocal instructions about vessels carrying licences, or flying false neutral colours, without adequate reinforcements, such exhortations would not help.

### **Naval Help from the French**

The possibility of French intervention in this Anglo-American war, as in the last, took up time and effort in London as well as in North America. Although theoretically, French warships blockaded in the Channel should not be able to cross the Atlantic, in unfavourable weather and visibility, an escape would not be impossible. The need for maintaining the blockades of French ports acted as a constraint since it meant that fewer British vessels were available for service against the United States. In October 1812, Warren had alerted Melville that, "There is a report in the U: States that bonaparte has pledged himself to Lend them 20 Sail of the Line a Division of which may be Shortly Expected".(85)

A 'Secret & Confidential' letter from the Admiralty Office to Warren, dated 19 June 1813, again discussed concern that escaping "French Squadrons from Brest or Rochfort" were "not unlikely to appear off the North American coast". Warren was further warned to "prevent surprise of any of your blockading squadrons". On the same day, Admiral Lord Keith was ordered to instruct the senior officer of any relieving force to take under his



command on arrival, only enough of Warren's North American squadrons to enable him to match a potentially combined force of French and United States warships on the American eastern seaboard. He was to be reminded of the importance of the British blockading squadrons, and warned not to "weaken or divert any blockading squadron off any of the Ports in which any American National Ship may be".(86) Although unlikely, the prospect of French intervention acted as a constraint on British actions on both sides of the Atlantic. In the event, any hopes Madison might have entertained of French naval, military or financial help, were made unrealistic by the British maritime blockade of France.

Nevertheless, Melville's increasingly evident concern was at least in part a reflection of the domestic political climate in which he held office. Melville represented the Admiralty in Cabinet and in Parliament, where Warren's perceived lack of progress was subject to Opposition scrutiny and barbed comment. How their conduct of the American war would be seen at home was a constant factor in the decision-making of both men. Warren particularly knew that, all the while, well-placed applicants were eager to supplant him.

The officers and men comprising the British blockade's boarding parties were clearly expected to conform not only to current legal constraints but also to the moral and social standards of their time, as shown by the note book of one young officer evidently expected to learn the comprehensive and strict regulations concerning maritime blockade. Those painstakingly written out by James Dunn aboard the frigate *Spartan* between 1811 and 1813, contained precise legal and practical "Directions for examining Ships at Sea,

and sending them for adjudication”. “In the visitation & search of Neutral Vessels” for example, he “must exercise as little hardship or personal vexation as possible and must detain Ships no longer than is necessary for a fair examination into the use, property & destination of the Ship’s Cargo”.(87)

The rules were punctiliously applied. On 12 May 1813, for example, HMS *Hogue* took and burned the 366 ton American merchantman *Acteon*, returning in ballast from Cadiz to Boston with a licence to export grain granted by the British Minister in Cadiz. Two years later, the American owner claimed damages against Captain Thomas Capel of the *Hogue*, in London’s Admiralty Court. There, Sir William Scott, Lord Stowell, ruled that the owner had been “unjustly deprived of his property”, and awarded “restitution with costs and damages” totalling £4,000, payable by Capel, who could make “representation” to the British government for compensation if it thought his decision to burn *Acteon* acceptable.(88)

Proper conduct was also expected towards captured enemy personnel. Civilian passengers on vessels intercepted, especially women and children, would generally have expected courteous, even generous treatment at the hands of the Royal Navy, and according to contemporary American newspapers, prisoners evidently received it on most occasions.(89) Seven rioting American seamen killed on 6 April 1815, while still held at Dartmoor prison in England, proved an unfortunate exception.(90)

## Weather and Climate

The most consistently frustrating constraints on the Royal Navy's operation of economic warfare in North America were probably those posed by climate and the weather. Temperature inversion in warmer weather caused spring fogs and summer mists known as "frets". In June 1813, Warren had confessed that, despite a 74 and three frigates outside Boston, both *President* and *Congress* had escaped "in a fog which is prevalent at this Season".(91) Reduced visibility was common even in August. By late November 1813, "Gales of wind & fog which so frequently occurs on this coast", had caused stragglers to lose sight of convoy escorts, so becoming more vulnerable to risk of capture.(92) On 30 December 1813, Warren had to admit that "on dark Nights with Strong Winds", several fast merchant ships had escaped to sea.(93) Such set backs were likely to produce recriminations, and to lower morale.

Even before an unseasonal hurricane did severe damage at Halifax on 12 November 1813, later described in detail in Chapter 4, the constant demands of blockade and convoy duties in such weather conditions had strained the North American dockyard's resources. All of them were running seriously short of materials and even of provisions.(94) In April 1814, Lieutenant Napier in the frigate *Nymphe*, wrote in his journal of "damp penetrating fogs, constantly and alternately changing to rain". Easterly onshore winds brought "snow and sleet". Poor visibility hindered contact with other blockading vessels and, especially at night, allowed blockaded vessels to escape. "Hard frosts" made necessary thick winter clothing which hampered movement. In June, a three-day westerly gale drove patrolling

vessels off station, as the prevailing wind so often did, threatening the continuity essential to blockade, to be followed in August with the start of the hurricane season.<sup>(95)</sup> The continual demands of blockade resulted in casualties even in relatively good weather, as in HMS *Marlborough* on 26 December 1812. The journal of ordinary seaman George Hodge on that day recorded, “A fresh breeze - a strange sail in sight. Fell from the for[e] top mast Matthew Donelson and was drowned”.<sup>(96)</sup> Donelson’s loss underlines the relentless year-round cost of maritime blockade, naval or commercial, to the Royal Navy on the coasts of North America in the early nineteenth century.

The Royal Navy’s economic warfare in North America was evidently heavily constrained, especially in its early stages, by the conflicting demands of diplomacy and economic warfare, and by the number and severity of the practical problems involved, but it was nonetheless, ultimately, to prove remarkably successful.

## Chapter 3

### Britain and the United States: Developing Economies in Peace and War

“[W]ith an extensive and fertile country, and a small population compared to the extent of our territory, we have annually a large surplus to export to foreign markets;... on the export of this surplus, which is cut off by war, depends in a great degree, the ability of the farmer to meet taxes”. ‘State of the Finances’, John Eppes, Chairman of Ways and Means Committee, House of Representatives, 10 October 1814.(1)

The Treaty of Paris, securing the independence of the United States from Britain in September 1783, had been preceded by a British Order in Council of 2 July that year, changing the terms under which Americans had traded as colonial Britons.(2) It was thought by some that Britain’s major trading partners were about to become foreign trading rivals. John Holroyd, Lord Sheffield, argued in his influential pamphlet that to allow the Americans any trading advantages for which they no longer qualified, could threaten Britain’s long-term commercial and maritime supremacy.(3) Conversely, the West India Committee, lobbying Parliament on behalf of the plantation owners, shippers and merchants of the British West Indies had argued as early as April 1783 that permission for “American ships as heretofore, freely to bring the produce of the dominions of the United States to the sugar colonies and to take back our produce in return is...essential”.(4)

Despite the debate, “a single Atlantic economy” had, in fact, soon re-asserted itself.(5) An “extensive flow of goods, ideas, skilled migrants and capital” had again contributed to a great degree of economic interdependence between the United States and the United Kingdom.(6) Britain still shared, especially with the American eastern seaboard, both a common language and

culture. Moreover, despite enormous potential and natural advantages, American economic development had initially been hampered by shortages of both real and financial capital, difficult terrain and great distances. The high cost of overland transport had offset all but local comparative advantage, and secondary industry had remained largely domestic and small scale. The United States was therefore still heavily dependent on European imports for manufactured goods including metal goods, pottery and textiles from Britain.

Nonetheless, especially after independence, American primary industries like agriculture, forestry and fishing had quickly produced exportable surpluses. Tertiary industries, including both coastal and trans-Atlantic shipping had developed, to distribute imports and export agricultural surpluses. American vessels increasingly transported the colonial products of European countries. Commercial and financial centres grew on the American eastern seaboard, among them Boston, Philadelphia and Providence, Rhode Island. American population growth had been rapid. A colonial population of about 2m in 1770 had grown to around 3.9m by 1790, and to 5.3m by 1800, with an average annual increase of almost 3.6% for the previous ten years.(7) By 1810, the total population of the United States was about 7.2m, compared with approximately 17.9m for the United Kingdom.(8)

### **Conjoined Economies**

The population growth of the United States had provided a vital market for British manufactured textiles by creating more demand than the small American textile industry could meet. British output had expanded

beyond domestic demand after a succession of technological innovations developed by entrepreneurs with access to financial capital. After 1793, when war had closed European markets, Britain had replaced them with New World outlets, such that by 1798, 60% of British textile manufactures went to North America and the Caribbean.(9) British cotton exports to North America alone had grown from 37% of total cotton exports in the 1780's, to 53% in the 1800's. British woollen exports to the United States over the same period had also increased.(10)

Cotton played a crucial role in the early nineteenth century Atlantic economy for both Britain and the United States. As a bulky crop, the raw cotton grown in the southern United States had been regularly shipped in large American vessels to Liverpool. As cotton manufacturing concentrated in Lancashire, external economies had contributed to a British advantage in selling price, so that by 1805, manufactured cotton formed 42% of British exports.(11) Therefore, by the early years of the nineteenth century, Britain and the United States were not only major trading partners but were also mutually dependent as both source and market for the other's specialised output. American wheat, flour, rice, timber, tobacco and raw cotton found outlets in Britain, and as a largely agrarian economy and expanding market for manufactured and processed goods, the United States was crucially important to Britain's economic development. Trading, financial and family links continued to develop between London, Liverpool, and Manchester, and Baltimore, Savannah and New Orleans.

On both sides of the Atlantic, many recognised the importance of this interdependence, and some sought to preserve it as political and

diplomatic relationships deteriorated. After the war, Republican Congressman Adam Seyburt, reflected that between 1802-4, American exports to Britain and its dependencies had averaged \$23.7m annually, representing 34.6% of the total, almost twice those to France, the United States' next most important customer.(12) American imports from Britain and its dependencies between 1802-4 averaged \$35.7m a year, which Seyburt calculated to be 47.4% of the total. It was almost three times the 16.4% of American imports from France. Anglo-American trade between 1802-4 had shown an unfavourable balance for the United States of \$12m, almost three times its next largest trade deficit of \$4.4m with "China and other native Asiatic parts."(13)

Specifically, between 1806-11, Britain had imported from America an annual average of 34.6m lbs of raw cotton. In 1811 alone, British imports of raw cotton from the United States had reached 46.9m lbs, compared with an annual average for the years 1805-9 of 69.2m lbs imported into Britain from all parts of the world.(14) Seyburt's figures suggest that at this time more than two-thirds of Britain's raw cotton imports usually came from the southern United States. Furthermore, Seyburt noted, on aggregate between 1805-11, the United States "received annually, 20.1% of the manufactures and produce exported from Britain", even when excluding "foreign and colonial produce". During the same period, the total value of British exports to the United States "of every description", including foreign and colonial re-exports, averaged \$36.5m a year.(15)



## **The Question of Advantage and Cautious Accounting**

Seyburt later argued that, in the years before 1812, Anglo-American trade had been at a marked advantage to Britain. He attempted to quantify Britain's comparative advantage by claiming that, "It is generally calculated that raw materials gain sevenfold by being manufactured."<sup>(16)</sup> Similarly, "In 1800, the merchandise exported from the United States to Great Britain was worth \$74.23 per ton", whereas, "that imported from Great Britain was worth \$240 per ton."<sup>(17)</sup> Therefore, between 1795 and 1801, the average annual imbalance against the United States "in favour of Great Britain, of \$15.2m, was only \$70,166 less than the apparent unfavourable balance produced by our trade with all parts of the world collectively taken."<sup>(18)</sup> Of 1795-1801's aggregate imbalance of \$106.1m, no less than \$92.5m resulted from "our trade with England and Scotland whence we chiefly import manufactured articles."<sup>(19)</sup>

Between 1790 and 1815, American exports had totalled \$847m, while "foreign goods imported and not re-exported", reached \$1,231m, producing an adverse balance of visible trade of \$384m.<sup>(20)</sup> However, as Nettels showed, these figures did not present a complete or accurate picture of contemporary American trade. In colonial times, the British Navigation Acts ensured that such exports were probably carried in British bottoms and insured in London. Perhaps as an accounting legacy, exports were still valued as their price in America before being sent abroad, and although the now foreign buyers would have to pay shipping and insurance costs as part of the total price paid, such costs were not added to United States export values. By

1807 however 90% of the value of exports was carried in American vessels.(21) As the American merchant fleet expanded, the selling merchant was often at least part ship-owner. This was the case with the New England firm of Brown and Ives, affluent and influential importers and export merchants of Providence, Rhode Island, sole-owners of five vessels, and part-owners of four more.(22) Shipping costs were therefore not always separately recorded in their overall profit and loss accounts, and although freight earnings and insurance premiums were, what would later be called ‘invisible exports’, they were not added to the ‘prime cost’. Exports were being conservatively counted as ‘free on board’.(23)

Imports too seemed to show that Anglo-American trade was very much to British advantage. By 1807, 94% of the value of United States imports was also said to be brought in American vessels, despite almost half of the imports coming from Britain, which with the world’s largest merchant fleet, traditionally offered both shipping and marine insurance.(24) However, after 1790, the offices of marine insurance brokers were to be found in many American ports, including those of Campbell & Richie in Boston, sometimes used by Brown & Ives.(25) Many American merchant vessels carried ‘supercargoes’, trusted agents responsible for the profitable disposal of export cargoes, and the arrangement of return cargoes. Prices of return cargoes from foreign ports during round trips may have included an insurance premium, but many insurance contracts for vessels, and both outward and return cargoes, would have been made in America at the outset. The sometimes unnecessary inclusion of all shipping costs and insurance premiums would therefore have increased the apparent value of American imports, but made

comparison with contemporary export earnings even more invalid. Some imports were counted when taxed *ad valorem*, according to their value as 'prime cost', others at specific rates per weight. Still others were tax-free, and therefore practically ignored by record keeping customs officials. Estimates of such tax-free imports have been a lasting cause of inaccuracy.

Contemporary overseas trade figures also excluded "foreign exports", that is re-exports, often imported and processed natural products including spices, blended teas and coffee, carried mostly to Europe and the West Indies. These were so extensive and valuable that between 1798-1800, and again between 1805-8, that they exceeded the value of "domestic exports" sold abroad, such as timber, grain and increasingly, flour.(26) Between 1803-7, the United States annual average adverse balance of trade was \$19.8m.(27) According to Bogart, Nettels' authority, freights earned during this time by American shipping, averaged \$32m a year.(28) Given the accuracy of Bogart's estimate, Nettel's conclusion that, "Whatever the exact figures, it seems certain that freights and profits" from re-exports, when added to American 'domestic exports', "gave the Union a profitable status in world commerce", is important.(29) In modern terms, although the United States had an adverse annual balance of visible trade with Britain, overall, when 'invisible items' like the earnings of American shipping were included, it had a favourable balance of payments. This makes what was to follow seem all the more remarkable. An incomplete understanding of America's foreign trading position may well have motivated Madison's preparedness to risk maritime blockade by a declaration of war on Britain.

The apparent imbalance in Anglo-American trade, although based on an incomplete understanding of it, was often greatly resented. “Such”, wrote Seyburt, “have been our contributions for the advancement of the skill and industry of a nation which, for raw materials, is the most dependent on other countries”. Quoting the British Member of Parliament, banker, financier and pamphleteer Alexander Baring, Seyburt concluded that, “Our tribute, ‘paid, to a considerable extent, for the support of the fleets and armies’ of Great Britain.”(30)

Britain’s almost continuous war with France since 1793 had in fact contributed considerably to American prosperity, although David Warden, “Late Consul for the United States at Paris”, exaggerated when claiming in 1819 that, “The state of European warfare from the year 1802 to 1812 gave to America almost all the carrying trade or freight of the commercial world, valued at 10% upon the capital”.(31) Nonetheless, the United States merchant marine had certainly reached 1.1m tons by 1807, and by then, 92.7% of the tonnage engaged in the United States foreign trade was American.(32) Furthermore, Warden argued, “The United States also gained 5% by exchange, so that the annual profit of commerce and navigation have been estimated at 15% upon the capital.”(33) More plentiful financial capital also meant that by 1806, more cargoes were American owned, leading Barnabas Bidwell to assert in Congress that, “We are no longer mere freighters for foreigners”, but work “on our own capital, and for our own account”.(34) However, an aggressively expanded United States merchant fleet would increasingly encounter both competing British merchant vessels, and the

Royal Navy, intercepting neutrals while conducting its effective commercial blockade of France.

### **Diplomacy and Debate**

In 1794, it had looked as if the Jay Treaty would resolve the difficulties of Anglo-American trade by defining neutral rights in wartime.<sup>(35)</sup> During the following period of prosperity, American visible exports had almost trebled, from \$33m in 1794 to \$94.1m in 1801, and, after falling during a temporary European peace, had again peaked in 1807 at \$108.3m.<sup>(36)</sup> But, from the outset, American access to trade with and between the British West Indies had been a bone of contention on both sides of the Atlantic. The American Senate had ratified the treaty only when Article XII, restricting American access, was suspended. Orthodox British mercantilists objected to it on principle, as reducing the overall value of British trade.<sup>(37)</sup>

According to Article XII, either British or American vessels could import livestock, timber, grain and flour to the West Indies, without any higher or additional duties becoming payable. American vessels could export “any molasses, sugar, coffee, cocoa or cotton” from the West Indies, but only to the United States, and certainly not to wartime European markets, on which American traders would have made most profit.<sup>(38)</sup> Subsequent American trade with the West Indies was to be the focus of much British resentment. Robert Banks Jenkinson, later Lord Hawkesbury and still later Lord Liverpool, wrote in January 1796 that, “Our West India Islands will

never be safe if the subjects of the United States are allowed to have a free intercourse with them and import among other articles their democratic principles into those islands.”(39)

American trade to and from the West Indies had indeed grown rapidly, and in clear contravention of the restrictions of Article XII. As soon as 1805, James Stephen, a lawyer who had lived in St Kitt’s until 1794, argued in an influential pamphlet that neutral American shipping of French colonial exports, was simply *War in Disguise*.(40) He noted that, although in no position to fight Britain, the Americans were partly negating British war efforts by supporting the commerce of the French West Indies, and by assisting French competition, undercutting the ‘West India trade’ of British planters and merchants. Stephen predicted that “by the ruin of its commerce and its commercial revenue, (infallible consequences of a war with this country)”, the United States “would have no resources for the great and extraordinary demands of maritime war, but very heavy interior taxation”. Referring to the Treasury Secretary’s Report to Congress for 1801, Stephen noted that,

external commerce contributes more than nine-tenths of the whole revenue of the country; and that if this source of supply were cut off,...there would be a deficit of \$2,400,000 to be provided for, beyond the interest of the public debt, before any war fund could be raised. (41)

Joseph Marryat, writing in 1807, also greatly deplored any British trading concessions which, “ever led to new demands, as the history of all our negotiations with America has abundantly demonstrated”.(42) He added a

note that, by 1807, “General Smith of Baltimore, acknowledged in the senate of the United States, that the amount of West India produce annually re-exported, after supplying the home consumption of America, was twenty-eight millions of dollars, or nearly seven millions sterling.”(43) Increased American participation in the West Indian carrying trade clearly competed with British colonial shipping, which Marryat recognised as “the nursery of seamen and naval power”.(44)

Alexander Baring however, argued in 1808 that Britain’s evident recession was caused by “the restrictions of the enemy”, the Berlin and Milan decrees of Napoleon’s Continental System, rather than “the intercourse of neutrals with the Continent of Europe”.(45) Baring considered Stephen’s pamphlet largely responsible for Britain’s retaliatory Orders in Council, and deplored one commentator’s disappointment that Britain had not taken the “opportunity of going to war with America”.(46) All trade, Baring thought, should be encouraged, and that American neutral trade was, “politically inoffensive and commercially beneficial”. Britain’s Orders in Council, he thought, should be repealed.(47)

But until they were, American shippers were to find themselves in a dilemma. The Milan decree of 17 December 1807 had announced the French intention of detaining neutral vessels found trading with Britain. A series of British Orders in Council had retaliated by requiring that neutral trade with French occupied Europe should first pass through British ports, paying transit fees. As a result, Hickey argues, “If American ships complied with the French decrees, they were subject to seizure by the British; and if they submitted to British decrees, they could be seized by the French.”(48) British concessions,

such as reduced transit fees and the increased issue of licences to carry imports into Britain, did little to help, since the principle of Britain's perceived right to interfere with neutral American trade was not conceded.

Nevertheless, the level of American prosperity had increased markedly until moderated by French decrees, British Orders in Council, and Jefferson's anti-British Embargo. It had reflected the strength of American foreign trade, both rising exports, and the level of imports, and had important and lasting consequences. As more American farmers, merchants and shippers had become affluent, spending had increased on imported luxuries including sugar, tea, coffee, wines and silks. Since the population of the United States had grown between 1791 and 1801 by almost 35%, and its imports by over 280%, spending on imports could become the major source of government tax revenue by the imposition of customs duties on imports. To these could be added, as a less important corollary, shipping registration and enrolment fees, and lighthouse dues.<sup>(49)</sup> Furthermore, although demand for such imports would rise as incomes increased, it would decline less than proportionally, if at all, when import duties raised the price. Internal excise duties, used by the opposing Federalists to pay for America's largely successful undeclared maritime war against France, had been unpopular, contributing to the Federalist's electoral defeat in 1800. Taxation of imports therefore had seemed ideal in peacetime. While equitably targeting the rich, it could be avoided by the poor, and met the philosophical requirements of those who had read Adam Smith's, topical 'Canon's of Taxation', long available in America.<sup>(50)</sup> Being predictable, cheap and convenient to administer, as well as difficult to evade, import duties produced revenue so



efficiently that Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin argued that the Republican's less unpopular import duties would allow progressive reduction of the United States National Debt, then considered an important objective. This had proved so successful that since 1805, as shown in Appendix B Table 5, the National Debt was still being reduced as late as 1813.(51)

But however successful in peacetime, even allowing the avoidance of internal excise duties and 'direct' taxes on property, the United States government's almost sole reliance on import duties to provide more than 92.3 % of its tax revenue in 1812, made it fiscally dependent on the continuation of normal trade relations with Britain, its major trading partner. However, both Jefferson and Madison after 1809, believed that Britain was vulnerable to the withdrawal of American trade, and could be compelled to reduce the Royal Navy's interference with neutrals during its blockades of France, and its reliance on impressment. Economic sanctions against Britain as an alternative to war however, contradicted the taxation of imports for raising revenue, and placed Gallatin in a difficult position. The political requirement to support the President's economic sanctions against Britain, and the maintenance of sound government finances dependent on import duties, would be extremely difficult to reconcile. Even the alternative of an American export embargo ran the risk of retaliation. Britain could find permanent sources of raw cotton, for example, in Brazil, Egypt or the East Indies, as an alternative to the southern United States.

After December 1807, Jefferson's export embargo and non-importation legislation, collectively known as the "restrictive system", had damaged most sectors of the American economy. Officially recorded

American total exports had fallen by almost 80% from \$108.3m in 1807, to \$22.4m in 1808. Exports had recovered by 1811, but to only \$61.3m.(52) More importantly, however, and as shown in Appendix B, Table 1, imports fell by almost 60%, from \$144.7m in 1807 to \$58.1m in 1808.(53) This effort to curtail British naval activity caused such serious damage to the American economy that even fellow Republican John Randolph compared it to an attempt “to cure corns by cutting off the toes”.(54) Despite the unemployment, inflation and hardship caused by Jefferson’s economic sanctions, which had brought no productive British diplomatic response, Madison persisted with Macon’s No 2 Bill, and a Non-Importation Act which banned British imports from February 1811.(55) This did much to reduce Anglo-American trade. Furthermore, a severe shortage of specie in Britain made payment in cash for continuing American exports to Britain, increasingly difficult.(56) Since, after the Non-Importation Act, Americans could not legally receive British manufactures in payment, credit built up in American accounts in London, which holders became increasingly anxious to repatriate in some form. Some attitudes had also hardened. Some British opinion regarded American neutral trade as unprincipled profiteering on Britain’s war against French tyranny, while some Americans resented British restrictions on maritime trade as an attempt at quasi-colonial subjection.

Madison was to compound the problem by the imposition of his own 90-day Embargo on 4 April 1812, supplemented, before its end, by a declaration of war against Britain. This was to be without the prior introduction of a workable system of taxation of a wider cross-section of the American population by either a ‘direct’ tax on property, or the re-

introduction of excise duties on internal production and trade, or both. The pre-war American retention of revenue-raising methods so narrowly based on import duties and shipping fees, demonstrates that few in Congress understood the vulnerability of the American economy, or had forecast accurately the impact of either their own restrictive legislation, or a British commercial blockade, much less the possibility of the two being in operation at the same time.

Gallatin had long intended that any war should be financed by government borrowing.<sup>(57)</sup> The prospect of this being a sustainable success was rendered improbable by the Republican trade legislation. Such restrictions on American overseas trade, including the possibility of heavy financial penalties for non-compliance, would seriously damage the interests of precisely those people best placed to make long-term loans to the government. This would include farmers seeking to dispose of agricultural surpluses, merchants buying and re-selling such goods, or to the shippers arranging their transport. These men were often part of an articulate international network long practised in finding profitable alternative investments. The lost political support of those whose livelihoods were threatened was probably a foregone conclusion, but the forfeit of their loanable funds should also have been predictable.

Lending to the American government by buying its securities at par, until then the usual practice, could well seem less attractive than investment in developing American industries like textiles, largely freed of competition by British blockade, or in British government securities, readily available for cash, and at discount, in London or Canada. The potential lender's co-

operation was all the more unlikely in support of a war against the major maritime power best placed to impose a sea-based commercial blockade which would damage or destroy their livelihoods. Britain had demonstrated such competence in prolonged wars, inflicting real economic damage on France.(58) One, or even two, loan-calls might be made on affluent banks, or wealthy and politically well-disposed individuals, but whether they could, or would, support an expensive war, as prolonged as Britain's against France, was of course untested, and apparently un-investigated. Any expectation of financial aid from France, itself isolated from overseas trade by British maritime commercial blockade, was probably unrealistic. As Gallatin told the Senate in November 1811, "In the present state of the world, foreign loans may be considered as nearly unattainable. In that respect, as in all others, the United States must solely rely on their own resources."(59)

Anglo-American relations had deteriorated quickly after February 1811. The American Minister in London returned to the United States, to be replaced only by a *chargés d'affaires*.(60) The illegality of British imports and potentially reduced government income might reasonably have been expected to sharpen Congressional attention to fiscal alternatives. On 25 November 1811, Gallatin appeared cautiously optimistic. In his report on the 'State of the Finances' he informed the Senate that a forecast deficit of \$1.2m for 1812 could be met from the surplus of \$3.9m for the year ending 30 September 1811. He congratulated the administration on its use of import duties for reducing the national debt by \$42m since 1805, despite the repeal of the duty on salt and "the great diminution of commerce during the last four years". This, he argued "considerably lessens the weight of the most

formidable objection, to which that revenue, depending almost solely on commerce, appears to be liable".(61)

He commented on the need for "persevering application of the surplus which it affords in years of prosperity", and continued, "if a similar application of such surplus be herewith strictly adhered to, forty millions of debt, contracted during five or six years of war, may always, without any extraordinary exertions, be reimbursed in ten years of peace." "But", he added, "to be placed on a solid foundation, it requires the aid of revenue, 'sufficient at least to defray the ordinary expenses of Government, and to pay the interest of the public debt, including that on new loans which may be authorized'." Disappointing proceeds from sales of public land could be rectified by "an addition of fifty per cent to the present amount of duties". "This mode", he added, "appears preferable for the present to any internal tax." Another 50% on customs duties, "would", he said, "with the aid of loans...be sufficient in time of war". Together, this would later double the rate of import duties.

Having so far loyally followed the party line, Gallatin had then allowed himself some moments of doubt.

Whether it would be sufficient to produce the same amount of revenue as under existing circumstances cannot at present be determined. Should any deficiency arise it may be supplied without difficulty by a further increase of duties, by a restoration of that on salt, and a proper selection of moderate internal taxes. (62)

The fact that continued “years of prosperity” could not be guaranteed, had impinged itself on Gallatin sooner than on most, apparently causing a perceptible reduction in confidence.

The possibility of raising money by loans to the amount which may be wanted, remains to be examined: for, the fact that the United States may easily, in ten years of peace, extinguish a debt of forty-two millions of dollars, does not necessarily imply that they could borrow that sum during a period of war.” (63)

With war against Britain becoming ever more probable, Congress, its Committees and the Treasury Secretary, belatedly gave thought to financing it. In a reply to the House Ways and Means Committee, written on 10 January 1812, Gallatin proposed not only borrowing \$10m, mostly for use in 1813, but also doubling the rate of import duties, already averaging 17%. His most controversial proposal however, was his recommendation for raising \$3m by a ‘direct’ tax on property, and another \$2m by indirect taxes, specifically, internal excise duties.(64) He agreed to the Committee’s earlier suggestion of issuing Treasury notes, to become in effect “a part of the circulating medium”, but warned that the amount should “never exceed” that “which may circulate without depreciation”.(65) Gallatin was immediately subjected to heavy, often libellous, criticism. Many, including Republicans, could not accept that, trade having been diminished by measures they had supported, together with currently rising interest rates, would mean radical fiscal reform, even perhaps the re-introduction of internal excise duties, if the war that many of them had persistently advocated, was to be paid for.

It was not as if Madison or Congress had lacked advice, based on varying degrees of expertise and political disinterest. On 17 February 1812, only four months before the American declaration of war, Ezekiel Bacon, Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, explicitly warned Congress. While almost wholly dependent for revenue on import and shipping duties, and especially when taking almost half its imports from Britain, “which in a state of war must be entirely suspended”, the United States, he said, could not afford to be subjected to British maritime commercial blockade. He advised Congress “to estimate accurately...not only [Britain’s] military and naval strength, but what is of equal importance in modern warfare, her pecuniary and financial strength”.(66) “We have been accustomed to consider the situation of British finances to be such that her Government must be on the very verge of bankruptcy.” By rejecting Gallatin’s proposals to widen the American tax base, Bacon argued, “we should advance much more rapidly in the road to national bankruptcy than Great Britain has ever done, with all her follies and all her prodigality.”(67) Major fiscal reform, including the raising of loans and the re-introduction of disused internal excise duties, was urgently required, if not already overdue. After much debate, Congress agreed to borrow \$11m, but would allow doubled import duties, ‘direct’ taxes and internal excise duties to be levied, only after a declaration of war against Britain.(68)

Import duties would clearly prove crucial to any American war effort since net customs duties accrued during 1811, to be available as government income the following year, stood at \$8,958,777, and comprised 91.41 % of the American government’s income for 1812, of \$9,801,132.(69) Customs

duties accrued in 1812 reflected that year's hurried importation into the United States of British goods, into which American profits accumulated in Britain since the Non-Importation Act of 1811, had been invested. This raised net customs revenue to \$13.2m, no less than 92.31% of the American government's income of \$14.3m for 1813.(70) Without net customs revenue having been supplemented by wider taxation and successful borrowing, war should surely be best avoided, or if already precipitately declared, quickly ended by armistice and negotiation, so minimising the damage. Although procrastination made a poor alternative to reform, Congress proved itself unwilling to demand financial sacrifices from voters until they became unavoidable.

### **The British Economy: 1803 - 15**

Britain meanwhile, had had economic difficulties of its own. Harvests had been poor in both 1809 and 1810. Average wheat prices had risen by 18.6% between 1810 and 1811, reaching an unprecedented peak in 1812.(71) Despite the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809, which had replaced Jefferson's Embargo and officially banned exports, 1.4m bushels of American grain and flour had reached Britain that year, followed in 1810 by 786,889 bushels more.(72) Overall, bread prices in London had risen by more than 15% between 1810 and 1812, despite a slight decrease in 1811.(73) Napoleon had licenced the export of French and German wheat to Britain, perhaps seeking to worsen the developing currency shortage.(74)



Until 1810, British goods had been excluded from most European ports, excepting some in Portugal and on the Baltic coast, although in that year, Russian ports had been re-opened to Britain. The French invasion of Spain and then Portugal after 1808 had weakened their control of their South American colonies and British trade, particularly with Brazil, had increased. British exports and re-exports to “the foreign West Indies and South America”, increased between 1807-9 by more than 380%, and imports by almost 280%. But, between 1810-12 these exports had fallen by 31% and imports by 64.5%.(75) Additionally, the impact of the American Non-Importation Act of 1811 had been that British exports to the United States had fallen from £10.9m in 1810, to £1.8m in 1811, a fall of 83.5%.(76) By 1812, overproduction by British manufacturers misled by too optimistic merchants, had added to the cumulative effects of the American legislation, Napoleon’s Continental System and the activities of French privateers in the Channel, to suppress British business activity.

Despite numerous successful attacks on British merchantmen, including those by American privateers, the Royal Navy’s protection of British trade, and therefore the country’s economic and financial strength, had on the whole been successful. Britain had remained in a position to supply over £35m in subsidies to its European allies between 1810 and 1815, £10m in 1814 alone.(77) Overall, between the periods 1804-6 and 1814-16, total British exports had risen by 28.7%, and imports by 29.2%.(78) Ultimately, Napoleon’s Continental System had demonstrably failed. As shown in Appendix B, Table 3, total British exports had fallen between 1810 and 1812, but while American re-exports were to fall between 1812-14, re-exports of

British colonial produce had increased between 1804-6 and 1814-16 by 80.4%, contributing to a recovery of total British exports by 1814.(79)

However, the hardship caused amongst Britain's poor and unemployed had evidently been real. By 1813, expenditure on poor relief in England and Wales had exceeded £6.7m, 56% higher than in 1803, and which had fallen by only 5.4% by 1814.(80) Complaints by some of the industrialists effected, and demonstrations by unemployed workers, provided valuable material for the government's Whig Opposition, notably for Parliamentary opponents of the Orders in Council, and particularly Henry Brougham.(81) Fear of popular unrest, and the assassination on 11 May 1812 of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval, long an advocate of the Orders, had probably contributed to their revocation as far as the United States was concerned, on 23 June 1812, ironically, six days after the American declaration of war on Britain.(82)

### **British Tax Revenue and Borrowing**

But, although these economic problems were significant, neither the government's tax income nor borrowing position was ever seriously threatened. The British government's gross tax income of £71m in 1812 was only 2.7% less than the £73m of 1811, the last year of peace. The fall to £70.3m in 1813 was less than 1%, and by 1814 had risen by 6.3% to £74.7m. In sharp contrast to the United States, where net custom duties formed more than 92% of total government tax revenue in 1812, the British tax base was sufficiently wide for customs duties to form only 18.31% of the British government's total gross tax income in 1812, rising comparatively little

throughout the war, and still only 19% of total tax income in 1815, never having risen above 20%. (83) Revenue from British customs duties rose 7.7%, from £13m in 1812 to £14m in 1813, and almost another 3% to £14.4m in 1814. Customs and excise duties together formed 57.6% of total gross revenue in 1812. British 'property and income' taxes followed a similar pattern to the government's gross income by falling 2.2 % from a pre-war yield of £13.5m in 1811, to £13.2m in 1812, and falling by only 0.76% to £13.1m between 1812 and 1813. The yield of the British tax on land ownership was to rise by 7.8 % between 1812 and 1814.(84)

The Royal Navy's protection of Britain's generally successful overseas trade position was therefore complemented by a comparatively widely based and crudely progressive system of taxation, which supplemented by the government's ability to borrow, was capable of supporting wars against both France and the United States. As shown in Appendix B, Table 36, on average, between 1812-15 British customs duties yielded a gross £14.1m, 19.2% of total government income. During the same period, gross excise duties yielded an average £27.7m, 37.7 % of the total. Stamp duties produced £6.2m, 8.4% of total income. Land tax produced another £7.7m, a further 10.5% of the total. Property and income tax yielded £14m gross, another 19.1%. Miscellaneous revenues gathered the remaining 5.1%, of an average total government income of £73.5m.(85)

In contrast to the position in the United States after 1813, "Nearly 60% of the extra funds raised by [the British] government to prosecute its wars between 1793 –1815, came from taxes and not borrowing."(86) The British tax strategy had put most of the burden on domestic consumption so

that a wealthy minority's private investment, essential to maintained economic growth, and to their taxable incomes, would continue. Britain's interest rates remained relatively stable at "just below 4% before the war to just over 5% during it."(87) "While the share of national income invested...remained roughly constant...consumption fell sharply, from over 83% of national expenditure in 1778-92 to around 72% in 1793-1812, and reached as low as 64% by 1813-15."(88) While this may be borne out by United Kingdom sugar consumption per head, which may have fallen by 13.3% between 1813-15, the basic cost of living for those in urban employment had not become excessive, as far as it can be measured by average London bread prices, which had fallen almost 33% from their 1812 peak, by 1814.(89) The wages of agricultural workers however, had fallen by 3 index points between 1812-15.(90) Although unwelcome, privation in Britain was reportedly much less severe than in the United States where prices had risen by 45% between 1811 and 1814.(91)

In further sharp contrast to the United States, as will become evident in Chapter 7, British budget deficits were largely met by the successful sale of government securities worth over £440m between 1793 and 1815, covering between a quarter and a third of wartime government expenditure.(92) The British national debt rose from £299m in 1793 to £843m in 1815, "without", Kennedy concludes, "any visible sign of the country going bankrupt or the lenders doubting the government's ability to repay in the future."(93) Even a suspension of specie payments by the Bank of England in 1797 produced only short-term alarm since, the Bank,

had so secured itself in the public confidence that its now unbacked money was just as acceptable as when gold could be got for it at a fixed price...The banking and mercantile community in London and the provinces, with virtual unanimity, pronounced its readiness to carry on business as normal with a paper currency.

(94)

In contrast, Congress had failed to renew the charter of the first United States bank in March 1811, contributing to inflation by the resultant proliferation of state and private banks, many later called, “unincorporated and irresponsible.”(95)

Especially since the renewal of war in 1803, some in Britain had advocated neutral trade with the West Indies, but encountered the view that such American trade in particular threatened the effectiveness of Britain’s maritime commercial blockade of France. Furthermore, the Royal Navy’s continued blockade of a militarily successful enemy remained vital to British trade, and had been too costly and demanding to abandon before the war had been brought to a successful conclusion. Although not written until 1818, William James argued that Britain’s Orders in Council were simply, “not permitting the subjects of the United States under the disguise of neutrals to be the carriers of France”. He continued that, “the ablest politicians in the republic were engaged to prepare a specious manifesto, representing the United States as the aggrieved, and Great Britain as the aggressive party.”

(96)

For Americans, the British operation of the Orders in Council could prove costly, such as the loss to Brown and Ives, merchants and shippers of Providence, Rhode Island, when their ship *Arthur* and its cargo of cotton was

captured by HM gun brig *Blazer* on 20 February 1810. On 25 February, Captain Joshua Rathbun wrote to Brown and Ives from London about the trial before Sir William Scott, that, “the disposition of the courts [of Admiralty] seem very unfavourable towards the Americans at this time, of the many which were sent in and tried, but few are Cleared.” The judge had condemned both ship and cargo.(97)

Nevertheless, one form of American maritime trade was so profitable that it continued up to and beyond the American declaration of war on Britain in June 1812. The poor harvests of 1809 and 1810 had been particularly inconvenient to the British government, since with shortages of grain and flour at home, Britain had been ill-placed to send supplies to its troops in Spain and Portugal after 1808. Despite the increasingly strained relationships over neutral trade, the American need to export its grain and flour surplus had coincided with the British need to supply its Peninsula army. The 230,000 bushels of wheat sent directly under British licences from American ports to Spain and Portugal in 1810, had increased to 835,000 bushels by 1811, an indirect contradiction of American attempts to apply economic pressure on Britain.(98) Britain’s urgent need for specie, in sums of up to £76,000 at a time, to pay for American grain, flour and biscuit cargoes, caused recurrent crises for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nicholas Vansittart, and the Governor of the Bank of England, but each emergency had been resolved in turn, after some anxiety. American attempts to capitalise on Britain’s shortage of specie had been forestalled by the timely arrivals of precious metals from the West Indies and the East India Company.(99) The strength of Britain’s

overseas trading position had again provided the means for its financial survival.

Ex-President Jefferson's rationalisation of this situation may have influenced Madison's views on Britain's apparent inability to resist economic pressure, and on America's ability to finance dispute, or even war with Britain. Jefferson had argued that,

If she [Britain] is to be fed at all events, why may we not have the benefit of it as well as others? Besides if we could, by starving the English armies oblige them to withdraw from the peninsula, it would be to send them here; and I think we had better feed them there for pay, than feed and fight them here for nothing. A truth too, not to be lost sight of is, that no country can pay war taxes if you suppress all their resources. To keep the war popular, we must keep open the markets. As long as good prices can be had, the people will support the war cheerfully. (100)

In time however, the reverse of this view was to prove remarkably accurate when British success in the Peninsula ended demand for American grain and flour, so reducing American earnings and taxable capacity.

While it lasted, the licenced export of American wheat, rye, flour, bread, crackers, rice and coffee to the Peninsula had certainly been profitable. On 1 September 1812, Brown and Ives' *Hector* had sailed from Providence with a cargo of flour costing \$13,000. It had sold in Cadiz for \$40,000, a net return of \$27,000.(101) The possession of a British licence however, did not necessarily protect against inconvenience. The firm's brig *Argus* sailing for Cadiz on 10 September with flour and rice was later stopped by the Royal Navy and taken into Gibraltar. Captain Noyce's production of a licence,

apparently issued by Vice-Admiral Sawyer in Halifax, had led the Vice-Admiralty court to restore both vessel and cargo. However, when the British need to issue licences for the export of American produce ended in 1813, a potential source of finance for the American war effort was also ended, without an apparent substitute.(102)

Despite the trade and personal links of the 'Atlantic economy', by 1812, some attitudes in both Britain and America had hardened further. The American Non-Importation Act appeared to be reducing British exports, however ingeniously it was said to be evaded there. British exports to the United States worth almost £11m at current prices in 1810, had been reduced to £1.8m by 1811.(103) American agents in Britain, holding credit paid into their accounts for imports, were not buying British manufactures as they once did. In 1812, in London, John Croker, First Secretary of the Admiralty since 1809, and prolific writer, had published a pamphlet called, *A Key to the Orders in Council*, which reviewed the decrees and orders issued by France, Britain and the United States since 1807.(104) It had also sought to explain and justify Britain's position, and its treatment of neutral merchants and shippers, chiefly American.

Nevertheless, in Washington, two-thirds of Madison's address to Congress on 1 June complained of the effects of the Orders on the American economy. He argued that,

Under pretended blockades, without the presence of an adequate force and sometimes without the practicability of applying one, our commerce has been plundered in every sea; the great staples of our country have been cut off from their legitimate markets; and a destructive blow aimed at our agricultural and maritime interests. (105)



There were those present who understood the fiscal and financial consequences of this admission, but who evidently failed to explain themselves clearly enough to change the course of events. By 18 June both House and Senate had voted for war with Britain.(106) On 19 June, a bill which would have raised revenue by allowing most British imports to be resumed, was defeated by only five votes.(107)

For months after the American declaration of war, it was hoped by some in Britain that revocation of the Orders in Council, as far as the Americans were concerned, would lead in time to a negotiated peace, allowing for unavoidable delays in communication. Conversely, on 2 August 1812, James Abernethy wrote to Lord Liverpool as “one that entertains a different opinion” since the Americans sought “rights which are infringements on our own maritime consequence”.(108) He was also, “sure that French influence and intrigues hath preponderated.” In order, “To conduct this war with as little expense” as possible, he enclosed a “plan of a Naval War, which, had the same been adopted in what is called the ‘American War’ the issue to ourselves would have proved very different”. His scheme would, “effectually prevent the Enemy’s Ships and Privateers from getting out of port, most certainly their re-entering with their prizes”. It would, he said, require two ships of the line, thirteen frigates and 26 sloops and brigs of war, 41 vessels in all, to blockade the American coast, ranging from the “Gulf of Florida and off New Orleans” to “the Coast of New Hampshire, which offers partial security to our Newfoundland and Quebec Fleets.” The “Line of Battle-Ships” would be particularly useful “should there

escape a Ship or two of that description from France, to guard against which, it might be advisable to have two Ships of the Line at Halifax.”(109)

As late as 3 October 1812, Lord Bathurst, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies and, until only weeks before also President of the Board of Trade, was writing at length to the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool.(110) Decisions were needed on the goods for so long imported from the United States, and on which Britain had come to depend. Lord Clancarty, he said, had also written to Liverpool on the subject some weeks before. Bathurst outlined again the arguments for and against importing under licence the grain and flour, raw cotton, rice and tobacco, in neutral, even American ships. The only vessels to be disallowed with certainty, would surely, be French. The last three commodities were the products of “the most Anti-Anglican” parts of the United States, the last perhaps to deserve to benefit from continued trade.

Bathurst rehearsed all the arguments about alternative sources for each product, particularly cotton, clearly aware of the stocks already held in Britain. Licence fees for importing cotton would be, in effect, a form of tax on textile manufacturers, and “at least limit their importation” of American cotton, one way of hurting its producers. Among the disadvantages of British blockade would be that American seamen would be diverted into manning privateers, and the United States men of war, well-constructed ships in a small but skilfully manned navy. Clearly, Bathurst wrote, these were all matters on which Liverpool must decide.

The decision was not much further delayed. On 13 October 1812, “HRH the Prince Regent in Council ordered that General Reprisals be granted

against the ships, goods and citizens of the United States of America.”(111) According to the Edinburgh *Annual Register*, this Order in Council was in effect a delayed British declaration of war, made necessary both by unrecalled American letters of marque, and the American decision not to ratify a suspension of hostilities agreed between Lieut General Sir George Prevost, Governor General of Canada, and the American Brigadier General Hull.(112) For American merchantmen and their crews, British General Reprisals, when eventually learned of in distant European ports, would mean internment and long detention. This would include both Brown and Ive’s *Asia*, stranded in Copenhagen and the *General Hamilton* in St Petersburg, neither to return to Providence, Rhode Island, until 1815. For the Royal Navy in the waters of North America, it was to mean a renewal of arduous weeks of maritime blockade.(113)

Dependent on imported raw cotton for their livelihood, some British cotton spinners had apparently long been opposed to Britain’s efforts to regulate neutral American trade, and after the outbreak of war, the prospect of British commercial blockade completely preventing the importation of American cotton. In an open letter to Lord Castlereagh, dated 2 March 1813, Charles Lyne reported that, having adapted their machines for its use, the spinners argued that superior “bowed Georgia cotton wool” was essential, and unobtainable elsewhere.(114) They maintained that British blockade of American cotton supplies would be “impolitic”.

This view, Lyne called “very erroneous”. He calculated precisely that stocks held, even of Georgian raw cotton, would last “from this time to 9 May 1814”. Additional imports from Brazil would postpone shortage until 27

November 1814. Imports from British colonies in the Caribbean and South America would maintain stocks until 3 March 1815, and Indian raw material, imported “very cheaply” from Surat and Bengal, would allow production to continue until 17 July 1815. “The additional quantity...will probably be imported into Great Britain long before it is possible to consume what is now here.”

It was also the view of John Whitmore, ‘Chairman of the Joint Committee of British Merchants Trading to and from the Brazils and Portugal’, that these imports would be preferable as being “from our own colonies and those of our allies, in our own ships, and payable in our own manufactured goods... thus proving to the enemy that we can do...without his assistance for the support of our manufactures”.(115) Whitmore had given evidence to the House of Commons that buying from sources prepared to take British cotton manufactures in payment, would replace markets lost since the American Non-Importation Act. American manufacturers would admittedly benefit from a British blockade, but would be unable to export, and so confined to their own market, closed to Britain since before the war. The British cotton industry need not therefore oppose any proposed maritime commercial blockade of the Americans.

Lyne further reported that “the Manufacturers, Exporters and Merchants of Glasgow”, were in agreement. Even allowing American merchants to continue exporting in neutral vessels would “lengthen this war to the detriment of our commerce, navigation, finances and national prosperity”.(116) They all recommended “a strict blockade of the ports of the United States” which would be, “the most effectual means of distressing the

enemy by excluding their produce from the markets of the world.”(117)

Unknown to him, as Lyne wrote to the Prime Minister, Admiral Warren and Rear-Admiral Cockburn were about to begin the full-scale British blockade of the Chesapeake.

Unlike the United States, Britain had the means to protect its foreign trade, which in turn provided the wealth which could be efficiently taxed and borrowed to finance wars to successful conclusions, both in Europe and in North America.

## **Chapter 4. Implementation 1: The United States Blockaded**

### **The United Command of Sir John Borlase Warren.**

**August 1812 – April 1814.**

#### **Hesitant Beginnings.**

The British application of naval and commercial blockades to the eastern seaboard of the United States suffered a series of setbacks at the outset, due in part to the pre-emptive action of Commodore John Rodgers of the United States Navy. Rodgers left New York harbour, unhindered by the Royal Navy, on 21 June 1812, three days after Madison's declaration of war on Britain.

He sailed in USS *President*, a large American frigate, nominally of 44 guns, intending to cruise in squadron strength.(1) *President* was in company with the *United States*, also rated 44, the smaller frigate *Congress* 36, the sloop *Hornet* and the brig *Argus*, altogether a powerful force. Rodgers was anxious to avoid the possibility of being blockaded in harbour by Royal Naval vessels off Sandy Hook, and hoped that "should war be declared, & our vessels get to sea, in squadron, before the British are appraised of it... we may be able to cripple and reduce their force in detail: to such an extent as to place our own upon a footing until their loss could be supplied by a reinforcement from England."(2) He had also heard of a valuable British convoy homeward-bound from the West Indies, following the north-east trade winds before crossing on westerlies to the eastern Atlantic. There he hoped to intercept it.(3)

Rodgers left before receiving the orders of Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton, whose letter was delayed, possibly by his reputed inebriation by midday, his obsession with detail, and the suddenly increased pressure of work and need for decisions.(4) Rodgers seems to have been remarkably well informed, having “ascertained, & I think from a source that may be depended on, that the British naval force on this side of the Atlantic, consists of one sixty-four – seven frigates - seven sloops of war – seven Brigs, and two or three schooners.”(5) He also knew that the “British frigate *Belvidera* & Sloop of War *Tartarus* were seen off Sandy Hook yesterday morning”.(6) Captain Richard Byron of HMS *Belvidera*, 36, was patrolling off Sandy Hook, although out of sight of land, in hope of intercepting the French privateer *Marengo*, expected shortly to leave the harbour of New London, almost due north of the eastern end of Long Island.(7)

However, at 6 a.m. on 23 June, “with Nantucket Shoal bearing NE, distant 35 leagues”, *President* “sighted a Large sail...soon discovered to be a Frigate.”(8) The frigate turned out to be the *Belvidera*, but by 11.30 p.m., after a day of unsuccessful attempts at disablement, miscalculations and accidents, including the bursting of a chase gun, which killed three and wounded thirteen others, including Rodgers himself, the British frigate had escaped.(9)

The *Belvidera* reached Halifax on 27 June, having taken three small American prizes en route, since the American squadron’s having opened fire without any attempt at communication, killing two British seamen, had probably seemed to confirm for Byron the outbreak of the long-expected war.(10) But in Halifax, Vice-Admiral Herbert Sawyer, C in

C of the Royal Navy's North-American station remained characteristically cautious. On 9 May 1812, the Foreign Office had instructed the Admiralty to avoid precipitating war, and clear orders had been sent to Sawyer in Halifax that he was to await confirmation from Mr Augustus Foster, the British Minister Plenipotentiary at Washington, before sanctioning hostilities at sea.(11) Sawyer therefore released the *Belvidera's* captures. This must have seemed an unexpected setback to Byron and his crew, both in terms of morale and eventual prize money. Sawyer also sent Captain Thompson in the sloop *Colibri* 16, under flag of truce to New York, to obtain an American explanation and unambiguous information.

Rodgers had also noted in New York on 19 June that "the schooner *Mackerel*, with Mr Ruff (the English messenger) sailed last evening for Halifax", presumably without the news from Washington of Madison's declaration of war.(12) Despite this lack of confirmation, Sawyer now sent *Mackerel* under Captain Hargrave to England, with his reports and dispatches. (13) According to the *Hampshire Telegraph*, the *Mackerel* reached Portsmouth on 25 July, which caused the *Naval Chronicle* to publish a further cautious interpretation of *Belvidera's* escape. "Our Government has expressed an opinion that the attack made upon the *Belvidera* had neither resulted from any new orders of the American Government, nor was any proof that war had been decided on. The American frigates, it was thought, had acted in conformity to a previous order of the Government of the United States not to permit vessels of war belonging to foreign powers to cruise within their waters."(14)



Vice-Admiral Sawyer had also sent HM sloop *Rattler* 18, to Bermuda, the *Hunter* to Newfoundland, and other craft to the outlying cruising stations, with orders for all the vessels under his command to assemble at Halifax. This might enable them to intercept and defeat Rodgers' squadron. This concentration of the Royal Navy's strength at Halifax, including the elderly *Africa*, 64, had the effect of dismantling Sawyer's original intention, in the event of war, of blockading each major American port with one of his six larger serviceable ships. As one British officer was to complain, "we have been so completely occupied looking for Commodore Rogers' (sic) squadron that we have taken very few prizes." (15) Whether deliberate or not, Rodgers' distraction of Sawyer's intended blockade allowed many returning American merchant vessels to reach their home ports safely, and to replenish import stocks. The import duties on their cargoes added very significantly to customs revenues, and importantly, affected American government thinking. The New York legislature was told that "Nearly as great a proportion of homeward bound merchantmen have escaped capture as has been customary during the last three or four years of peace." (16)

Rodgers meanwhile, had abandoned his search for the returning West Indies convoy in the western approaches, and further failed to venture into the English Channel, Bristol Channel or Irish Sea, an omission since much criticised, particularly his failure to inflict on the Royal Navy the potential disruption of its blockades of France, whilst dealing with him. (17)

Although as Mahan pointed out, the loss of one West Indies convoy would not greatly have affected the British economy, any merchant

losses in British seas would be unwelcome, not least because of the adverse effects on the Stock Exchange, maritime insurance premiums, public morale and political stability.(18) The first round in Britain's maritime economic war with the United States, was characterised by a succession of missed opportunities on both sides. Much more could have been achieved by a larger British blockading force, but given the Royal Navy's current European commitments, this was impracticable.

### **Dual Objectives: War and Diplomacy.**

On 4 July, Sawyer received confirmation from Foster in Washington that Congress had declared war on Britain. The following day, he dispatched the packet *Julia*, which crossed the Atlantic with the news in a remarkably fast twenty-four days.(19) Therefore, it was not until 29 July that definite intelligence of the American declaration of war reached the British government. Even then, some in Britain hoped that once news reached Congress that Britain had revoked its Orders in Council on 23 June, a diplomatic solution might still prove possible.(20) Revocation of the Orders, as far as they applied to American shipping, was worded so as to take effect from 1 August 1812. However, any reply from across the Atlantic could not be expected before the beginning of September at the earliest.

On the following day, the 30 July, the British Government and Admiralty felt more free to act. Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren, a man with diplomatic experience as well as previous service in North American waters, was ordered by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Melville to

“come up to Town forthwith” to meet the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh.(21) The Foreign Secretary evidently read to Warren his “Orders & Instructions”, but left some possibilities unspecified. In a letter to Melville on 8 August, Warren discussed the potential complications of the possible secession of the New England States from the Union, and how, in that event, the Royal Navy should conduct itself, in relation for example, with vessels from New England.(22) In a letter of 12 August Warren sought and received from Castlereagh clarification on the “friendly disposition of parts of the United States” and the terms to be fixed for any cessation of hostilities for negotiation.(23)

Warren was also to be entrusted with diplomatic responsibilities, since Foster, the British Minister had left Washington, and had sailed from New York on 14 July in the sloop-of-war *Alecto*, not to reach Portsmouth until 19 August. (24) Warren was authorised to propose an armistice to the American Government to allow time for both parties to investigate the possibility of a peaceful resolution of Anglo-American differences following the revocation of the British Orders in Council to take effect, as far as American vessels were concerned, on 1 August 1812.

### **Embargo and Convoy: Offensive and Defensive Economic Warfare.**

But, since diplomatic success could not be guaranteed, the legal framework for British commercial blockade was put in place. On 31 July, an Order in Council ordered that “commanders of HM’s ships of war and privateers do detain and bring into port all ships and vessels belonging to

citizens of the United States.” A General Embargo was declared on American shipping and goods “now within, or which shall hereinafter come into, any of the ports, harbours or roads within any part of His Majesty’s dominions, together with all persons or effects on board.”(25)

The General Embargo contributed to an effective start to Britain’s economic warfare against the United States. As Albion and Pope demonstrate, 46 of the 450 American ships libelled in the Vice-Admiralty Court in Halifax during the war, were detained there before 17 September 1812, and included some of the largest American merchant vessels taken. They calculate that no less than 57% of the full-rigged ships and 26.5% of the brigs condemned in Halifax were taken in the first three months of the war.(26) While just over 10% of the number taken, these vessels represent “almost a quarter of the tonnage” taken during the entire war.(27) Most were probably seized in or near Halifax harbour, a serious loss even to often prosperous American owners whose incomes might otherwise have provided loans to the government.

British commercial sanctions against an American economy heavily dependent on trade with Britain, began on 31 July with an order that “no ships or vessels belonging to any of His Majesty’s subjects be permitted to enter or clear out for any of the ports within the territories of the United States of America, until further order.”(28) The same issue of the *London Gazette* announced on 1 August 1812 that the Admiralty revoked “all licences granted by us to any ship or vessel to sail without convoy to any port or place of North America, Newfoundland, the West Indies or the Gulph of Mexico.”(29)

The need for convoy often added considerably to delays and therefore costs, but unless given dispensation as particularly fast or well-armed, the penalties for masters of merchant vessels leaving without clearance as part of a convoy, or breaking away from the Royal Naval escort without permission, were severe. As well as invalidating the ship's insurance policy, punishment could include a prison sentence, such as that imposed on Mr Newlands, master of the *Coquette* of Glasgow. He sailed from St Thomas' Island in February 1813, under convoy of HMS *Kangeroo*, but "ran away from the fleet" and received "a month's imprisonment in the Marshalsea".(30)

**Sir John Borlase Warren: Admiral and Diplomat.**

The Admiralty now moved quickly, and on 3 August, Warren was appointed to take over the hitherto separate commands of Halifax Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Jamaica and the Leeward Islands as a new "United Command", an "enlarged and important service", superseding their present commanders, Vice-Admiral Sawyer, Admiral Duckworth, Vice-Admiral Stirling and Rear-Admiral Laforey respectively.(31) On 6 August, the Foreign Office issued to the Admiralty secret instructions similar to those given to Augustus Foster, the British Minister in Washington on 8 July, but which had not reached him before he left on 14 July.(32) These instructions, and more dated 7 August, included a Foreign Office draft of the letter Warren was to send to James Monroe, Madison's Secretary of State, on arrival in America, and were received by Warren on 8 August, authorising

him to “suspend hostilities... in the event of the American Govt. revoking their letters of marque.”(33) He was to propose “the immediate cessation of Hostilities between the Two Countries” provided that “the Government of the United States of America shall, instantly, recall their Letters of Marque and Reprisal against British Ships, together with all Orders and Instructions for any Acts of Hostility whatever”.(34) The same day, Warren wrote a careful letter to Lord Melville, dated 8 August, in which he sought further clarification of his complex political and diplomatic instructions.(35)

But even before leaving for Halifax, Warren realised that, should diplomacy fail, the resources available in Nova Scotia were inadequate, and wrote to the Admiralty that “in the Event of its being necessary for the future prosecution of the War to harrass (sic) the Coast and destroy the Trade and Maritime Resources of America”, he would need reinforcements including “small vessels which may be navigated in Creeks and Shoal Waters.”(36)

On 12 August the Admiralty announced Warren’s appointment as “C in C of His Majesty’s squadron on the Halifax and West India stations, and down the whole coast of America.”(37) After prolonged preparations, including the acquisition of a printing press for issuing future blockade proclamations, Warren left Portsmouth in his flagship *San Domingo*, 74, on 14 August 1812, accompanied by *Poictiers*, 74, *Sophie*, *Magnet* and the schooner *Mackerel*. The frigates *Tenedos* and *Niemen*, both 38’s, were, according to the *Naval Chronicle*, “to follow as soon as possible”. Warren’s diplomatic responsibilities were an open secret; the *Naval Chronicle* continued “Sir John, we understand, is gone out with powers to negotiate,

(sic) as well as to act offensively with the ships under his orders; but proposals of conciliation are, in the first instance, to be made.”(38)

Ten days after Warren left Portsmouth, the Jamaica convoy arrived safely. According to the *Naval Chronicle*,

Great expectations were formed in America of Commodore Rodgers falling in with the Jamaica fleet, and capturing the greater part of it. HMS *Thetis*, however, and the whole of the convoy from Jamaica, arrived in the Downs on 24<sup>th</sup> August. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, Commodore Rodgers’s squadron hove in sight of the convoy, upon which the *Aeolus*, the *Shannon* and the *Belvidera* frigates, which were escorting it across the Atlantic, parted company, in chase of the enemy. (39)

However, whichever enemy the British frigates thought they were chasing, it cannot have been Rodger’s squadron since, according to his own account, he had abandoned the chase on 13 July and turned south for the Azores.(40) Nonetheless, whilst employed in chasing Rodgers without success, the British frigates had been distracted from blockade duties which might have made a major contribution to a negotiated peace. Rodgers reached Boston on 31 August, and explained, in a self-justificatory letter to Hamilton that, with scurvy amongst his crews, he had captured only seven small prizes throughout his long voyage.(41)

Warren meanwhile, was not to reach Halifax until 26 September after a “boisterous passage” in which the accompanying sloop *Magnet*, Captain Maurice, was lost with all hands.(42) On arrival, Warren promptly set about both his naval and diplomatic responsibilities. On 30 September, he wrote to the American Government proposing an armistice on the strength of Britain’s revocation of its Orders in Council as they applied to

American merchant ships, on condition that America withdrew its letters of marque, and began the long wait for a reply.(43) Warren had no unrealistic hopes of a diplomatic solution. On reaching Halifax he had quickly concluded that “any alteration in the sentiment of the Eastern States respecting Great Britain, or a Separation from the General Union of the United States” had been “too much relied upon: as the Whole Object between the Two Parties is only an Electioneering Struggle for Power”.(44)

### **Warren’s United Command: Problems and Solutions.**

Warren formally took over from Sawyer in Halifax on 27 September, and found, perhaps not unexpectedly given Sawyer’s reputation for inactivity, a number of immediate concerns, including the inadequate number and poor condition of the ships available. In Halifax, in addition to the 64 gunned *Africa*, launched as long ago as 1781, he found just five frigates, and in Newfoundland, a 50 gun 4<sup>th</sup> rate, and three frigates. Twenty-seven smaller vessels completed the North American part of his command. Altogether, his United Command consisted of eighty-three named “Ships in Sea Pay”, at Antigua on the Leeward Islands station, and at Port Royal in Jamaica, as well as the thirty-seven in St John’s, Newfoundland and Halifax. The list composed in August by Warren’s meticulous Flag Secretary and prize agent George Hulbert, arrived at a total of seventy-nine ships for the United Command. Not all were seaworthy.(45) The disparity between these lists of vessels apparently available, and the reality of those actually fit for service in American and West Indian waters was to remain a constant cause of concern for Warren.



On 5 October, Warren wrote to John Wilson Croker, First Secretary of the Admiralty, reminding him that he had already lost nine vessels of his command to capture, loss or reallocation, and “the necessity of reinforcing the Squadron on this Coast and in the West Indies...to meet the exertions of the Enemy, who seem to be determined to persevere in the annoyance and destruction of the Commerce of Great Britain and these Provinces.”(46) The list of losses included not only, on the afternoon of 19 August, the frigate *Guerriere* to the American *Constitution*, but also the frigate *Barbadoes* which had struck a sandbar off Sable Island on 28 September, together with two convoyed merchantmen, resulting in the loss of £60,000 in specie intended as the payroll for Halifax Dockyard.(47)

Manpower shortage, of both seamen and dockyard workers, was another long-standing problem. On 5 October 1812, Warren issued a local proclamation, probably more in hope than realistic expectation, offering pardon to any Royal Naval deserters who returned.(48) Furthermore, on 7 October Warren wrote to Melville “I am also sorry to say that Admiral Sawyer’s Health will prevent him serving as Second with me at this Critical Moment and that the *Africa* is in so bad a State as to preclude me making use of her in the Line”. By 18 October, he had informed Croker that Sawyer was too unwell to serve as his second in command, and sought his replacement.(49)

But, before leaving, Sawyer was to contribute to a problem which for Warren was to become serious, that of licences held by American and neutral trading vessels. Wellington’s armies in Spain and Portugal had long relied on American flour, wheat, rye and dry goods, shipped by American

and neutral merchantmen. Now in wartime, these vessels had to be issued with British protections, licences to carry their cargoes through British blockades. Similarly, the British West Indian islands needed American grain, livestock and softwood, traded in the past for sugar, tobacco, rum, hardwood and tropical fruit. Both American and Canadian merchants had long traded with the West Indies, and many felt that they faced financial hardship or worse if not supplied with such licences. On 5 August, Sawyer had complied with the proposition of Andrew Allen, the British Consul in Boston, to “give directions to the Commanders of His Majesty’s Squadron under my Command, not to molest American Vessels Unarmed and So Laden ‘bona fide’ bound to Portuguese or Spanish Ports” or those of their colonies, “Whose Papers Shall be Accompanied with a Certified Copy of this letter Under Your Consular Seal.”(50)

But licences, genuine and suspect, together with the use of false neutral colours, had quickly proliferated. (51) As many as 500 licences had been issued by British naval, military and civilian officials in the first ten weeks of the war.(52) The unrestrained issue of British licences appears to have induced an air of complacency at least in some American merchants. On 11 September 1812, John Maybin of Philadelphia wrote to a business acquaintance in Providence, Rhode Island,

I believe with some of our Merchants the Confidence they have that the British Cruisers will not Molest them going to Lisbon & Cadiz – others have a Pasport (sic) under the Authority from Admiral Sawyer and Mr Foster – for which I am told they pay one Dollar per Barrel”. (53)

The availability of British licences created acute difficulties at sea, particularly for junior officers in command of British boarding parties, responsible for immediate decisions. Warren complained to Melville on 7 October 1812 that, “The applications for Licences are beyond all idea for Spain Gib’r & the West Indies from the Americans & I have not countersigned any”, although adding pragmatically, “...but for Importation into this Province”, meaning Nova Scotia. Clearly irritated by the enemy’s use of false neutral colours, he later added “The Southern States, who are a composition of most Vile Materials: have sent to Sea Numbers of Ships under Spanish, Portuguese & of late obtained Swedish colours from St Bartholemews: the property is thus covered & leaves the field open to a war of privateers against the British Commerce.”(54)

Meanwhile, senior serving Royal Naval officers seriously questioned Andrew Allen’s widespread issue of British trading licences and his apparent personal gain, which in turn, prompted immediate political enquiries.(55) Allen was also involved in the issue of licences to Americans trading with the West Indies, in October 1812, as enquiries into his conduct began.(56)

A further problem pre-dating Warren’s arrival, and hindering the prompt implementation of British blockades was that of American privateers, and merchant vessels with letters of marque. Before being relieved, Sawyer had informed Croker of his command’s capture of nine American privateers, thereby “protecting the Coast of this Province & the Trade.” Sawyer was “much gratified that these Vessels were taken so soon after their Sailing, as they would doubtless have done much mischief.”(57)

Similarly, Warren was anxious “to clear that part of the Station of the Enemy’s privateers, of which there are no less than Twenty that have much annoyed the Trade.”(58) Between 1 July and 25 August 1812, no less than twenty-four privateers, accounting for 94 guns and 963 men had been captured, followed by two more by the end of the year.(59) On 7 October, Warren had reported that “privateers are innumerable there being not less than 10 off the Island of Cape Breton & having hitherto no frigates within my reach, I have been obliged to dispatch the *Africa & San Domingo* to clear that district of the Station”.(60)

These successes in relation to the size of the problem, were small. The routes of British vessels travelling between Britain and the West Indies, or the ports of Lower Canada, all tended to converge off Halifax. Unless convoyed, these offered rich prizes to American privateers. Many vessels had hurriedly left American ports before 4 April 1812, in order to beat the start of Madison’s 90-day Embargo. On returning that summer, most of their seamen had escaped capture by the expected British wartime commercial blockade. Now, many of them took almost the only sea-going employment available, and joined crews of generously-manned American privateers, or sought to supplement their incomes in vessels on legitimate trading voyages with letters of marque. By American calculation, even “before Warren’s arrival”, the number of British vessels captured by American privateers “probably exceeded two hundred”, three quarters of them between the Bay of Fundy and Newfoundland.(61)

As part of a problem never completely resolved, vociferous British traders in the West Indies and Canada were to complain about American

privateers for the rest of the war, both to Warren and his successor, and to the influential at home.(62) Warren was usually to be held responsible for the escape of privateers to sea through a porous British naval blockade by both Admiralty and merchants alike.

Warren's Order Book, for what he called his "Halifax, Bermuda and West Indies Squadrons", reveals both the priorities he set for them, as well as his initially limited resources. On 4 October 1812, Warren had ordered *Africa* and *San Domingo* "diligently to cruise for the especial succour and protection of the Convoys", specifically those from Britain to Quebec and Nova Scotia and from the Gulf of St Lawrence, "as well as for the Trade in General and the Destruction & Annoyance of the Enemy".(63) The order in which these tasks are set out is, at this stage of the war, very significant. Convoys were an important aspect of Warren's defensive economic warfare against the United States, although the escort by Royal Naval vessels of grouped British merchant ships, either outward or homeward bound, was from the outset, difficult to co-ordinate with the implementation of blockades. With the Halifax squadron dispersed, Warren complained to Croker that "until the several ships return, it will be impossible for me to send the Convoys directed by my Instructions."(64)

Warren's second major order, dated 10 October, was for *Poictiers*, 74, and "two frigates of Captain Epworth's Division", including *Nymphe*, 38; the sloop *Sylph* 18, and the schooner *Herring*, 6. They were "to Cruise off the Chesapeake, & Cape of Delaware, taking care to Station some vessels of Cape Hatteras", some 150 miles south of the Chesapeake, "to intercept any Ships from the East Indies, or Ships of War from France as

well as for the protection of the Trade from the West Indies stretching occasionally towards the Delaware...and Sandy Hook but not further to the Northward".(65)

As if this were not enough, they were also to inform Warren "from time to time of any movements of the Enemy or any intelligence of importance" sending information to Halifax until 15 November, and thereafter to Bermuda. They were to "continue upon this service for the space of Eight Weeks...or until you are joined by a Flag Officer, and detaching one Ship as occasion may permit, to refit & complete Stores and Provisions and Water".(66) This was indeed a tall order for only five vessels, especially when at this stage of the war, the intervention of the French was not thought an impossibility. By March 1813, Warren was to estimate that double that number of vessels would be needed for efficient blockade of Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware River alone. By then, he would consider three 74's, three large frigates and at least four smaller vessels the essential minimum. Moreover, additional vessels would be needed to form a relieving squadron, to fill gaps made by exhaustion and storm damage.(67)

### **General Reprisal: The Widening of Economic Warfare.**

In London on 13 October 1812, an Order in Council provided the legal basis for a wider, and more offensive, commercial blockade at sea, not only by Royal Naval vessels, but also by holders of Letters of Marque and Reprisal. It sanctioned their "apprehending, seizing and taking of the ships,

vessels and goods belonging to the Government of the United States of America or the citizens thereof” or “others inhabiting the territories.” British captors should “bring the same to judgement in any of the Courts of Admiralty within His Majesty’s domains.” Importantly however, “nothing in this Order contained shall be understood to recall or affect” Warren’s authorisation to “sign a Convention recalling and annulling, from a day to be named, all hostile Orders issued by the respective Governments”.(68) Furthermore, not wishing to miss any opportunity for taxation, the British Government had printed in the *London Gazette* for 31 October, its “regulations for the distribution of Prizes”, which could be “sold and disposed of” by the takers “for their own use and benefit after final adjudication” but “subject to payment of customs duties as if imported.” (69)

As a further indication of the complexity of the situation in which Warren and his squadrons found themselves, on the same day, a further Order in Council was made “permitting trade between Bermuda and the United States in neutral vessels” in essential commodities.(70) Although necessary for normal life on the island which would serve as Warren’s winter base, this trade would inevitably help the American economy, a perverse contradiction to economic warfare. The Royal Navy was further instructed “not to molest American vessels that have taken Grain &c to Lisbon on their return to the United States provided they have Licence from His Majesty or Mr Forster” (sic), the British envoy to Washington.(71) Until 13 October, such American vessels were supposed to return from Spain or Portugal in ballast, but could now carry return cargoes of “lawful

merchandise” as well as specie taken in payment, making the detection of false licences still more important, but no easier.

In his orders to Broke’s squadron on 14 October, Warren significantly gave priority to their using their “utmost exertions for the protection and support of the Trade and Commerce of His Majesty’s Subjects”, and only then “for the destruction and annoyance of the Enemy”. Warren also confirmed an established tactical principle, warning Broke to “be careful not to weaken the strength of your Ships by sending into Port any vessels of small Value”. Sending away experienced junior officers and seamen as prize crews would leave British vessels shorthanded in the event of more important action, although burning or sinking insignificant prizes once stripped of anything useful was not popular with either officers or men deprived of even long postponed prize money.(72)

As Warren waited for the American government’s reply to his armistice proposal of 30 September, the *London Gazette* noted that Congress had refused to ratify the ceasefire arranged on land between Sir George Prevost, the British Governor-General of Canada and General Dearborn of the American Northern Provinces Army, and had directed that “hostilities should be recommenced.”(73) Personally, Warren might have felt that General Reprisals could not be implemented until he received the American’s answer; certainly, the Bermuda “Copy of Records in Vice-Admiralty Court” kept by George Hulbert, Warren’s meticulous flag secretary and prize agent, does not begin until 25 November 1812.(74) Some prize taking by both sides however, seems to have continued uninterrupted.



Economic sanctions at sea however would not necessarily have been incompatible with Warren's suggested armistice and potential diplomatic solution in that sanctions could be withdrawn and reversed in the event of peace. Following a negotiated settlement, captured vessels and cargoes could be restored, prisoners released, and even compensation paid. A generous British policy after a display of force might have proved persuasive in the long term.

The American reply arrived at Halifax in the *Junon*, on 16 November 1812. Not unexpectedly, Monroe's answer, dated 27 October, referred back to the issue of impressment, suggesting that it should be suspended, pending Congressional legislation to prohibit the employment of deserting British seamen on American merchant or 'public' naval vessels. That same day, Warren found unacceptable "the surrender, even for a short period of one of the most antient (sic) and essential of the Maritime Rights of the British Empire". "The Presidents (sic) Speech Containing a refusal of the propositions, render any further observation unnecessary."(75)

Now that *Junon* had returned with Monroe's inadmissible counter-proposals, General Reprisals could be put into effect legitimately, although hostilities had never been completely suspended; American prizes had continued to arrive at Royal Naval bases. In anticipation of commercial blockade begun in earnest, Warren had sought to rectify the shortage of both adequate resources and clear instructions from London. From Bermuda on 7 November, Warren had written to Melville that "several points of this Command require a much more numerous Force than I have under my orders & I trust you will, as soon as convenient with your other

Engagements think of our situation, as well as some Decisive Orders respecting the number of American ships that have been brought into this port as well as in the West Indies.”(76) The want of decisive orders, and of adequate means of implementing them, were to remain amongst Warren’s major problems.

### **Vice Admiralty Courts, Prize Money, Legal and Practical Problems.**

Despite Albion and Pope’s apparent assumption that “the best prize money for the Royal Navy was won in the first three months” of the war, the early embargo captures did not mean promptly paid prize money for British crews.(77) The protracted process of condemnation of prizes by the various Vice-Admiralty Courts of Warren’s United Command, especially when as punctiliously conducted as at Halifax, meant that payment of prize money was to be long delayed. Warren was concerned that this lowered the seamen’s morale(78) Delay in the payment of prize money can have done little in reducing the rate of desertion.

On the Jamaica station, the hazards of navigation produced another setback for Warren. The inadequate resources with which he sought to implement the multi-faceted policy of commercial and naval blockade, as well as the protection of British business property in the Caribbean, were to be further reduced. On 22 November 1812, Captain James Yeo in the British 32 gun frigate *Southampton* captured without difficulty the American 14 gun brig *Vixen*, but in returning to Port Royal, just after midnight on 27 November, both vessels struck a reef and sank. Both crews

landed on Conception Island, and later reached Jamaica, but the need for a Court Martial was inevitably added to Warren's responsibilities for operational planning.(79)

Towards the end of November, Warren complied with the Admiralty's order to establish his winter headquarters in Bermuda, at least until March, when the weather generally moderated. Although 600 miles due east of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and 700 miles from New York, it was "admirably calculated...for an advanced post or a port of equipment in time of war, to guard our West India trade from the enterprises of the enemy's cruisers, and in particular, those of America."(80)

### **Diplomacy Suspended: Blockade in Earnest.**

Although as yet unaware that Warren had received Monroe's unhelpful reply, the British government seems to have been prepared for an American rejection of Warren's diplomatic approach. His commercial and naval blockades of the United States could now proceed less constrained by diplomatic considerations.

Even by early November, apparently unconstrained by Warren's diplomatic effort, a British commercial blockade of the southern coast of the United States was underway, over five hundred miles west of Bermuda. Extending from Charleston, South Carolina, southward to St Mary's, Georgia, then the southernmost Atlantic seaboard state, this blockade sought to disrupt all southern trade, particularly Georgia's timber trade. This supplied America's shipbuilding and repair yards, such as Portsmouth,

New Hampshire, and New York, giving the blockade a strategic importance which would grow as it continued. As early as 7 November 1812, the uncertainty of Savannah timber supplies made one American buyer with responsibility for naval ship repairs insist that “the Government also bear the risque of capture”.(81)

Then on 21 November 1812, Lord Bathurst, British Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, and until September, also President of the Board of Trade, wrote to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. He formally instructed them on this first occasion to order Warren “in the Event of the American Government having refused to conclude a cessation of Hostilities by Sea and Land”, he should “forthwith institute a strict and rigorous Blockade of the Ports and Harbors of the Bay of the Chesapeake and of the River Delaware”, and “maintain and enforce the same according to the Usages of War in similar Cases.” Mindful of the “Law of Nations”, Bathurst then added, “in the Event of the Blockade... being *de facto* instituted, that he do lose no time in reporting the same, that the usual Notification be made to Neutral Powers.”(82)

As evident from Map 2, such a blockade would hinder American use of the major ports of Baltimore and Alexandria, as well as the harbour at Norfolk, Virginia, and disrupt internal trade and communication between the smaller towns and settlements on each river. Blockade of the Chesapeake alone would hinder commercial traffic on the James, York, Rappahannock, Potomac and Patuxent Rivers. Bathurst’s proviso, “in the event” of American refusal of peace feelers, implies that British commercial blockade of the

Chesapeake and Delaware had not so far been rigorously applied while any hope of a diplomatic solution remained, even if it had been further south.

The Admiralty issued these initial orders to Warren on 27 November, and then, perhaps reflecting the uncertainties of trans-Atlantic communications, re-iterated them on 26 December, this time sending Warren a copy of Bathurst's letter of 25 December, which repeated his instructions. Warren was again ordered to conduct "the most complete and rigorous Blockade, of the Ports and Harbours of the Bay of the Chesapeake and of the River Delaware", to "establish" the blockade, "and to maintain and enforce the same according to the usages of War under the Regulations pointed out in his Lordships said Letter."(83)

However, any such blockade would be rendered largely ineffectual if the United State's overseas trade could simply be conducted for the duration of the war by neutral shippers. Although such a situation would be less than ideal for the Americans since tonnage duties on American vessels would be lost, import duties would still be payable and the American Treasury partly replenished. Therefore Bathurst's instructions to the Admiralty would have to address the question of how neutral vessels making for, or leaving, blockaded American ports were to be dealt with by the Royal Navy. Accordingly, Bathurst's letter of 25 December importantly instructed the Admiralty that "all Measures Authorized by the Law of Nations and the respective Treaties" between Britain and "the said Neutral Powers will be adopted and executed with respect to Vessels attempting to violate the Blockade after such notice." The Admiralty was to "give Instructions to the Commanders of His Majesty's Squadrons and Ships of War", including "Cruizers", and "particularly to the

Senior Officer employed... to stop all Neutral Vessels destined” to the blockaded ports. If they appeared ignorant of the blockade, and had “no Enemy’s Property on Board”, British blockading vessels were only to “turn them away apprising them” of the situation, and “writing a Notice to that Effect upon one or more of the Principal Ships Papers.”

“But if any Neutral Vessel which shall appear to have been warned, or otherwise informed of the existence of the Blockade, or to have sailed from her last clearing Port after it may reasonably be supposed that the Notification before mentioned may have been made public there, yet shall be found attempting or intending to enter” any blockaded port, “such Vessels shall be seized & sent to the nearest Port for legal adjudication.”(84)

Similarly, any neutral ship leaving a blockaded American port with a cargo “appearing to have been laden after knowledge of the Blockade” would also be seized and sent in. Any in ballast, or loaded before notification, unless previously warned, would be “suffered to pass, unless there be other just Grounds of detention”. Even then, such vessels would have “notice and warning” written on their papers, prohibiting further attempts, and “stating the reason for thus permitting them to pass”.(85) Such a comprehensive grip on enemy and neutral vessels, and command of American waters would, if practicable, be likely to make an impact on the United States’ overseas trade and tax revenues.

Therefore, on 26 December, as part of the British government’s effort to keep neutrals informed, the *London Gazette* announced that Viscount Castlereagh,

signified...to the Ministers of Friendly and Neutral Powers...that the necessary measures have been taken ...for the blockade of the ports and harbours of the Bay of the Chesapeake and of the River Delaware in the United States of America, and that from this time all the measures authorised by the Law of Nations will be adopted & executed with respect to all vessels which may attempt to violate the said blockade. (86)

After a period of four or five weeks to allow for the slowness of communication, neutral European merchant shipping could not claim to be unaware of this development and could, if it chose, avoid confrontation with the blockading vessels of the Royal Navy.

There was certainly no shortage of American merchant vessels to intercept. Despite American non-importation and 'enemy trade' legislation designed to prevent such trade, some American-owned merchandise had continued to cross the Atlantic throughout the summer and autumn of 1812.(87) Especially after the revocation on 23 June of Britain's Orders in Council concerning American shipping, American merchants in Britain, including Jonathan Russell, the United States' chargé d'affaires in London, expected a negotiated settlement and the resumption of Anglo-American trade.

Their financial assets frozen in cash form by the British shortage of specie, American merchants had been obliged to convert their capital into British manufactured export goods or processed re-exports, strongly demanded in America.(88) Russell advised them to dispatch their goods to America, and "thought it his duty to countenance the idea that shipments made after the revocation of the orders would be admitted into the United States."(89)

Even when British newspapers published the American declaration of war on 30 July, Russell's advice to American merchants in Britain and British colonies, was to ship their goods to America. Similarly, Anthony Baker, the British chargé d'affaires in Washington, expressed hopes to Castlereagh that revocation of the Orders in Council meant that such American shipments would be allowed under special British licences.(90)

In November 1812, the American Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin believed that "On the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, the account of the declaration of war having reached England, a temporary embargo was laid on American vessels; but on the following day, they were by order of Council, (sic) permitted to take cargoes of British merchandise and to proceed to the United States, being for that purpose provided with licenses protecting them" at least until 15 September.(91) But all were mistaken. Such shipments remained illegal, contravening both American non-importation and enemy trading laws until Madison made a specific proclamation suspending the acts, which he chose not to do.(92)

By December 1812, American customs officials had impounded illegal imports with a "prime" cost-price value of "about £4m sterling", then officially worth almost \$18m, and accepted bonds on them for that amount. The goods had an American market value nearer \$30m.(93) After suggestions that the merchants should pay \$9m, only half the value of the bonds, even this was waived by Congress. Later, even Gallatin's plans to modify the non-importation and enemy trade laws to allow the collection of revenue on hitherto illegal imports, failed to gain Congressional approval.

(94)



## **Shortages, and Internal Dissention.**

Even before the Admiralty's orders of 27 November for the commercial blockade of the Chesapeake and Delaware can have reached him, Warren wrote to Croker complaining of the paucity of his resources relative to the demands on them. On 29 December he wrote from Bermuda observing bluntly that,

the Force under my Orders is extremely small, the extent of Coast very considerable, and with many Convoys to furnish, it is impracticable to cut off the Enemy's resources, or to repress the disorder and pillage which actually exists in a very alarming degree and will continue, both on the Coast of British North America, and in the West Indies, as will be seen by the Copies of the Letters enclosed from Sir George Beckwith and Governor Elliot upon that subject. (95)

The demands of Beckwith, Governor of Barbados, and Elliot of the Leeward Islands, represent the relentless pressures indirectly exerted by the wealthy and often influential British owners in the islands, to which Warren was to be subjected during the twenty months of his "United Command".

It soon became evident that Warren's United Command was not to be entirely based on friendly co-operation. Sawyer's eventual departure from Halifax had overlapped with difficulties with the West Indies. In February 1813, Warren had confided to Melville that the West Indies had already cost him "more trouble & pain than it is easy to Describe", especially "Jamaica: where I am sorry to say that Admiral Stirling is acting in a very unhandsome way". Stirling had been dispatching ships and

allocating men without consulting Warren and aiding “political intrigue or outcry...against the Administration”, and laying “all the odium of every protest...upon my shoulders”.(96)

Warren hoped that “after receiving their Lordships Orders” Stirling would cooperate. Also, that “the Board will perceive the necessity of making that Officer answerable for the employment of the Ships left under his Immediate Direction” especially since “a few privateers is the only warfare waged in that Quarter: & which with 13 or 14 sail of Pendants I should think he might prevent; if he employed the Ships upon the Public Service instead of Convoying Money”. Stirling had been benefiting personally, illicitly charging for convoy protection as well as for bullion shipment, and was eventually court- martialled and replaced, but Warren’s perceived mismanagement of the West Indies Station was to prove a recurrent problem for all involved. Warren hoped in vain that Melville would “arrange this Disagreeable business & relieve me from such Insidious combinations that would require every Moment of my Time to revisit”.(97)

Earlier however, Warren had made some well-informed and partly-practicable suggestions; “that the Squadron would be much benefited by Six or Seven good Sailing, old Ships of the Line, such as the *Canada*, *Captain*, *Bellona*, *Monarch*, cut down and reduced as Razies, to Carry their Lower Deck Guns and heavy carronade on their Quarter Deck, Gangways and Forecastle, manned with three hundred Seamen and Sixty [Marines]”. In view of the size of the crews of the large American frigates, Warren went on “likewise...twenty five or thirty Marines and some Seamen should be

added to the complements of the Frigates on this station”(98) Given the demands on the Royal Navy of the ongoing war in Europe, the manning suggestions were, for the time being at least, unrealistic.

### **Blockade in Place: Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware River.**

On 6 February 1813, Warren had supplemented the London proclamation of the Chesapeake and Delaware blockades, with a local declaration to neutrals.(99) Meanwhile, Warren had learned in a letter from Melville dated 3 December 1812, that Rear-Admiral Sir George Cockburn had been appointed as Warren’s second in command in place of Sawyer, and that he was “understood to be a very intelligent and enterprising Officer”.(100) In the same letter Melville had confided,

You will receive an Order for instituting a rigorous blockade of the Chesapeake and Delaware, & I must confess that I have been surprised that some measure of that description had not been already resorted to in regard to the Enemy’s Ships although of course it required an Order from hence to extend it to Neutrals. I presume there can be no difficulty in anchoring at all times of the year within the Chesapeake & that the Delaware may also be rendered very unsafe for the Enemy’s cruisers to enter. (101)

Cockburn was ordered to leave Cadiz on 18 November, and join Warren in Bermuda. Sailing on 23 November, he arrived there on 17 January 1813, to learn that he was to be responsible to Warren for the Chesapeake blockade. After urgent repairs to *Marlborough*, he left for the

Bay on 18 February, although not arriving until 3 March.(102) Warren's assurance to Melville on 19 February that Cockburn "immediately went into the Chesapeake and placed that Bay and the Delaware in a State of Strict and Rigorous Blockade" was therefore somewhat premature. He was also compelled to refer to a problem perhaps all too easily overlooked in the comfort of an Admiralty office in London; "The Port of Boston and Rhode Island cannot be blockaded; without much loss of men & risk of Ships, from the Month's of Nov[ember] untill March;(sic) owing to the Snow Storms & severity of the Climate."(103) Nonetheless, by 21 February, Warren felt able to inform the Admiralty that the blockade was in place, although so far comprised of only four vessels.(104) But by then, the American Secretary of the Navy had already complained that "The enemy having penetrated the Bay...with their tenders and Boats,...are now greatly annoying the trade".(105)

When the frigate *Narcissus*, 32, arrived in company with the *Dragon*, 74, and the 44 gun frigate *Acasta* in Lynnhaven Bay, at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay on 4 March 1813, Captain Lumley found that *Marlborough*, *Poictiers* and *Victorious*, all 74's, had arrived the day before. He also found that the 36 gun frigates *Maidstone* and *Belvidera*, and *Junon*, 38, together with the smaller *Laurestinus*, had been in Chesapeake Bay since 4 February and had already "Formed the Blockade previous to our arrival with Rear-Admiral Cockburn," to whom the *Maidstone*'s Captain Burdett now relinquished command.(106) Burdett's force, augmented by *Statira*, had already captured the American armed schooner *Lottery*, en

*route* from Baltimore to Bordeaux with a valuable cargo of coffee, sugar and logwood.(107)

By now, despite Warren's estimate of ten vessels being necessary for Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware together, the blockading force in the Chesapeake alone now consisted of more than ten vessels; four 74's, six frigates of between 44 and 32 guns, and several smaller vessels. This situation may have been temporary since Captain Lumley's list, adopted by Hulbert, shows a rotation of vessels, some arriving and others leaving within days, for replenishment or deployment elsewhere.(108)

Cockburn's arrival in force coincided with an attempt by Captain Charles Stewart in the American heavy frigate *Constellation* to reach the open sea beyond Hampton Roads. Stewart retreated, initially to Norfolk, and then further up the tidal river, beyond the reach of potential cutting out expeditions, but nevertheless unable to escape. To commercial blockade had been added naval blockade. *Constellation* was to remain incarcerated for the remainder of the war, and therefore unable to attack vessels of the British blockading squadrons, or by doing so, mitigate the economic effects of British commercial blockade.

Warren himself arrived in Chesapeake Bay in *San Domingo* on 22 March, his initial stay lasting until 5 May. On 23 March, Rear Admiral Cockburn made an evaluation of British progress to date in blockading the Chesapeake. He reported to Warren that even with the collaboration of a captured American pilot, all efforts to reach the blockaded *Constellation*, now in the shallow Elizabeth River, were seen as impracticable. Boats from his squadron did however capture some American merchant vessels, and "it

appears the Capture of these Ships so high up one of their Rivers” and “the probability of their other Rivers being subject to similar visitations” contributed to, “the state of alarm in which our arrival has put the whole country”.(109)

The resident’s “ineffectual application to Government for means of defence” added to “the rigorous blockade of the bay and the Delaware, and the check lately given to the Licence trade...have caused the continuation of Hostilities with us to be now as unpopular in this as it has been in other parts of the United States”. “The Virginians”, he added, “who a few Months back so loudly called for war, are beginning to be as clamorous and a[n]xious for Peace.(110)

An “intelligent Merchant of Richmond” had, Cockburn reported, “never seen since his entering into Business such Commercial activity in America, offering such Prospects of general Profit to all concerned” as in the first four or five months of war. The needs of the British army in Spain, and of the British Caribbean colonies had increased demand for grain and flour while “the Superabundance of British Licences...at a reasonable Rate” had meant that “the Shipowners were able without risk to get Freight the moment their ships were ready to receive it”. Meanwhile, “Merchants had more orders for Shipments to Europe &c than they could well execute and Farmers... consequently got higher prices for the produce of their Labor than had been known for many years”.(111)

Cockburn’s informant maintained that the British blockade of the Chesapeake “not only put a Stop to these advantageous prospects but having also thrown back into the Country an immense quantity of last years

produce and caused an entire and complete stagnation of all Commerce and profit". This, the merchant said, had "a proportionate effect on the minds of the People, and there was now only to be heard from one end of the Country to the other Lamentations of Individuals who were now beginning to suffer from the effects of the war". The American "added with much apparent pleasure that Mr Maddison had lost all the latter measures he had proposed to Congress...for prosecuting the War with rancour, and he assured me from the present state of the Country the President would neither be enabled nor permitted to continue it".(112)

As a matter of course, Warren would have expected a situation report immediately upon his arrival at the scene of operations. However, in the absence of independent confirmation, Cockburn's report of the naval, economic and political consequences of the blockade of the Chesapeake, so soon after its beginning, might seem premature, exaggerated or even sycophantic, designed to tell Warren what Cockburn thought he wanted to hear. It might merely reflect Warren and Cockburn's conversations in Bermuda, between Cockburn's arrival in mid-January, and his departure in mid-February, in *Marlborough* for Chesapeake Bay. No American merchant, keen for largely commercial reasons to see the end of Anglo-American conflict, can be seen as an entirely disinterested commentator.

Further, the apparent results so quickly observed by the Richmond merchant, so clearly match the ideal outcome of British strategy, as to invite some scepticism. While the cancelled plans of American farmers to grow for the international market, and the fears of shippers who cancelled attempts to reach the open sea, are no doubt significant, they are difficult to

measure. Similarly, and most importantly, both the merchant's impressions and Cockburn's report, are wholly subjective, where an objective analysis of commercial captures and their fiscal, financial and therefore political consequences, would be much more valuable.

However, a letter written by a committee of Baltimore insurance underwriters to Secretary of the Navy Jones in February 1813, predating Cockburn's somewhat effusive report to Warren, to an extent vindicates the impression given by Cockburn's informant, and reflects the concern felt by some other American businessmen. Having begun their letter, "Under the Circumstances of the present Blockade of the Chesapeake, and the extraordinary Hazards to which our Commerce is exposed", the underwriters proposed a measure of self-help by providing up to four "fast sailing and well equipped and well armed Schooners" to oppose the British blockading squadron's tenders and launches, allegedly being used to "decoy and intercept" American merchantmen, causing their insurers financial loss. Apparently anticipating rejection, the underwriters disingenuously added that they were "aware that the protection of Commerce is the proper provence (sic) of the General Government, with which they do not desire to interfere" in suggesting their "auxiliary measure".(113)

Jones replied promptly on 16 February 1813 that he would put the suggestion to Madison, unknowingly naming the now blockaded "Frigate *Constellation*" and "17 Gun boats and a Cutter now at Norfolk" as the existing American naval defences of the Chesapeake, "now directly menaced with an attack".(114) He also made a realistic assessment of the



American capacity to defend their overseas and coastal trade against British blockade. Jones wrote,

It is true that the Government of the United States is Constitutionally charged with the protection of Commerce, but its means are limited and inadequate to protect at all points our extensive Coast and coasters against a powerful Naval foe whose Superiority enables [them] to attack a vulnerable point with a celerity and force that cannot be repelled but by the Cooperation of the voluntary local force, whose interests & feelings are directly assailed. (115)

Less realistically, Jones also hoped that, “if it were practicable to get below their tenders and launches in the night so as to intercept them and chastise their temerity, it would probably confine them to their ships in future.”

(116) In the event, even a combination of federal government and local forces were unable to offer sufficient resistance to British blockades of increasing scope and power.

Throughout the early spring and summer of 1813, the thirty vessels named in Captain Lumley’s list of the “Blockading Squadron in the Chesapeake”, arrived to maintain the naval and commercial blockades of the Chesapeake, or left for re-supply, re-fit and repair.(117)) An early indication that the Admiralty’s orders were being carried out, was a report in Baltimore’s Niles’ *Weekly Register* that the American ship *Emily*, carrying flour from Baltimore to Lisbon, apparently with a valid British licence, had been stopped in Chesapeake Bay, and its papers “indorsed”, with a statement that the bay had been placed under rigorous blockade.(118)

In the months which followed, *Narcissus* initially captured vessels in ballast, which were usually sunk or burned, but later took four ships carrying flour. The *Rolla* from Norfolk, Virginia, bound for Lisbon, was followed by the *Finland* and two others unnamed in Hulbert's list of captures up to 12 June 1813. The schooner *Flight*, returning from Bordeaux to its home-port of Baltimore with a cargo of silks, brandy and wine was a richer prize. The schooner *Vista*, also en route from Bordeaux to Baltimore "with Oil, Brandy and Wine" was "Drove on shore, the Cargo sav'd by *Victorious* and *Spartan*". Two Baltimore schooners, *Racer* and *Lynx* each laden with coffee, sugar and flour for Bordeaux, were captured, as were two schooners and a sloop, each carrying maize, described as "Indian corn".(119)

The *Narcissus* was obliged to share many prizes with other vessels present at the time of capture, but the ship *Beauty of Baltimore*, laden with "Whiskie and Iron", and the sloop *Butler* of New Bedford carrying corn, were unshared. Whilst the majority were commercial vessels, some were out of the ordinary. The schooner *Dolphin*, listed as "on a Cruise", was apparently a privateer, for which "head money" was later paid on each prisoner taken. *Narcissus'* list of prizes ends on 12 June 1813 with the capture of the American Revenue cutter *Surveyor*, of ninety six tons, with twenty-six men and six guns.(120) For the American administration, as well as for merchants and owners, the accumulation of such losses was becoming financially more significant, as well as a source of inconvenience and irritation.

These blockades, of the southern coast and of the Chesapeake and Delaware rivers, were accelerating a process of erosion of many American livelihoods and living standards. The Royal Navy's method is exemplified by Warren's order to Broke's squadron, composed of *Shannon*, *Nymphe*, *Tenedos* and *Curlew*, dated 27 November 1812. Broke was "occasionally to Cruise with the whole or part of your Squadron, for any period not exceeding five or Six weeks, upon St Georges Bank, and as far as Block Island and Montauq (sic) Point, so as to intersect the passage to Long Island Sound, Rhode Island and the Ports near Boston". This work was not without its navigational hazards. He was to remember that "when employed Cruising upon that station or upon St Georges Bank and off Nantucket Shoals, great attention is to be paid to Sound every two hours." Broke's squadron, later joined by *Valiant* and *La Hogue*, was to be deployed "so that a Division may always occupy the Quarter Specified for Cruising and cutting off the Enemies Supplies."(121)

Among the consequences of this rigorous commercial blockade was the isolation of Nantucket Island, thirty-five miles off the Massachusetts coast, eventually reducing the population to extreme poverty, later to have significant political results. By depriving many Americans of their capital and markets, the blockades eroded their means of generating incomes, and their ability and preparedness to continue to finance a war by an increasing number and level of taxes, and the government's repeated calls for loans, well beyond the end of 1814. Of necessity a protracted process, and not obviously at the outset, these commercial blockades,

supplemented by naval blockade, were nevertheless, the beginning of the end for realistic hope of achieving American war aims.

Nonetheless, the defensive aspect of economic war with the United States could not be overlooked, including the protection of Britain's important trade in North American timber. As a result, on 2 December 1812, Warren had issued orders for a squadron to, "take the Merchant Vessels Laden with timber for the Several Ports of the United Kingdom under your protection and afford them Convoy 150 Leagues to the Northward and Eastward of the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and having done so you are to cruise in search of the Enemy's Ships reported to be at Sea."(122) Reconciliation of the defensive and aggressive priorities in these instructions necessarily heightened the need for quick decisions by watch keepers, whether to remain with the convoy or investigate potential enemies, with potentially grave consequences for mistakes. Nonetheless, trade protection by convoy escort was to remain a vital part of Britain's economic war with the United States, although never easy to co-ordinate with blockades.

In addition to the operational decisions for the blockades of the Chesapeake and Delaware, Warren was occupied in corresponding with London, both privately with Melville, and more officially with Croker. However, in a letter to Croker marked 'private' for official reasons, dated 25 January 1813, Warren alluded to the important intelligence-gathering function of the Royal Navy's blockade of the United States. Warren's squadrons occasionally collected both informative American newspapers and onshore agent's reports, usually brought out by boats prepared to trade

with British vessels, not only in fish, fruit, and vegetables, but also in intelligence, often remarkably well-informed, accurate and up to date.

The role also included monitoring, and where possible intercepting, American communications with potential European allies, as well as the interrogation of captured crews. On 25 January, Warren informed Croker that he had “sent for their Lordship’s Information Two Dispatches in Cypher from the French Consul in Carolina to the Minister for Foreign Affairs at Paris. The Cypher may be Discovered at the Office in Downing Street by my old friend Broughton, or some of the Gentlemen in that Department.”(123)

While writing from his flagship “off New York”, Warren had clearly decided, in advance of any formal orders to do so, to add that port to those to be blockaded. Earlier in January 1813, he had ordered Byron in *Belvidera*, with *Spartan* and *Tartarus* “forthwith to proceed off Montaug Point, long Island (sic) & Cruise for the Destruction of the Enemys Commerce & Ships and protection of the Trade of His Maj. Subjects between the East Side of Long Island & Block Island, & from thence 20 Leagues to the Eastward for the Space of Nine Weeks...”.(124) By February, Baltimore’s *Weekly Register* reported that “They are blockading the Chesapeake and the Delaware, and are occasionally off New York.” (125)

Warren’s letter of 25 January gives an insight into local tactical dispositions and to their underlying strategic purpose. “You are aware” he wrote, “that the *Dragon* 74 *Statira* 38 and *Colibri* Brig are with me: we have Taken and burnt since our being out 16 sail of Ships and Vessels.- I

may probably produce some Deficit ere long in the Revenue of the United States: If all my other Divisions are equally active and successful:"(126)

The same letter also revealed an anxiety. "I am anxious to Take or Destroy some of the Enemys Frigates as they are called but in reality they are small Two Decked Ships: I trust their Lordships will not be displeased with my having enclosed a Newspaper containing an Official Report of the Committee upon their Naval Affairs; and particularly the size Description and Force of the American frigates:" Returning to the themes of earlier letters, Warren also added, "I wish you would send me some Razees of the Description I have stated: and the *Indefatigable* as well as 8 Gun Brigs for New Brunswick the Gulph of St Lawrence; and another Ship or Two of the Line would render our Force here more useful and respectable."(127)

At this stage, the Royal Navy's commercial blockade of the United States was still beset with complications. The treatment of apparently neutral shipping remained a problem since some American vessels had re-registered in neutral countries, and neutral vessels, unless clearly carrying contraband, were still so far allowed access to such New England ports as Boston. The proportion of apparently foreign ships entering American harbours was rising steadily. Such vessels imported, for example, iron and glass from Swedish ports, and sugar, molasses and rum from the Swedish West Indies, returning with American flour, tobacco and timber.(128) Both these export markets, and the materials bought, with the tonnage and import duties payable on them, were useful to the enemy, and so long as neutral vessels were allowed the use of American ports, Britain's commercial blockade would remain only a partial success. Even as late as February

1813, Warren sought Admiralty clarification since “it was impossible to Institute a Blockade of the Enemies Ports in the Face of Neutral Licences and Protections without Number.”(129)

From the assumption of his united command, Warren had been subjected to the lobbying of the entrepreneurs of both Halifax and the West Indies. Few approaches however can have been as naively self-interested as that of the merchants of St John, New Brunswick, who demanded that the gypsum trade they conducted with American vessels should be allowed to continue, yet somehow “consistently with effectual Prosecution of the War against an enemy whose proceedings are by none held in greater Abhorrence than these Memorialists.”(130)

However, since long-term British interests, as in the Peninsula, were occasionally served by connivance with some short-term American benefit through continued trade, more was required of Warren than merely mechanistic application of his instructions. Therefore, when even some American merchants made similar requests, Warren needed a wider strategic understanding, more than of merely immediate tactical concerns. Warren received one such approach from a group of Boston merchants as early as December 1812, requesting that they should be allowed to use a licence purportedly acquired from the British Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth, to carry grain from Alexandria and Norfolk to Britain’s army in Spain. On the back of the letter Warren pencilled and initialled, “No vessel, either with or without Licenses can go out of a Port under Blockade, the orders upon this subject are Strict and Decisive.”(131) The letter then appears to have been filed unanswered. By the time Warren drew the

attention of the Admiralty to this matter, exactly a year later, Wellington's progress in Spain had made such licences unnecessary, and Warren's approach to American grain exports could be unambiguous. Implementation of blockade on the North American station was seldom uncomplicated.

### **Kicks and Ha'pence: Criticisms and Reinforcements.**

Warren's persistent requests for reinforcements, such as those of early November and late December 1812, met with varied responses. In mid-November, Croker had insisted that "their Lordships have already placed under your orders...3 sail of the line exclusive of the *Africa*", twenty-one large and small frigates, twenty-nine sloops and fifteen smaller vessels, with even more promised.(132) In a private letter of 3 December 1812, Melville informed Warren that he would then have "in the number of pendants under your orders...about one seventh of all the Sea-going Vessels in the British Navy", with the apparent implication that the Admiralty was expecting better results.(133)

Official correspondence from London also brought implied criticism and news of an appointment likely to lighten Warren's administrative burden. On 9 January 1813, Croker first re-iterated Admiralty dissatisfaction. "My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty had hoped that the great force placed at your disposal, as stated in my letter of 18<sup>th</sup> November, would have enabled you to obtain the most decided advantages over the Enemy, and to blockade their Ships of War in their



Ports, or to intercept them at Sea if they should escape the vigilance of your blockading Squadrons".(134)

Even the promise of help was not without, at least, irritation. Now that reinforcements, once arrived, would give Warren a force including "ten sail of the Line, my Lords have thought fit to appoint a Captain of the Fleet to serve with your Flag". Customarily, Warren could expect to be consulted on such an appointment, but Croker continued, "as they were not aware of any individual among the senior Captains of the Navy to whom the appointment must be limited, who would be more acceptable to you, they have appointed Captain Henry Hotham to that Situation".(135)

A possible indication that Warren might have preferred an alternative, having met and disliked Hotham, is perhaps evident in a letter Melville had written to Hotham earlier. "There can be no question that whatever may be the habits of private intercourse on which you may have hitherto been with him, he will be glad to avail himself of your professional assistance." Hotham had previously received commendations from very senior officers, and was highly regarded.(136) In the months that followed, Hotham would send regular instalments of a Journal to the Admiralty via Second Secretary John Barrow, always openly acknowledged in a letter from him to Hotham in Bermuda, noting that it would be "laid before their Lordships".(137) Warren's staff, including his Secretary George Hulbert, would surely see these acknowledgements, weakening the suggestion that Hotham had been "carefully chosen" to report secretly on Warren's performance.(138)

Originally intended to leave on 5 January 1813 with *La Hogue* and *Valiant*, Hotham left on 8 January, to take up his appointment in March, raising a broad pendant. Another of Croker's letters followed, also dated 9 January 1813. It noted that the Admiralty "understood that several Captains and Commodores, officers of His Majesty's Ships...have been in the habit of taking their Wives and other Females to Sea, and disapproving as they most strongly do of this irregularity", called upon Hotham to "prevent in every instance the recurrence of a practice which must be extremely injurious to His Majesty's Service".(139) A professional approach to maritime blockade and economic warfare was to be required.

The reinforcements reaching Warren early in 1813 were, however, a disappointment. "[T]he wretched State of the Ships that joined me singly rendered it impossible to make use of them without Refitment."(140) Moreover, the fulfilment of Croker's promise on behalf of the Board that "Such an addition will also be made to your force in frigates and Sloops as will place 30 of the former and 50 of the latter at your disposal", was clearly improbable given Britain's continuing war with France, and the Royal Navy's current world-wide commitments.(141)

Warren had certainly inferred Admiralty criticism even if none were intended. He replied to Melville "I have felt much hurt that the Board Should Suppose that any Exertions on my part should be wanting; were the means in my power of Distressing the Enemy."(142) Perhaps as partial proof of his exertions, Warren enclosed in a letter to Croker at the Admiralty dated 28 March 1813, a table entitled "Coast of America - Proposed Division of Ships & their Stations".(143) Although as he wrote

Warren knew that most of these ‘proposals’ had already been carried into effect, they serve to show exactly how Warren saw the Royal Navy’s role at this stage of Britain’s economic and naval war with the United States.

**Warren’s Dispositions: ‘Coast of America – Ships and their Stations’.**

Warren’s proposals reveal a pattern of at least one 74, and up to five other vessels on each of the three major stations. Of Warren’s dispositions, the first station was for the blockade of the Chesapeake, performed by *Marlborough* and *Victorious* both 74’s, frigates *Maidstone* and *Junon*, and the sixth rate *Laurestinus*, 26, *Fantome*, 18, and an eight gunned tender. Their purpose was “To intercept the Enemies’ Trade and Cruizers from Washington & Baltimore & to prevent the produce of Virginia from going to market.” The squadron was not only “To destroy their Revenue” but also their “Resources, there being the greatest No. of Privateers from those Ports upon the whole Coast of America.” The second station was for the blockade of the Delaware, where *Poictiers*, 74 *Narcissus*, 32, and *Paz*, 10, were to perform an identical function.

The third station, kept by *Dragon* 74, and one other unnamed vessel, was “Off New York”, to perform the same roles as the first two squadrons. Warren further speculated that “This Port may be Blockaded by taking possession of Sandy Hook with Troops & anchoring some Ships within it, & by another Squadron off Mont[a]uk Point to anchor, Water and Refit in Gardiner’s Bay E. end of Long Island where 18 Sail of the Line under Adml. Abuthnot in the old American War used to lay.” The other,

fourth, squadron Warren referred to, “Off Nantucket Shoal, Block Island” and “Montuk Point”, was composed of *Belvidera*, 36, and *Acasta*, here described as having 40 guns.

Five smaller vessels, the largest with only eighteen guns, were all that were available for the Bay of Fundy and “To protect the Coast of New Brunswick from Invasion.” Nova Scotia was better provided for. Three thirty-eight gun frigates, *Shannon*, *Tenedos* and *Nymphe* were “To cruise upon St George’s Bank, off the Gulf of St Lawrence & on the Banks of Newfoundland.”

A seventh squadron was allocated to the southern coastline. *Aeolus*, 32 and *Sophie*, 18, were posted “Off Charleston, Beaufort, Ocracoke and Roanoke”, in order “To intercept Trade, Privateers & to destroy the Revenue.” Warren added that he was aware that “several additional Vessels must be added to distress this part of the Enemy’s Coast.” Only the 14 gun *Viper* was allocated to watch Savannah and St Augustine, despite their having “The most implacable & virulent people in the whole Union.”(144) It was through this area however that clandestine cargoes of American raw-cotton began their voyages to Britain, having been transferred in exchange for British manufactures, to the neutral Spanish Amelia Island through a commercial blockade at this point deliberately left porous.(145)

Meanwhile, Warren’s flagship, the *San Domingo*, in company with *Ramillies*, also a 74, *Statira*, 38, and *Orpheus* 32, together with *Colibri* 18, and a tender, were held in reserve “To unite to meet an Enemy, or to Cruize occasionally whenever an additional No. of Frigates or Sloops arrive so as

to afford relief upon the several Stations.” He hoped for an additional “two Frigates & two Sloops of War to allocate to “any given point wanting Force or in search of any of the Enemy’s Ships.”

Despite its already being the end of March before the schedule was dispatched to London, Warren went on “In the month of March it will be necessary to add a new Squadron to attend to Boston & Rhode Isld., as the weather will then be sufficiently mild to admit of Ships keeping that Station.” He also wrote of then being able to add to the responsibilities of the three frigates currently off Newfoundland.(146) Warren’s proposed dispositions emphasise just how thinly spread his resources had to be to meet the Cabinet’s intentions and the Admiralty’s instructions, over enormous distances, and facing navigational hazards and frequently foul weather.

To add to Warren’s discomfort, Croker had relayed in a letter dated 10 February 1813, that the Admiralty found his reports on the number of active American privateers “in a great degree exaggerated”. Further, that

they cannot suppose that you have left the principal Ports of the American Coast so unguarded as to permit such multitudes of Privateers to escape in and out unmolested; and their Lordships are quite sure that by preventing our Merchant Ships from running [away from convoy protection] and by carefully blockading the Principal Ports the trade of privateering will be made so hazardous and expensive that its objects will be in most instances frustrated. (147)

But it was not just a question of America’s ‘principal ports’. On an indented coastline of prodigious length, the number of small inlets and harbours able

and willing to support privateers was one of many factors inadequately allowed for in the Admiralty's assessment of Warren's performance to date. Whatever the Royal Navy's other commitments, a shortage of suitable resources would always be a limiting factor in conducting efficient blockades, and in dealing with privateers. For both tasks, sufficient substantial vessels, capable of penetrating estuaries and inlets, would be essential.

On 3 March 1813, Warren made an attempt to nullify the efforts not only of several American public warships but also of the privateers based around Boston, as well as those Bostonians engaged in overseas trade. He ordered Broke to "use every exertion in your power to intercept the Enemy's Frigates coming out or going into the Port of Boston as well as the Privateers Prizes & Trade returning to the Northern Ports".(148) Boston at this time however, was still open to neutral merchant vessels. Warren's initiative seems likely to have coincided with a discussion of the need for it in London.

In a very long letter dated 20 March, Warren was to receive further Admiralty evaluation of his progress as expressed by Croker, who initially conceded that "With regard to the watching Boston ...my Lords are aware that this Port cannot be effectually blockaded from November to March" but nonetheless recorded Admiralty disappointment that Rodger's squadron had escaped in October, as if the weather conditions permitting it complied to a precise timetable. The Admiralty also deplored the escape of Bainbridge in December and,

Tho it was not possible perhaps to have maintained a permanent watch on that Port yet having...precise information that Commodore Bainbridge was to sail at a given time, My Lords regret that it was not deemed practicable to proceed off that Port (at a reasonable distance from the land) and to have taken the chance at least of intercepting the Enemy if the weather should not have permitted you to blockade him. (149)

Croker continued, “With regard to your future operations and the disposal you propose to make of your force, I have to express to you their Lordships approbation of the general arrangement”, although Warren was reminded that four more ships of the line had been allocated to him, two of which should apparently have reached him by 20 March.(150) “My Lords are glad”, Croker went on, “to think you will consider the amount of force now under your orders as most ample – It exceeds very much what a mere comparison with the means of your Enemy would appear to make necessary”. This comment however takes into account only the naval blockade Warren was expected to conduct, and the relatively few American ‘public’ warships he faced; but not the numerous American privateers, nor the American and neutral merchant vessels which Warren’s forces were expected to intercept and detain as part of the Royal Navy’s commercial blockade.

Warren’s references to the French in demanding reinforcements were deemed “by no means just” since, so far in this war, no French fleets had been deployed in Caribbean or American waters. Should the French Navy escape its Royal Naval blockade, Croker asserted, Warren would be proportionately reinforced. Finally, Croker added, “My Lords...recommend

to you the most active and vigorous prosecution of the War during the Season when the whole of the American Coast is accessible by your Squadron, and which will admit of your placing all the Enemy's Ports in a state of close and permanent Blockade".(151)

Some news from London had been more encouraging. In the letter of 10 February, Croker had referred to Warren's proposal of razees, adding that "their Lordships have already turned their attention to this point; and had ordered four 74 Gun ships to be cut down and fitted in the manner you recommend, with a view to their being employed on the American Station in lieu of Line of Battle Ships."(152) By 23 March 1813, Melville could be more specific and assured Warren in a private letter that "when *Majestic* and *Goliath* are completed as razees we propose sending them to you." (153)

Melville continued, "We wish also to give you not less than 30 Frigates for the whole of your command, besides a due proportion of smaller vessels amounting altogether perhaps, with the Line of Battle Ships and Frigates to 120 pendants, and we calculate that this will allow for your various blockading convoy and cruising services, and also a full third in port refitting and repairing".(154) Whether this part of Melville's promise could be fully kept seems doubtful, although the cause of this apparent largesse was about to become clear.

As he outlined his current dispositions for the Admiralty in March 1813, Warren was unaware that in London, both the Admiralty in formal orders and Melville in a private letter, were framing instructions for the blockade of the United States to be extended. In his letter of 26 March



1813, Melville informed Warren that he should expect an Admiralty order “for blockading all the principal Ports in the United States to the southward of Rhode Island & including the Mississippi,” and added, “we calculate that your force is amply sufficient to enable you to execute this service effectually.” Intending that Warren should comply as far as possible with the British perception of the “Law of Nations”, Melville went on “We do not intend this as a mere paper blockade, but as a complete stop to all trade and intercourse by Sea with those Ports, as far as the wind & weather, and the continual presence of a sufficient armed Force will permit and ensure.” More practically, Melville added, “If you find that this cannot be done without abandoning for a time the interruption which you appear to be giving to the internal navigation of the Chesapeake, the latter object must be given up, & you must be content with blockading its entrance & sending in occasionally your cruisers for the purpose of harrassing & annoyance.”

(155)

Warren’s Admiralty orders, bearing the same date, required him to “institute a strict and rigorous Blockade of the Ports and Harbours of New York, Charleston, Port Royal, Savannah and of the River Mississippi.”

(156) He had already been blockading the northern approaches to New York, these orders sanctioned his blockading the more difficult southerly approach, and legitimised what he had been doing in the north. This extension of the blockades passed into British law with an Order in Council dated 30 March 1813, and the *London Gazette* duly published its usual warning to neutral shipping.(157)

To an extent, Warren's Admiralty orders followed events, sanctioning what was in fact already happening. A letter from the port authorities in Charleston, to American Secretary of the Navy Jones, dated 1 March 1813, pre-dating Warren's new orders, reported that "The Frigate *Eolus* [*Aeolus*] and Brig *Sophie* with the two Small Privateers are still off our bar," although "by information received from the Fishing Smacks, they have made no Captures of Consequence, five schooners and Several Ships Sailed on Saturday for France, unobserved by the blockading Squadron." Nevertheless, the writer found it necessary to add "...it appears that Lord Townsend", *Aeolus*' commander, "is perfectly acquainted, with the State of this harbor, and also the destination of every vessel in it, with the politics of their owners &c...I regret that I am not authorized to prevent the fishing smacks from going out while the Enemy remains off the bar; no doubt but that all the information goes out through that channel, altho rigidly searched at the Guard vessel."(158)

Nonetheless, the British blockade of Charleston was, at this stage, clearly under-strength and Warren's repeated calls for reinforcements were understandable. Warren's appreciation of his crucial need for all the means the Admiralty could spare to implement effective commercial blockade, is expressed in his letter to Melville on 29 March 1813. If American overseas trade, especially imports, could be sufficiently reduced,

It is possible that the everlasting Demand for Cash & Consequently Taxes may occasion Convulsion & Disorder among the Several States, which may urge the President to more explicit & acceptable Terms, of which, should such an event arise, your Lordship will receive the Earliest information. (159)

The British however were not alone in experiencing shortages. American resistance to British blockade seems to have been hampered in places by a shortage of suitable manpower, as at Norfolk, Virginia. By April 1813, Secretary of the Navy Jones had to admit "...our efforts to recruit for the Gun Boats have failed at Baltimore, and progress very slowly at Philadelphia, even for the small force ordered for the defence of the Delaware, now as effectually blockaded and annoyed as the Chesapeak." The range as well as the psychological impact of the British blockades is revealed by Jones' further comment that "The presence of a powerful hostile squadron is naturally calculated to excite alarm; thus we have urgent calls from Maine to Georgia, each conceiving itself the particular object of attack".(160)

The Chesapeake certainly was being "blockaded and annoyed". During April and May 1813, Warren exploited his almost complete command of Chesapeake Bay, with Cockburn leading an expedition up the Bay, and landing at this stage without much effective opposition. An interim convoy of 40 prizes was dispatched to Bermuda on 17 May; a useful measure of success to date. In June however, an amphibious assault on Craney Island, at the western entrance to the Elizabeth River, and vital to an attack on Norfolk, was repulsed. (161) Amphibious forces later briefly occupied Hampton near Newport News, where French auxiliaries fighting for the British, behaved with barbarity, contributing to Cockburn's not wholly deserved reputation for brutality. Many soundings were taken and much useful intelligence was gathered, to be used with great effect the following year.(162)

The impact of the British commercial blockade was also being increased by a change in the type of vessel detained. From April 1813, it appears that the Royal Navy sought to intercept not only the ocean-going ships and large schooners of often-wealthy owners, but also smaller coastal vessels, often the only physical capital of modest entrepreneurs, sometimes undertaking the journey themselves. When maintained from one year to the next, this would disrupt the coastal trade on which many local economies relied, eventually with serious consequences for the American government. By May 1813, a Captain Dent complained from Charleston that “our port continues Blockaded by a sloop of war and two brigs” in company with a privateer, making “a number of captures, principally coasters”.(163) By the end of April 1813, no less a commander than Captain Sir Thomas Hardy in *Ramillies*, led a squadron off Block Island, north-east of Long Island Sound, attacking the coastal trade seeking to approach New York. His squadron also sought to deny access to privateers and those with letters of marque, and used boats such as those of the frigate *Orpheus* for pursuit into inlets and estuaries.(164)

On 26 May 1813, Warren issued from Bermuda a local proclamation of the commercial blockade of New York so that vessels attempting to leave the port could not claim ignorance. Additionally, on 2 July 1813, Thomas Barclay, the former British consul, still in residence as agent for British prisoners of war, wrote a letter to the Russian vice-consul in New York, specifying the blockade’s significance to neutrals.(165) This letter was published there on 6 July. So far, the commercial activities of the ports and harbours on Long Island itself were excluded.

Although on 28 March 1813, Warren had proposed stationing *Aeolus* and *Sophie* off Charleston, North Carolina, to blockade Beaufort, Ocracoke and Roanoke, south-west of Cape Hatteras, it was not until September that he named such places in a proclamation. Since in the meantime, American vessels used the innumerable local inlets, Warren authorised an attack on Ocracoke, made by Cockburn with marines and other troops on 12 July. British boats captured the privateering brig *Anaconda*, and the schooner *Atlas*, with letters of marque. Those landing “purchased Cattle &c” from cooperative local inhabitants.(166)

The following week Cockburn explained at length how the “Blockade of the Chesapeake is very materially, if not entirely frustrated by the Port of Beaufort and the Ocracoke Inlet not having been hitherto declared to be also in a state of Blockade” linked as they were by “an easy inland navigation from Norfolk and Elizabeth Town”. “Flour and other Produce of the neighbourhood of the Chesapeake, which can no longer be sent by the Capes of Virginia is now sent in numerous small Craft to the Neutrals & other large vessels safely laying at Ocracoke and Beaufort”. They should be blockaded “as well as the Chesapeake of which in fact they now form a part owing to their immediate water Communication with it”. They were “a Depot likewise for whatever is to be important to it”. Estimating the cargo of the *Atlas* alone to be worth “600,000 Dollars”, such vessels were, Cockburn wrote, “kept in constant activity from the immense Quantity of Goods...sent from and received at the various Towns situated on the Shores of the Chesapeake”.(167)

Perhaps partly as a result, when on 1 September Warren sent to a Crown Commissioner a copy of his current proclamation of the blockade of New York, Charleston, Port Royal, Savannah and the River Mississippi, dated 26 May 1813, he took the opportunity to announce an extension and explain the reason for it. "From the first of September 1813, all outlets from the Albermarle & Pamlico Sounds, connected by inland navigation with the port of Norfolk, the ports of Beaufort and Ocracoke, (sic) North Carolina, Cape Fear river & Georgetown, South Carolina, and Sunbury and Darien in Georgia, [were] in a state of strict and rigorous blockade".(168)

Although barely begun by 1812, the network of canals so far completed potentially gave better access to blockaded ports, from further along the coast, than was immediately obvious. The Dismal Swamp Canal, opened in April 1812, offered escape from Norfolk in Chesapeake Bay, south into Albermarle Sound and out into the Atlantic.(169) Although often so narrow as to accommodate only twenty or even ten-ton vessels, these canal entrances could, if unwatched, significantly reduce the efficiency of a coastal blockade. Waterways provided New York with "ample channels of communication with the interior by water", making it a "centre of domestic distribution... the whole range of coast from the Connecticut to the Shrewsbury River, and remotely inland - can be reached in perfect safety from this city in a sloop of 20 tons."(170) An efficiently applied close blockade of the coast would drive internal traffic onto such inland waterways, with their connections to the sea. In the absence of cost-effective road transport, canals would do much to gather exports and

maintain local distributive trade and communication, therefore, as far as possible, access to them would have to be closed.

Furthermore, by naming specific ports and the vessels allocated to blockade them in a proclamation, Warren complied with what was then generally understood to be legally necessary for a maritime blockade.

Aware that the named squadron had to be an apparently adequate force for the blockade to be complete and uninterrupted, Warren had carefully added to his proposal in March that “several additional Vessels must be added”.

Extension of the blockade to hinder the American’s use of inland waterways was therefore not only expedient, but also legally respectable.

(171)

By September 1813, a more objective appraisal of British progress with the blockade of the United States than Cockburn’s attempt in March, was possible. Throughout the spring and summer of 1813, the Royal Navy’s commercial blockade had gathered pace. Between 30 March and 22 July 1813, Warren’s squadrons made 138 captures of which all but two were merchant vessels. The exceptions were the American heavy frigate *Chesapeake* taken by the *Shannon* on 1 June, and the US revenue schooner *Surveyor* taken by *Narcissus*’ boats on 12 June 1813. After a succession of keenly felt defeats, these captures were seen in Britain as vital progress in the war with the United States, although in the long-run less important than the impact made on the American economy by the cumulative effect of the seizure of American merchant vessels. Continued commercial blockade was made practicable by the Royal Navy’s successful blockade, capture or

destruction, by the beginning of December 1813, of the fifteen, named American warships shown in Appendix A as Table 2 (a).(172)

Of the 136 trading vessels taken during those sixteen weeks, 110 were American, of varying sizes and with a range of cargoes. Of the 26 non-American vessels, most were Spanish, Portuguese or Swedish although four were “English” recaptures, with other British vessels detained for “illicit trading”.(173) Twenty-four of these prizes were sent under prize crews into Halifax, twenty-two to Bermuda, eight into Nassau on New Providence Island, and seven to Jamaica for adjudication by their respective Vice Admiralty Courts, and one into Porta Corbello. Twenty-six were burnt or destroyed, and two simply “set adrift”. Eight of the faster prizes were pressed into service as tenders for larger British ships, while one, captured by Warren’s *San Domingo*, was “fitted as a watering vessel”.(174) Despite its being illegal, one American ship, the *Montesquieu*, “laden with tea, nankeen, silk, copper and cassia, from Canton, bound for Philadelphia, captured by the *Paz* March 27 1813”, was “ransomed for 180,000 dollars.” (175)

Whereas earlier in the year, the voyage of the 409 ton American ship *Star* carrying grain from Alexandria to Lisbon would have been licensed and condoned, Wellington’s recent progress in the Peninsula now rendered such shipments less necessary. *Marlborough*’s capture of the *Star* on 14 June 1813 could now strike at American grain exports without hindering Britain’s efforts against Napoleon’s armies in Spain. Only four days later, *Marlborough* also took the 292 ton ship *Protectress*, also laden with American flour, together a significant success for Cockburn’s



“Chesapeake Squadron”, and a powerful disincentive to American farmers, processors and shippers.(176)

While the schooner *Ploughboy*, sent by *Ramillies* into Halifax on 16 April 1813 carried 288 bales of cotton, other cargoes were more varied. The 150 ton American brig *Valador*, flying Portuguese colours when captured by *Statira*, *Spartan* and *Martin* on 1 June, carried silk, ribbon, window glass and some specie”.(177) The 35 ton American sloop *Butler* taken by *Narcissus*’ boats on 9 June 1813 had carried merely “corn meal and fish”, but was nevertheless sent into Bermuda for adjudication. Other mundane cargoes included groundnuts, potash, potatoes, barrel staves, roof shingles and sundries, while others included valuable mahogany, indigo, tea, sugar, wine and skins.(178)

Often both vessel and cargo must have represented a considerable investment, such as the 457 ton ship *Volante* laden with “Brandy, Wine, Silks, Dry Goods, Iron &c”, captured en route from Bayonne to Boston by *La Hogue*, *Valiant* and *Curlew* on 26 March 1813, and listed as “condemned”. So was the brig *Diomedé* of 293 tons, captured on 10 May by *La Hogue* and *Nymphe*, exporting “Redwood, Indigo, Sugar, Tea, Oil & Ships Blocks” from Salem to Manilla.(179) Later, on 3 September 1813, the 750 ton ship *Jerusalem*, importing “2,000 boxes of Sugar, Coffee, Copper, and Hides”, from “Havannah to Boston” was captured by *Majestic* and “taken into Halifax”.(180)

These three losses alone must have had an adverse effect on the preparedness of all those involved to continue with American international trade. Both exports and imports were also disrupted in the timber trade. On

14 March 1813, the 120 ton American brig *Commerce*, “with lumber from Rhode Island bound for Havannah”, was captured by *Colibri* and burned, while on 31 March, the American ship *Franklin*, “of 171 tons and ten men”, importing timber from Cayenne to New York, was captured and sent by *Ramillies* into Halifax.(181)

Internal American trade in a range of commodities, including cotton, was also being disrupted by such captures as that of the American schooner *Rising Sun* of “100 tons and 8 men laden with cotton from Charleston to New York”, captured by *Atalante* on 31 March 1813, and sent into Halifax. Similarly, the American brig *Cornelia* laden with cotton from Savannah, bound for Boston’s growing textile industry, was taken by *Ramillies* on 26 April 1813, and sent to Bermuda.(182) Conversely, the recapture by HMS *Opossum* on 2 February 1813, of the 250 ton British brig *Bowes* laden with a cargo of cotton, being imported from Pernambuco in Brazil to Liverpool, must have brought relief to owners and insurers alike, if not its prize crew.(183)

Taken together, these lists suggest that by September 1813, most sections of the American economy were being affected, rather than as earlier, the profits of just a minority of shipowners and wealthy merchants. Although neutrals were not unaffected, of a list of 77 of Warren’s captures taken up to 19 July 1813, all but 15 were American. Eight were “English” recaptures. Forty-four were definitely ‘condemned’, and 13 more looked likely to be. Only ten were ‘restored’ of which 7 had produced licences, one was ‘part condemned’ and another one ‘cleared’.(184)

Warren's pencilled note, added to the list of captures and detentions ending on 26 September 1813, testifies to the slowness of the Vice Admiralty Court's adjudication system by recording that "121 sail at Halifax, 113 at Bermuda, 68 at Leeward Islands, 70 at Jamaica" were still "unaccounted for, total 372".(185)

Warren reported to Croker, as tardily as 11 November 1813, that between 20 April and 20 September that year, his squadrons had sent a total of 115 vessels into Halifax alone, for adjudication in its Vice Admiralty Court. At the time Warren wrote, the outcome of just 68 of these cases was fully recorded. Twenty-nine vessels, almost 43% of the cases decided, were 'condemned', together with the cargoes of two more. Fifteen vessels, 22% of those decided on, were found to be recaptured British vessels, and twenty-two vessels, almost 32%, were 'restored' by the laboriously thorough court proceedings. The ultimate fate of the remaining forty-seven vessels was unrecorded. This list of vessels sent into Halifax does not refer to those sunk, burned or unofficially ransomed at sea.(186) By December 1813, Warren's squadrons had sent no less than 231 prizes into Bermuda alone, 54 up to the end of 1812, and a further 177 during 1813, of which only 5 appear to have been restored, and one recapture placed "under Admiralty Orders".(187)

To complement these successes in the Royal Navy's commercial blockade, some progress was made with a British naval blockade. On 1 June 1813, initial American plans for Decatur to attack the British squadron blockading Charleston - later amended to molesting British trade in the West Indies - were frustrated at the outset. His heavy frigate *United States*,

together with the now American *Macedonian* and the sloop *Hornet*, were intercepted by the *Valiant* 74, and *Acasta* 44, although Decatur later reported that as many as seven British vessels had blockaded the eastern exit of Long Island Sound.(188) The American vessels took refuge in the port of New London, north of Long Island, outside which a reinforced British blockading squadron became permanent. Only the *Hornet* was to escape, in November 1814, to take any further part in the war. Captain Oliver of the *Valiant* reported to Warren that he took “great consolation in having prevented their getting to sea from both ends of Long Island [Sound] and from knowing that they are now in a situation where perhaps they can be more easily watched than in most others”.(189)

This degree of progress with British commercial and naval blockades had been made despite daunting practical problems with often adverse weather and navigational conditions, and frequent shortage of provisions, even of fresh water. Winter weather conditions on the United States’ north-eastern seaboard often made watching a harbour like Boston or New York so difficult as to make failure in blockading them all too likely, while making depreciation of both ships and crews both unavoidable and difficult to rectify. In February 1813, Warren had reminded the Admiralty that blizzards often rendered blockading Boston and Rhode Island extremely difficult between November and March.(190) Meanwhile, between Boston and Halifax, Broke encountered strong north-easterly gales. The *Shannon*’s crew needed heavy worsted garments beneath their outer clothing, together with mittens, while handling frozen sails and rigging.(191)

Weather conditions created problems for British blockading squadrons even in summer, while prevailing westerly winds assisted attempts by determined American masters and commanders to evade patrols which, however diligent, could not be everywhere at once, and which spent much time and effort beating back towards the American coast. Despite having kept a 74 and three frigates outside Boston, Warren had had to admit in a letter dated 1 June 1813 that “in a fog which is prevalent at this Season...Commodore Rogers with the *President* and the *Congress* had got out:”.(192)

Warren’s letter would in fact have crossed on its journey to London with a letter to him from Melville and the Admiralty, dated 4 June 1813, which seems somewhat critical in its tone.

We hope soon to have further accounts from you & to learn that your most important object, the blockading [of] the Enemy’s Ships of War in their Ports has been attained, as also the other objects of putting a total stop to their trade and the annoyance of the Coastline”. (193)

This order of priority obviously reflects the possibility that major American warships if unblockaded could attack and disrupt, if not potentially remove, the British squadrons conducting the commercial blockades making a progressively less ignorable impact on American trade and Customs revenues.

Melville was also “very solicitous that the Ports of New York and Boston should be watched by a force fully equal to encounter the Enemy in the event of their putting to Sea”, and that any escaping should be pursued.

Further, that Warren's "Squadrons off New York and Boston will be on their guard against being caught between two fires by the junction of the Enemy from those Ports". Melville then combined good news with bad. "Some of our Fir Frigates have been launched; and others are coming forward. The whole will probably be completed in the course of this year, but we have great Difficulty in procuring men for them." He continued, "We are building these Ships of the same size and force as the large American's & shall probably build a third".(194)

By June 1813, Warren felt the need to postpone his return to Halifax until the autumn, "if the Service will admit for a few weeks for the benefit of my health and Refitment of the Ships." On 22 July, he said he would return to Halifax in September, but meanwhile intended "to attend a little to my health, which has suffered by so long a period at Sea".(195) By September however, serious sickness amongst British crews in Halifax was "prevailing", although temporary.(196) Further, in September and into October, the Caribbean and more southerly American states could expect hurricanes.

Throughout 1813, British commanders at all levels spent much time concerned with shortages. In March 1813, Warren had been ordered to "make Bermuda your permanent Station, it is the most central Spot within the Limit of your Station."(197) But, although Bermuda offered refuge from the biting winter cold and persistent fogs of more northerly waters between November and March, like Halifax, it suffered serious shortages. Warren had complained to Croker in February 1813 that "There is not any Rope...left in the Stores of the Royal Yard nor any to be had in

the Islands, the ships are in great want, and the Stores in Halifax being likewise drained I apprehend the highest inconvenience in refitting my squadron.”(198)

Periodic shortages of naval stores in both Halifax and Bermuda and the more permanent lack of such dockyard facilities as dry docks, and of such skilled workers as shipwrights, did nothing to ease Warren’s anxiety over fulfilling the Admiralty’s escalating demands. Although costly both to build and defend, “Had a dry dock been built at Halifax, it would have changed the strategic balance, not only in the North Atlantic, but also in the West Indies.”(199)

Although for Warren provisioning was a permanent concern, his commanders also made local arrangements. On 1 May 1813, Hardy in *Ramillies* stationed off Block Island, got “plenty of water and stock from it and we also get our linen washed there. The inhabitants are very much alarmed... but as long as they supply us we shall be very civil to them.” (200) On 1 June 1813, Warren had returned to Bermuda “with Ships being reduced in the article of Provisions to one week”.(201) Meanwhile, Capt Oliver of *Valiant*, responsible for keeping Decatur’s squadron blockaded in New London, “anchored off Gardiner’s Island, from whence we could see the Enemy Ships in New London River &c... sent the *Acasta* to Fort-pondbay where she got wood and water with great ease also a few Cattle”. (202) By July, Warren was anxious that the Americans might “fortify Old Point Comfort and prevent the Ships employed upon the Blockade watering or laying so High up in Lynhaven Bay as may be necessary for their protection in December and January”.(203)

Occasionally, provisions for the British blockading squadrons came from captured cargoes, but others were supplied by Americans at a profit. This “palpable and criminal intercourse” became sufficiently widespread for American Secretary of the Navy Jones to “call for the vigilant interposition of all the Naval Officers of the United States” in an order dated 29 July 1813. Jones complained that,

This intercourse is not only carried on by foreigners, under the specious garb (sic) of friendly flags, who convey provisions water and succours of all kinds (ostensibly destined for friendly ports, in the face too of a declared and rigorous blockade,) direct to the fleets and stations of the enemy with great subtlety and treachery by profligate citizens who under cover of night or other circumstances favouring their turpitude find means to convey succours or intelligence to the enemy. (204)

Provisions were indeed supplemented by “constant intelligence of our naval and military force and preparation.”(205) From later accounts, American attempts to restrict, much less eradicate these transactions, were largely ineffective. Meanwhile, the clandestine showing of “blue lights” at night continued to alert British blockading vessels outside New London to American intentions to leave harbour, and to infuriate pro-government sections of the American press.(206)

Warren was still so short of reinforcements that the relief of vessels on blockade duty was often delayed, with a corresponding reduction in efficiency. On 22 July, Warren had written to Melville from the “River Potomac 40 miles below Washington”, that he was,



pleased that some Razees are likely at last to come here: & when these additions arrive I shall place a strong Division as has already been the case off Boston & New London, this place & the Delaware – but it requires many ships to afford a relief to the several Divisions: added to which our supply of provisions at Bermuda has failed us much & must be remedied. (207)

These complaints contrast strangely with the Admiralty's version of the vessels at Warren's disposal. In comparison with the 83 vessels on the North America and West Indies stations in July 1812, only 79 of which are recorded by Warren's flag secretary by 7 August of that year, by 1 July 1813, the Admiralty listed no fewer than 129 vessels allocated to Warren's United Command.(208) The North America station at Halifax was listed as having 60 vessels of various sizes, including a prison ship, while the Leeward Islands station had 39. The Jamaica station had 17 and Newfoundland 13, including its prison ship, but excluding numerous troopships.

The North America station was listed as having ten 74's, and one razee described as having 58 guns, two large frigates, *Acasta* with 44 guns and the *Loire* with 40, and seven 38-gun frigates. Seven further frigates carried between 36 and 32 guns, while two 6<sup>th</sup> rates carried either 24 or 20 guns. Twenty-eight vessels with less than 20 guns were listed, together with three unarmed vessels. The Leeward Islands station was given as having two 74's and a 50-gun 4<sup>th</sup> rate, three 38-gun frigates together with four smaller ones, and three 6<sup>th</sup> rates with 20 guns. A further twenty-six smaller vessels, with less than 20 guns were also listed. Similarly, Jamaica was given as having two 74's and a 44-gun 5<sup>th</sup> rate, all the rest, excluding the

unarmed receiving ship, were described as 6<sup>th</sup> rates with less than 22 guns. The list gave Newfoundland one 74, one 5<sup>th</sup> rate with 40 guns, one with 38 and two with 36. Seven 6<sup>th</sup> rates with 20 or fewer guns, and an unarmed prison ship completed the United Command's allocation, approximately one fifth of the 624 vessels given by the General Abstract as the Royal Navy's strength on 1 July 1813.(209)

By July 1813, Rear Admiral Griffith had been appointed as Flag Officer to lighten the administrative load at Halifax. He was, Warren said, "already known to me", and "will be of infinite Service; as I can then Depend upon the Ships being sent out to their several stations after re-equipment; (sic) and also the unreasonable Demands & Alarm of the Merchants answered and attended to in Time."(210)

Nevertheless, despite all of Warren's often-valid complaints, the British naval blockade was achieving a measure of success. By July 1813, the Royal Navy had blockaded or captured eight named American warships, and destroyed or captured numerous smaller 'public' vessels.(211) The best of the smaller craft left afloat were often used as tenders by the British blockading squadrons. Warren was later to inform Croker of his purchase of nine such vessels, two brigs and seven schooners, all captured American letters of marque and "particularly fine Vessels of their Class and extremely fast Sailers."(212)

Warren's private letter to Melville on 6 September 1813 revealed his misgivings at apparent machinations in London. He wrote,

I am sorry to Observe in the Orders received from the Board; that Directions have been given to Rear Admiral Griffith to Direct the Blockading Squadrons without

their going through me as the Senior and Commanding Officer; which is not a pleasant circumstance: (213)

Clearly deciding just to get on with the job, Warren continued, as if reminding London of his function, “I shall however endeavour to arrange the System of Blockading Boston and the Eastern ports with Rr Admiral Griffith as well as selecting a certain number of Ships for that Service & Directing the Rear Admiral to See them relieved by fresh Ships occasionally throughout the Winter”.(214) With hindsight, perhaps Warren should have complained more loudly.

By 27 September 1813, Warren wrote from Halifax of his intention to “proceed to Bermuda” and direct Cockburn to “Employ the Flying Corps in Harrassing the Southern Coast of America and attacking such places as may be most Vulnerable and Destroying the Enemies Ships & Commerce” whilst leaving in Halifax “a strong Division of Ships with Rear Admiral Griffith for the Services of the Blockade of this Quarter of my United Station – so as to ensure their being regularly relieved”. Then, despite his usual plea that “some fresh ships may soon arrive upon this Station”, he wished that “Orders were given to include the Port of New Haven & perhaps also New London...within the Blockade of New York, or it will be impossible to prevent the Trade and Vessels entering the latter port by passage of the Sound”.(215) If granted, this second wish would significantly increase the demands on his resources.

Indeed, the cumulative wear on such British ships as *Nymphe*, *Orpheus* and *Statira*, long employed on both naval and commercial

blockades, was to contribute to another embarrassing failure of the British blockades. While *Nymphe* was in Halifax, withdrawn from her station for a routine refit, *Orpheus* sprung her mainmast, and was obliged to join her there. *Statira* meanwhile was “so very bad in her topsides, knees &c”, that Warren proposed sending her temporarily to join the New London blockade, then to the West Indies, to return to Britain with a convoy. On 16 October, Warren had to admit in a letter to Croker that Rodger’s *President* had again evaded the British blockading squadrons, and had re-entered Newport harbour from a five-month North Atlantic cruise.(216)

Despite this obvious reversal, by October 1813, after the tentative start complicated by belated diplomatic overtures, shortage of resources and undeniable shortcomings, the beginnings of naval success must have seemed within reach. Warren’s disposition of available ships and personnel seem to reflect much of what the British Government had in mind at the outset. On 26 October, Warren informed Melville that he had “directed Rear Admiral Griffith to superintend and direct the Blockade of Boston and the Bay of Fundy & the Convoys from thence in addition to the Port Duty”. He also proposed “having Rear Admiral Cockburn with the Ships off New York & moving myself occasionally towards Chesapeake & along the line of Coast”. He could not, however, avoid adding that he “should hope that all the Razees may be sent direct to me and an additional number of the new large frigates as I have not by 30<sup>th</sup> last so many as proposed in your Lordships former letter, and with the numerous blockades all of which require a relief of ships to preserve them.”(217)

The weather then sought to compound Warren's problems as a wayward and unseasonal 'hurricane' struck as far north as Halifax on 12 November 1813, causing unpredictable devastation. The following day, Warren reported that, although lasting only 90 minutes,

the direful effects of it are beyond belief, and the damages sustained by the Men of war and Shipping are extremely great, between fifty and Sixty Sail of Ships were driven ashore, many of them bilged, and others carried so far above the high Water mark, as to prevent their being again got off...The *San Domingo*, *La Hogue*, *Maidstone*, *Epervier*, *Fantome*, *Manly*, *Nemesis*, *Morgiana*, *Canso* were parted from their Anchors and put ashore, the whole are afloat except *Epervier* & *Manly*, & have not received material injury [although] *Maidstone* & *Fantome* must be hove down before they can leave the Port. (218)

*Nymphe* was among those seriously damaged having "lost her Bowsprit Foremast and Topmasts, [and] had the Starboard Quarter stove in". Warren concluded that "His Majestys Ships are materially crippled by this event" but that he would "use every possible endeavour to have them repaired with every dispatch which the Strength of this Yard & their own means admit of".(219) This meteorological setback was particularly unwelcome at this time since Warren had in hand an extension of the British commercial blockade.

Although Oliver's reports to Warren, and the American warships trapped in New London harbour both show that the British naval blockade of New York was in place by the summer of 1813, neutral merchant ships continued to enter and leave New York harbour as well as Boston. While the decision still stood to allow Boston to continue its trade with neutrals, in

the hope of widening to the point of secession the political gap between the Republican administration and the increasingly prosperous, and largely Federalist New England, any such hopes concerning New York were unrealistic. An opportunity for inflicting further economic damage on the United States clearly existed, the continued arrival and departure of neutral merchant vessels in New York still allowed its dealers their stock in trade, and resulted in continued Customs contributions to the American Treasury. Furthermore, by November 1813, the Royal Navy's slowly increasing resources on the American north-eastern seaboard probably meant that this trade could be curtailed.

Warren's proclamation on 16 November 1813, legally extended the commercial blockade everywhere south of Narragansett Bay, importantly noting that "the Ministers of Neutral Powers" had "been duly notified", and "that all the Measures authorized by the Law of Nations would be adopted and exercised with Respect to all Vessels which may attempt to violate the said Blockade." Equally essential legally, was his declaration that he had "stationed on the Sea Coasts, Bays, Rivers and Harbours of the said several States, a Naval Force adequate and sufficient to enforce and maintain the Blockade thereof, in the most strict and vigorous Manner." (220) Warren's letter to Croker of 20 November enclosed a copy of the proclamation detailing the additional blockade, which included Long Island Sound and "the line of Coast from the entrance by the Sound into New York to the Southern Ports & River Mississippi," and which would seek to end neutral trade with New York. (221)

Ostensibly, the extension was due to the Americans “establishing at the Port of New-London a Naval Station to cover the Trade to and from the Port of New York.” and having “through the Medium of Inland Carriage established a Commercial Intercourse between the said Blockaded Ports”, weakening “to a certain degree” the existing blockade.(222) Warren’s proclamation however sought to legitimise what he had already been doing, both in Long Island Sound, and between Charleston and St Mary’s, Georgia, and off the Mississippi estuaries since 1 September. By December, Americans in Baltimore and beyond could read an announcement of Warren’s extended blockade in Niles’ *Weekly Register*, and would soon be able to measure its adverse economic effects.(223)

When extended on 16 November 1813, the commercial blockade of New York was to include all the “ports and places” on Long Island itself, especially on its northern and eastern coasts. An American writer later conceded however, that, “the inhabitants were not molested in peaceful pursuits”.(224) On 2 December 1813, Captain Oliver of the *Valiant*, the Senior Officer in Long Island Sound, wrote to the Spanish consul in New York that, “after 6 December, no vessel whatever will be permitted to sail from any port in Long Island Sound”, and asked him to “communicate this intelligence to the neutral consuls in your district.”(225)

Towards the end of 1813, perhaps not surprisingly after 15 months of effort sometimes under difficult conditions, Warren’s health and temper began to fail. His letter of 26 October had been written with “the assistance of his confidential friend owing to a cold in my eyes”, and had contained the sort of pessimistic “reflections” later to be expressed more strongly. In

early November 1813, Warren's letter to Melville again referred to the "gale of wind & fog which so frequently occurs on this coast". He went on to "Earnestly request that some Reinforcement of Ships be sent to preserve the Blockades", adding with a touch of asperity "as well as to keep the Gentlemen of Jamaica in good humour."(226) On 30 November, he complained in another letter to Melville that he found it increasingly difficult to maintain and relieve blockades, guard the West Indies, and meet the constant demand for convoy escorts. Apparently anxious to continue the commercial blockade he concluded that, "I shall if possible be in Bermuda in about three weeks & send Rear Admiral Wimburne to attend to the Duty off New York & the Albermarle".(227)

By 30 December 1813, Warren had reached a low point. He was obliged to write to Croker that "Several large Clipper Schooners of from two to three hundred Tons, strongly manned and armed have run thro' the Blockade in the Chesapeak, in spite of every endeavour and the most vigilant attention of our Ships to prevent their getting out, nor can anything stop these Vessels escaping to Sea in dark Nights & Strong Winds". He also referred to Capt. Barrie's enclosed report which described "an instance of Several of these Schooners passing out in a Squadron, & outsailing every Ship in Chace".(228)

"I am sorry to say" wrote Warren in a less guarded letter to Melville, "that the American Small Vessels, notwithstanding the Vigilance of the Blockading Squadron; from the severity of the weather and in the Dark Snowy nights Do get out, & it is almost impossible to prevent it". Furthermore, "The Assembly at Jamaica are caballing & demonstrating



about Ships; I have sent all in my power.”(229) The incessant lobbying of the influential West Indies merchants had again touched a nerve.

He added, “I really am left so base to keep in check the Enemies Cruisers & new Ships which must be soon expected out, and that I am in no serviceable State but trust you will soon reinforce this Squadron with some of the new large Frigates: the *Endymion* is an Excellent ship & also the *Goliath & Majestic*.” Warren then wrote resignedly that earlier reinforcements had never been enough.(230) In fact, in December 1813, Warren appears to have had 38 warships in Jamaica and the Leeward Islands, and in Halifax, Newfoundland and Bermuda combined, “a dozen ships of the line & 56 cruisers”, apparently a total of 106 ships, although not including all the smaller vessels in his United Command.(231)

With this force, by the beginning of December 1813, the Royal Navy had blockaded, captured or caused to be destroyed, a total of fifteen named American naval vessels, ten of which were major ships of more than twenty guns.(232) Warren’s health had however suffered in ways unlikely to improve either his temper or optimism. His letter to Melville of 30 December complained that “Cruising on the Edge of Nantucket Shoal & off Rhode Island: the cold has occasioned a Rheumatic Illness from which I am but just recovering”.(233)

As long before as 26 February 1813, as Mahan notes, Warren had himself suggested to the Admiralty that his United Command should be re-divided, and that the Jamaica and Leeward Island stations should be given local autonomy, keeping his right to direct all North American and Caribbean stations only as exceptional circumstances demanded. However,

on 30 March 1813, the Admiralty had disagreed; the war required his unified command to remain unaltered. (234) Now however, the West Indies station was to feature once more in correspondence with London, in a reversal of the Admiralty Board's decision.

Warren had almost certainly not yet received, while writing to Melville on 30 December, either an Admiralty letter of 4 November, or one from Melville dated 24 November, notifying him of an essentially unjust Admiralty decision. The injustice lies not so much in the decision to re-separate the unified commands, but in the reasons given for it. Melville wrote, "You will receive by the present opportunity, the Official intimation of the measure we have been compelled to adopt of again placing the Leeward Island and Jamaica stations on their former footing of chief commands, the former under Rear Admiral Durham who succeeds Sir F[rancis] Laforey & the latter under Rear Admiral Brown." (235) However, Melville's letter continues, "This arrangement became unavoidable (though much against my inclination) by the repeated and well founded complaints from Jamaica of the almost total want of protection on that station." (236)

Only on 30 December had Warren once more attempted to draw the Admiralty's attention to this precise problem. He had again asked for a force more appropriate to the length of the American eastern seaboard, and for the three roles his force was expected to perform on it, as well as the British American coasts and the Caribbean. He had specifically requested Croker,

to acquaint my Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty that having sent the *Barrossa* to Jamaica to carry home specie, and every other Ship that could be

spared without raising the Blockaded ports of America, I lament to find that both the Leeward Islands and Jamaica are very deficient of a Force adequate to their protection, or to perform the various extensive Convoy Service required to be done in those places - . (237)

Warren was as aware as any naval officer of the Royal Navy's limited means in relation to its world-wide commitments, therefore to be held responsible for these particular consequences of the shortage, and the Admiralty's apparent failure to comprehend his requirements in dismissing his closely reasoned and often repeated requests for reinforcements, seems harsh.

Melville moreover continued,

This evil was also liable to be increased by the order which Admiral Brown had received from you to send away to join your flag any Vessel whose commanders might happen to die, in order that the vacancy might be filled up after such situation instead of an acting Captain being put in immediately. Under all those circumstances it became necessary to attach a certain number of Ships to each Admiral [and] to make him responsible for their being properly disposed of, according to the Wants of his station. (238)

Warren had presumably made these promotions from Bermuda in order to retain control, without preferment being decided by Admirals subject to local lobbying. The 'wants' of the West Indies stations appear to have been given preference, without proper recognition of all of Warren's other responsibilities, which the Admiralty, if not the local administration and sugar plantation owners, should have been in a position to appreciate.

Furthermore, although now less critically short of specie, the British government was still anxious to safeguard shipments of money from the Caribbean; it would therefore be expedient to attend to the views of its providers. Melville was careful to continue,

As the sole reason for the appointment of an Officer senior to Vice Admirals Stirling & Sawyer was the Union of the three commands, I do not think it fair either to you or to the latter officers to expect or direct that with your work in the Service you could continue merely as the successor of Admiral Sawyer on the Halifax Station. No person has yet been selected for that command, which if the latter had remained there would actually have reverted to him: but it will probably be either Sir Alexr. Cochrane or Sir Richard Keats. (239)

Being too senior to command any one part of a re-divided command, Warren would have to be recalled, probably to be replaced by the newly promoted Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, with whom he had had his differences some years before. In his reply, dated 3 February 1814, Warren professed himself “extremely surprised in being recalled at this moment” having “zealously and faithfully served my Sovereign and Country, under so many Disadvantages”.(240) He was also surprised at the decision, “having undertaken the Command in the Situation in which I was placed at the Time”, an apparent reference to his additional diplomatic responsibilities at the outset. Disappointingly however, Warren resolves to “forbear saying any further upon the Subject untill my arrival in Great Britain.”(241)

Warren had also received on 28 January Croker's letter of 4 November 1813, officially notifying him of his replacement on the re-separation of the North American and West Indies stations, and the necessary reallocation of vessels. Warren should "return in *San Domingo* or other convenient vessel needing urgent return, leaving at Halifax 10 line of Battle Ships or razees, 20 frigates, 25 twenty-gun ships or Sloops, and all smaller vessels on station."(242)

Moreover, while the Admiralty's letter to Warren was being delivered, his naval critics currently in Britain were quick to capitalise. Captain David Milne of HMS *Bulwark*, then in Portsmouth, gossiped on 2 January 1814 that, "Sir John Warren is coming home. I believe he has not at all given satisfaction; but the Prince is his friend."(243) Warren had however, done little to help his current reputation. During Cockburn's attack on Havre de Grace, Maryland, in early May 1813, John Rodgers' home there had been partly burned in his absence, and valuable possessions looted. Part of a British effort to bring the war home to the Americans, not themselves blameless in Canada, it nevertheless gave detractors like Milne the opportunity to add, "Commodore Rodgers' house has been plundered; his pianoforte is in Sir John's house at Bermuda, and he was riding in his, the Commodore's, carriage in Halifax. What do you think of a British Admiral and Commander in Chief? This is not the way to conquer America." In addition to the old accusations of indecisiveness, Warren had renewed his reputation for acquisitiveness, perhaps even adding one for impropriety.(244)

Vice-Admiral Cochrane's orders to succeed Warren were dated 25 January 1814, and he arrived at Bermuda in HMS *Tonnant* on 6 March. Warren delayed the actual handover of command until 1 April, and finally sailed for England on 8 April, never afterwards to hold an active naval command, or to receive much public recognition.

By November 1813, the whole American coast except New England had been, as far as his resources permitted, under both commercial and naval blockade. The British government had not apparently ordered Warren to abandon the exemption of largely Federalist New England in the hope of separating it from the more strongly Republican remainder of the United States. Until Warren's recall, the ports of New England had continued to supply British needs in Canada and the West Indies, as the government had intended.

In the twenty months since Warren's appointment, up to 1 April, both American international and internal trade had been significantly reduced. According to Warren's own pencilled calculations, his squadrons had accounted for 971 prizes, 300 of which had been "burnt or sunk". He records 210 "prizes sent into Halifax", 263 into Bermuda, 138 to the Leeward Islands, and 60 to Jamaica, and to them added "Burnt or Sunk in the Chesapeake, Long Island Sound, Delaware, Boston Bay – Large Vessels & Small Craft – 300 Sail", making his total of 971.(245)

Warren however seems to have gained little contemporary credit, either for his diplomatic efforts with the Americans on the British government's behalf, or for his naval and commercial blockades. Warren's obituary in the *Annual Register* for 1822 makes no reference to his services

between 1812-14.(246) The entry for Cochrane in a series of naval biographies, published almost immediately after Warren's death, gives Cochrane sole credit for having "not only put a stop to the trade of that country but kept the whole line of sea coast in a continual state of alarm", with no mention of Warren's initial contribution to either.(247) A more objective evaluation of Warren's efforts is probably best attempted after a review of Cochrane's time in command.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Implementation 2: The United States Blockaded 1814-15.**

#### **The North America Command of Sir Alexander Cochrane.**

“Admiral Warren also told Levitt Harris...that he was sorry to say that the instructions given to his successor on the American station were very different from those under which he had acted and that he apprehended that a very serious injury would be afflicted on America”  
Gallatin to Monroe, 13 June 1814.(1)

Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane wrote a formal acceptance of command from the *Asia* at Bermuda on 1 April 1814.(2) Much was expected of Warren’s successor, although some of his earlier senior officers had found him difficult. Ten years earlier Lord Keith had called him “a crackheaded, unsafe man...one with others who endeavoured to stir up dissensions in the fleet”.(3) Conversely, Robert Dundas, Lord Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty, was a fellow Scot, and since their two families had been friends for generations, Cochrane was not without ‘interest’.(4)

His record was nevertheless impressive. He was known to have commanded successfully the now re-separated Leeward Island station in 1805, and to have fought well under Duckworth at the Battle of San Domingo in February 1806. He had led the capture of the French island of Martinique in 1809, and of Guadeloupe in 1810, of which he had since been Governor.(5) He had been promoted to Vice-Admiral of the Red on 4 November 1813, the very day on which Croker had written to Warren, to notify him of his recall. Not yet 56 years old, Cochrane was expected to remain energetic. He was also reputed to feel a more than professional antagonism towards Americans.



His elder brother had been killed by the rebellious Colonists more than thirty years before, and this probably coloured his views.(6)

As his newly-printed letter-heads showed, his responsibilities covered a vast geographical area. He commanded “Ships and Vessels employed & to be employed in the River St Lawrence, and along the Coast of Nova Scotia, the Islands of Anticosti, Madelaine, St John & Cape Breton, the Bay of Fundy”, and the entire North American eastern seaboard, as far as “at and about Bermuda or Somer’s Island, the Bahama Islands, & the Gulph of Mexico to the Tropic of Cancer &c, &c”.(7) Containing an energetic enemy over such a wide variety of theatres, with limited resources, was part of a great range of responsibilities.

Throughout April, Cochrane was much concerned with victualling since, “the Crews of His Majesty’s Ships in this Port have not had a Day’s fresh Provisions since my arrival here”.(8) Beyond this implied criticism of his predecessor’s arrangements however, Cochrane was turning his mind to more important matters. As yet unknown to Cochrane, Napoleon’s abdication on 11 April 1814, had reduced the need for a British blockade of France. This, however, was not to mean an immediate increase in either ships or manpower at Cochrane’s disposal. Although the *Tonnant*, intended as Cochrane’s flagship, was delayed, the *Superb*, *Bulwark* and *Saturn* had left Portsmouth for Bermuda with a small convoy in January 1814. The *Saturn* was “a cut-down 74, of course a match for any American frigate.”(9)

Morale on the North America station seems to have been varied. Captain Milne of *Bulwark* was depressed by reports of the imminent launch of heavily armed American warships, including a 74, and felt it “a disgrace to

the British nation to have such ships as we have. There is none of our new two-decked ships that can carry her lower deck guns out if there is the least wind, and hardly one of them that does not need a thorough repair in less than two years after she is launched.” American ships, he felt, were better built than either British or French, and would “give both nations a lesson.”(10) Milne also saw manning as a problem; “we are not near as we ought to be either in number or quality of the men; and as for the marines they hardly deserve the name of men.” With other priorities met, those marines allocated to ships were “bad enough...this ship is really not manned as she ought to be; yet there are few in the service better.” Such pessimism was either not universal, or remained unexpressed. Milne was “ordered to sail in a few days to cruize in Boston Bay”.(11)

Rear-Admiral Cockburn had been retained as second-in-command on the North America station, and the Admiralty left him conducting operations in Chesapeake Bay where the blockades had continued uninterrupted even throughout the winter months. Captain Robert Barrie’s letters home from the *Dragon* in Chesapeake Bay testify to the Royal Navy’s endurance in adverse weather, its unrelenting persistence with the blockades, and the professional aggression of its onshore raids. Barrie had written in February 1814 that, despite being “so severely cold”, his crews had “destroyed and taken upwards of eighty-nine of the Enemies Vessels, besides frequently annoying them on shore”.(12) In March he wrote, “we have a squadron of Frigates & there is another squadron cruising within the Capes so that the Chesapeak is completely blockaded...we have turned back at least fifty vessels so the trade within the Chessapeak is done up while we remain here”.(13)

The British naval blockade of the Chesapeake was so remorseless during March that its efficiency had been admitted by the American Commodore Barry to Secretary of the Navy Jones. “[A]ny attempt”, by the American ship sloop *Erie* trapped at Annapolis, “to get out would be imprudent, the season is past and the enemy concentrated near the entrance of the Bay in such a manner as to defeat all prospects of escaping”.(14)

Routine for the blockading squadrons continued. Returns began to be made at Bermuda of blockading progress made under Cochrane’s command. One return detailed 25 vessels “captured, recaptured, detained or destroyed” in a nine week period between 1 April to 22 May 1814, totalling no less than 1,778 tons.(15) Less routine for a force of 136 seamen and marines from the squadron blockading New London, was a raid up the Connecticut River on Pautopang Point, on the night of 7/8 April. They “destroyed all the vessels afloat or on the stocks”, including 3 large privateers and 24 other vessels, totalling over 5,000 tons, and worth \$140,000.(16) That clandestine American support for the blockading squadrons continued, despite this sort of exercise of British sea power, is shown by Cochrane’s reports to Croker of his having authorised British vessels to obtain cattle and vegetables for cash, more successfully than as originally suggested, by offering Americans British bills.  
(17)

Warren had earlier decided to facilitate British blockading and raiding operations in Chesapeake Bay by the occupation of Tangier Island. As shown on Map 2, it was almost centrally placed, and only intermittently inhabited. Warren had been recalled before putting the plan into practice, but in early April 1814, it was implemented by Cockburn. The island would serve

as a collecting point for British prizes and captured goods, and although relatively infertile, “Excellent water” was “to be obtained in any quantity”. Moreover, boats could “Land with perfect facility at all Times and in all Weather”, while Tangier Bay offered a convenient and safe anchorage for larger ships. A redoubt and guard-houses were built with timber and roof shingles from a captured American schooner.(18) On 2 April 1814, Cochrane had issued a proclamation encouraging those wishing to “withdraw from the United States”, specifically runaway slaves, to become “Free Settlers in British Colonies”, or to join the British forces. Many joined the black Colonial Marines, later to use Tangier Island as their training base.(19)

It was from Tangier Bay that Cockburn assured Cochrane that he would “carry on the requisite offensive attacks at different and distant places across the Bay, by which in spite of every Effort of the Enemy, who cannot possibly guard every point, we manage at times to surprize his Vessels where he deems them to be most secure”. He strove to “Keep him continually on the Fret, much harass his Militia and Oblige them to always under Alarms”. He aimed to be “a most serious Inconvenience and Annoyance to the Country in general”. He also informed Cochrane of intelligence that, “the *United States*, *Macedonian* and *Hornet* are secured as high as possible above New London and dismantled”, with their crews redistributed. He would convoy recent prizes to Bermuda, while continuing to “Service the Chesapeake Blockade” with “Two Frigates – a Line of Battle ship &c, all to be used “stretching across in a Line” in Lynnhaven Bay, although he could “offer full and useful service to twice the number”.(20)

Meanwhile in Washington, on 30 March the United States government had abandoned its final attempt to coerce Britain by the use of economic sanctions as Madison recognised the failure of the widely evaded American export embargo. Lacking the Senate's support for the idea, Madison had imposed his embargo by executive decree on 29 July 1813.(21) Reluctantly ratified by Congress only on 17 December 1813, it was suspended on 31 March, and finally repealed on 14 April 1814.(22) In recommending this course of action, President Madison had called on the House Foreign Relations Committee to forecast such a repeal's financial consequences, and a copy of their report, dated 4 April 1814, was soon in Cochrane's hands. Cochrane claimed to be "in possession of private information" of the Embargo's repeal, and "from the same Channel received a Copy of the report of the Secret Committee".(23) The most far-reaching decisions implementing the British commercial blockade of the United States continued to be intelligence led.

Consequently, Cochrane was concerned by the report's predictions of increased neutral imports into the ports of New England, and the resultant augmented customs revenue financing new American warship building. He was disturbed at "obtaining a knowledge of the Enemy having received his Supplies for the equipment of his Navy...by Neutral Trade carried on with the Northern States".(24) He was similarly concerned that "the executive Government having in great measure failed in obtaining supplies for carrying on the War" was now "principally depending on Revenues collected on Cargoes of Neutrals trading with the Eastern Ports".(25)

Cochrane therefore informed Croker that he “judged it of national importance to extend the Blockade to all the other Ports to the Eastward of Long Island not hitherto under blockade, which I shall take care to enforce *de facto* by placing a sufficient number of Ships before these Ports.”(26) In anticipation of Cochrane’s arrival, Warren had prepared in March a “Schedule of Orders in Council, Circular Orders, Letters etc” to inform him of the complex situation existing as command was transferred on 1 April.(27) Amongst these documents, Cochrane had almost undoubtedly seen Croker’s ‘Secret’ letter to Warren of 28 April 1813, giving him Admiralty authority for ‘*de facto*’ blockades, those not specifically announced in the *London Gazette*, or by local British proclamations, and was presumably confident of Admiralty approval for blockade without the legal niceties.(28)

Nevertheless, despite the Admiralty’s willingness to condone undeclared blockades, as soon as 25 April 1814, Cochrane issued a local proclamation which further extended the British naval and commercial blockades to the whole American coast “from Black Point”, eight miles west of New London, “to the Northern and Eastern boundaries of the United States” with British New Brunswick. (29) The British blockades now included neutral trade into New England.

Also, on this occasion, Earl Bathurst’s notification to the “ministers of friendly powers” of the proclamation of 25 April, by “the commander in chief of His Majesty’s naval forces off the coasts of the United States of North America”, appeared in the *London Gazette* of Tuesday 31 May. It followed the usual formula of “declaring all the ports, harbours, bays, creeks, rivers, inlets, outlets, islands, and sea-coasts of the said United States... to be

in a state of strict and rigorous blockade”. European neutrals should be aware that “All the measures authorised by the Law of Nations will be adopted and executed with respect to all vessels attempting to violate the said blockade”.(30) This time, it was more likely to be true, since, as the *Naval Chronicle* noted, “A late *Gazette* contained an Order in Council releasing from the restrictions of blockade, all such ports and places in France as now are, or may be, placed in the military occupation or under the protection of His Majesty.”(31)

In Europe, Paris had fallen to the Allies on 30 March, and Napoleon’s war had also, for the time being, come to an end with his first abdication on 11 April. With a welcome interruption to the war in Europe, Britain could divert ships and men to the American war. On 30 April, the Admiralty recorded its intention of withdrawing ships from Europe although the “unjust and unprovoked aggression of the American Government” did not “permit them to reduce the Fleet at once to a Peace establishment.” For the Board, the vital question remained the “Maintenance of Maritime Rights.”(32) For Madison, any remaining hope of French diplomatic or financial help, was now gone.

Publicity for the extended blockade was also widespread in Britain, and the *Naval Chronicle*’s reprinting of the Foreign Office’s announcement, under ‘State Papers’, included the confident assertion that, “All the measures authorised by the Law of Nations will be adopted & executed with respect to all vessels attempting to violate the said blockade.”(33) To comply with what the British government maintained were the requirements of international law, the force deployed for such a blockade was carefully described as

“adequate”.(34) While seeking to end American trade with neutrals, as well as both their coastal and ocean-going trade, this force should also prevent American warships from getting to sea, or from making any attempt to lift the commercial blockade.

**“All America Blockaded”: Lt. Napier in HMS *Nymph*, 22 May 1814.(34)**

The British government’s notification of the extension to neutrals, completed the British naval and commercial blockades of the entire Atlantic coast of the United States, from Maine’s border with the British province of New Brunswick, to Georgia’s frontier with Spain’s East Florida at the St Mary’s River, and to West Florida and the Mississippi estuaries. This now included Newport, Boston “and the Eastern Ports”, and so finally interdicted all American seaborne trade, including that with neutrals. New England had prospered from neutral trade during its exemption from British commercial blockade, but no longer. This would at last affect American economic isolation, with profound fiscal, financial and political consequences. For the American war effort, this was the beginning of the end.

Cochrane promptly ensured that the extended blockade was to be strictly enforced. On 26 May, Cochrane gave an unambiguous answer to a query from Cockburn. “With respect to the Ship *Emilie* – as the whole of the Ports of the United States are now declared in a state of blockade you will be pleased to withdraw the permission you have given for her proceeding from Newport with a Cargo: she can only be allowed to sail in Ballast.”(36)

The number and quality of vessels eventually available to perform the naval and commercial blockades of the North American eastern seaboard



and the Gulf of Mexico is revealed in a table enclosed in the same letter to Cockburn. Two Line of Battle Ships, *Bulwark* and *Ramillies*, with four frigates, eleven sloops and a schooner were to blockade out of Halifax, to include Boston Bay. Two frigates patrolled Nantucket Shoals from the south-east. Two 74's were stationed off New London and Rhode Island, together with one frigate and two sloops. Two frigates, the *Nieman* and *Narcissus* were responsible for the Delaware. The Chesapeake, under Cockburn, was allocated two 74's, two frigates, a sloop and a schooner. The razees *Majestic* and three sloops patrolled between Cape Hatteras and St Mary's River, while just one frigate, two sloops and two schooners covered the Gulf of Mexico to the Tropic of Cancer. Altogether, the list includes 6 Line of Battle Ships, 2 razees, 13 frigates, 19 sloops, 4 schooners and a gun-brig. A total of 45 vessels are named, far fewer than the number of familiar names appearing on blockade service would seem to suggest, clearly explained by the postscript; "The same force or as near as possible will be kept on those Stations altho' the Ships will be occasionally changed", by both wear and tear and convoy duty.(37)

On 31 May, the Board of Admiralty drew conclusions on the feasibility of maintaining a year round blockade of the whole American eastern seaboard. It had consulted Warren, just returned to Britain, Rear Admiral Sir John Beresford, and Captain Philip Broke, "late of the *Shannon*". They advised that it was not possible to maintain "a strict blockade north of Cape Cod." While for eight months of the year blockade was "possible to the extent as to render all vessels attempting to sail out as in extreme risk of capture", during the winter months, only between a third and a half of such

ships would be taken.(38) On 5 July, Cochrane ordered Captain William Percy of the *Hermes* to take command of the small British squadron in the Gulf of Mexico and maintain a blockade of the Mississippi estuaries, therefore, for the whole American coast, from Maine to Louisiana, a long summer and autumn of both commercial and naval blockade was considered practicable by those who had had first hand experience.(39)

Consequently, Cochrane's proclamation meant that the New England coast, so far almost untouched, began to experience both blockade and raids. By July, Niles' *Weekly Register* reported that now "The eastern coast of the United States is much vexed by the enemy" who "seem determined to enter the little outports and villages, and burn everything that floats."(40)

Madison's last Embargo had included a ban on American coastal traffic, and its eventual repeal on 14 April might have led to a revival of such trade by small vessels but for the almost relentless application of the British commercial blockade after 25 April, except where conducted to mutual advantage. Some trade continued between Americans seeking outlets for food and information, both with British offshore squadrons, and with British forces in Canada, but at sea, the strangulation of the American economy and tax base continued. Generally untroubled by the prospect of American naval intervention, the British blockading squadrons took what appeared to be available. For the Americans, escape from harbour and evasion of British blockade was proving easier in smaller vessels. As the larger ships and brigs became scarcer, the faster and handier schooners and sloops began to replace them as prizes.(41)

Such smaller prizes feature in the journal of Lieutenant Henry Napier who arrived in the frigate *Nymphe*, in company with the *Ramillies*, off Boston Bay on 6 May 1814, for three months of blockade duty. Their blockade was to be hampered even in May by “heavy rain and fogs, thunder and lightning”, in July by a dangerous three day gale, and in August by the start of the hurricane season.(42) This blockade was usually conducted with propriety, sometimes even generosity, although occasionally with impropriety and harshness. On 25 May *Nymphe* captured “four sloops and a schooner” but “took cargoes out and restored the vessels”.(43) Whilst loss of the cargoes, often by now uneconomic to insure, would have damaged incomes and the local, and cumulatively national, economies, restoration of the vessels might have retained some goodwill amongst Americans.

This might have been seen as necessary since *Nymphe* intended to “oblige the Yankees to supply us with stock and vegetables at the market price. This is very reasonable; we leave all fishermen unmolested.”(44) Although this last assertion proved unfounded, *Nymphe* was brought “green peas and fruit, with stock of all kinds, books and newspapers wet from the press, by our friends here”.(45) Despite helping to prevent the scurvy suffered by both British and American seamen, this trade prompted Napier to make accusations of American “venality”.(46)

On 5 June, *Nymphe* was “laying in wait for coasters” off Halibut Point in Ipswich Bay, and “took an empty sloop of 100 tons”, which was released, and the schooner *Maria*, laden with potatoes, later “distributed between the two ship’s companies”. More importantly, they took the American schooner *Welcome Return* “a good prize worth \$4,000”,

prosaically, “loaded with notions” – vegetables.(47) High values of this sort led to the unofficial transactions practised by both sides which discredited the operation of maritime commercial blockade. Captured merchant vessels were occasionally ransomed to evade the often-lengthy process of condemning prizes, and the legal fees involved. Following cash payments to captors, journeys were resumed, cargoes delivered, and the vessels themselves remained available for continued use. The real possibility of merchants and shippers having to add ransom payments to the costs of a voyage might discourage some American maritime trade, usefully reducing tax revenues and shipper’s preparedness to lend to the government, increasing British pressure on the American economy, but the ransoming of prizes was illegal. The practice had become sufficiently widespread for both British and American governments to forbid it. Nonetheless, between May and July 1814, Lieutenant Napier recorded the ransoming of at least ten American vessels, presumably unreported.(48) Napier’s conscience was occasionally troubled. *Nymphe*’s taking \$200 from a Cape Cod fisherman, demonstrably unable to afford it, prompted Napier to write, “This is an ungenerous war against the poor, & unworthy of Englishmen. I am ashamed of Captain Epworth’s conduct.”(49)

Nevertheless, on 6 June, the *Maria*, now apparently *Nymphe*’s tender, and the ships’ boats, took two sloops laden with timber, which, “having supplied the ships”, were burned. They also “set fire to a schooner of 100 tons with wood, sails anchors &c.” The next day they “burned two fine sloops with wood”, to which a now unrepentant Napier added, “much better to have

ransomed them”. On 9 June a “flag of truce came out” to negotiate for the *Welcome Return*, later ransomed for \$3,500, shared with *Junon*.(50)

The alternative threat of destruction was very real. On 11 June Napier wrote, “the boats returned after having been amazingly successful in capturing and destroying about 800 tons of shipping...Destroyed all the vessels in Scituate Harbour but one.”(51) Men as well as vessels were ransomed by the blockading squadrons. That same day, the *Nymphe* ran “the *Concord* loaded with iron, on shore and detained the skipper as a hostage for the ransom of \$1000.”(52) The virtual British exclusion of neutral shipping from the harbours of New England continued. On 12 June, Napier recorded that *Nymphe*, “Weighed and chased a Swede, whom we warned off the coast”.(53)

By late July 1814, as shown in Appendix A Table 4, Cochrane had a total 80 vessels on his North American Station, comprised of 9 seventy-fours, 4 razees, and 24 frigates of either forty, thirty-eight or thirty-six guns. Particularly useful for reaching into estuaries and harbours were 37 smaller craft including two fast schooners, three bomb-vessels, and a rocket vessel. While 4 seventy-fours, 3 thirty-eight gun frigates and 7 smaller vessels remained “with the flag”, two 74’s, two frigates and five smaller craft were allocated to Chesapeake Bay. Rear-Admiral Griffith’s northern division of *Bulwark* and *Spencer*, both seventy-fours, 2 razees, 5 frigates and 16 vessels of less than twenty guns blockaded the area from Halifax to Nantucket. Meanwhile, the *Superb*, 74, a fifty-gun razeed, 6 frigates and 4 smaller vessels, closed the sealanes between Nantucket and the Delaware.(54)

The British offshore patrols imposing the naval and commercial blockades had long isolated islands like Nantucket, 35 miles from the Massachusetts mainland. Nantucket was particularly unfortunate since it was passed both by Griffith and Captain Sir Edward Troubridge, specifically ordered to patrol south of the island.(55) Few American vessels around Nantucket escaped the Royal Navy's attentions, its deep-sea whaling fleet of forty-six vessels in 1812 had been halved by 1814. Those inhabitants not engaged in distant whaling had long been dependent on local offshore fishing and imported food and fuel from the mainland. Despite having survived one wartime winter, by 21 July 1814, the largely Republican citizens were ready to approach Cochrane.(56)

On 28 July 1814, Cochrane wrote to Commodore Henry Hotham "I send you herewith Copies of Petitions received by Capt Barrie of His Majesty's Ship the *Dragon* from Selectmen of the Island Nantucket representing the Inhabitants of that Island to be in a state of Starvation".(57) Cochrane sought to drive a hard bargain writing,

The request they make to be permitted to carry on their Fishery cannot be complied with, but if they actually are in the distressed state they represent, permission may be granted them to import from the Continent supplies of Food provided they will declare themselves Neutral and deliver up all such Artillery, Guns & Ammunition as may be on the Island and submit to His Majesty's Ships getting from them whatever refreshments the Islands will afford...cause inquiry to be made into the truth of the enclosed statements and act as you deem circumstances to require. (58)

An enclosed petition described Nantucket as “in a distress[ed] situation for Provisions and Fuel”, asking that the “sloop Earl Jacob Barney” be allowed “to pass...to bring Corn and Bread stuff for the relief of this Island...as there is from six to seven thousand Inhabitants which have got the most of their subsistence out of the Seas, by the Whale fisherys (sic) which”, they argued, “precludes us from any concerns of War.”(59) On the islander’s agreement both to stop paying Federal taxes, and to water passing British warships, Cochrane would agree to their resumption of fishing, and trading for food and fuel with the mainland.(60) Accordingly, on 28 August, Hotham off Gardener’s Island in *Superb*, had ordered that an unarmed Nantucket sloop be allowed to cross Buzzard’s Bay, between the Massachusetts mainland and the island, with fuel and without interference.(61) The *Surprise* was to allow Nantucket vessels to pass for as long as no evidence was found of any tax being paid, if it was, permission was to be revoked.(62) Nantucket vessels, trapped by the British blockade of coastal traffic, were to be allowed as neutrals to regain their homeport. Cochrane also undertook to facilitate the release of Nantucket’s prisoners of war, but this arrangement was to be overtaken by eventual peace.(63) Nantucket was not alone in its predicament; other American communities such as that on Block Island agreed to supply British blockading vessels in return for exemption from raids or bombardment.

Cochrane’s application of British commercial blockade seems, as Warren’s had been, more than a merely mechanistic execution of a precisely pre-defined duty, but the thoughtful implementation of an essential part of a thoroughly understood strategy of economic warfare. Therefore, when Sir

John Sherbroke, Governor of Nova Scotia, passed on to Cochrane the requests of the Halifax merchants to be allowed to conduct a licenced trade with blockaded American ports, he denied them. Cochrane's reply to Sherbroke emphasised that the American government had not long repealed its latest embargo on "trade with the enemy" precisely because of its increasing difficulties with tax revenues and loans, and that any trade with American ports would help the American administration rather than the long-term interests of the Halifax merchants.(64)

Throughout the remainder of 1814, the British exerted further pressure on the American economy and administration, in a way more likely to produce political stability and long-term wealth for Nova Scotian merchants than rejected requests for licences to trade with American ports. This began with the British government's order to Sherbroke in June 1814, to occupy the eastern parts of the American border province of Maine, which stood between Nova Scotia and Lower Canada and seemed a potential threat to both. Sherbroke was to occupy "that part of the District of Maine which at present intercepts the communication between Halifax and Quebec".(65) On 11 July, Rear-Admiral Griffith's command of the northern American coastline, including Penobscot Bay, made possible the occupation of Eastport on Moose Island, and by 2 September the seizure of the port of Castine. On 3 September, an almost unopposed British advance up the Penobscot River resulted in the Americans burning their 26-gun corvette *Adams* blockaded at Hampden, and the capture or destruction of American merchantships at Bangor. The later occupation, until the war's end, of the coastal town of Machias, almost 90 miles north-west of Castine, strengthened the Royal



Navy's control of the Bay of Fundy between Nova Scotia and Maine. By 27 September, Griffith was able to report to the Admiralty that all of Maine between Passamaquoddy Bay and the Penobscot River was under British control.(66) It was to remain so for the remainder of the war.

Castine was well placed to trade with both the British provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. This offered those of the population who accepted occupation a chance to prosper when Sir George Prevost, Governor-General of British North America and Governor of Lower Canada, and Griffith, jointly issued a proclamation giving local inhabitants the option of pledging allegiance to the British Crown, or leaving the area.(67) Those taking the oath gained protection and the right to trade with neighbouring British provinces. British manufactured goods and re-exports were imported into Castine and then smuggled into the United States through, amongst other places, Hampden. The lost tax revenue from unpaid customs duties contributed to a major problem for the American administration, which both ambiguous legislation, and half-hearted enforcement, failed to alleviate significantly.(68) Many in Castine therefore embraced a situation, which, in any case, the United States administration lacked the funds, or sufficient unblockaded warships, to alter.

Similarly, Cockburn's increasingly complete command of the Chesapeake was allowing him to make often ineffectually opposed attacks on military and economic targets in the Bay. Cochrane told Bathurst on 14 July that he had, "sent about Nine Hundred Marines to the Chesapeake to act under Admiral Cockburn - who has been Annoying the Americans a good deal of late - with this force making partial Attacks and Shifting from place

to place I trust to be Able to find the enemy full employment for all his troops in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania – without detaching to the Canada Frontier”.(69)

Three days later in a letter to Melville, Cochrane had gone into detail. He pointed out that “Philadelphia can be Approached within fifteen miles by a Ship of 64 Guns – to attack it part of the Army may be Landed at N[ew]castle upon the Delaware – Six miles from which thier Principal Powder and Corn Mills are situated...those of course will be destroyd”.(70)

Beyond the immediate tactical advantage of limiting the number of American troops sent north, the repair or replacement of mills, foundries, factories, stores and warehouses destroyed by Cockburn’s landing parties would be a drain on the American administration’s increasingly strained financial arrangements.

Like Cochrane, Cockburn seems to have sought tacit agreements with local inhabitants that, if not attacked, his forces on land would respect their lives and private property, and that goods supplied to them would be paid for in specie, “at the time, to the uttermost farthing”, in preference to paper assets difficult for Americans to dispose of without their neighbour’s opprobrium, or heavy discounts.(71) Despite some serious lapses, often duly punished, this policy was followed such that the Captain of the Fleet responsible for provisioning established a table of prices to be paid to American civilians “with a view to prevent imposition”.(72)

Cochrane’s letter to Bathurst of 14 July revealed more of his views on Americans, and future British conduct of the war. “I have it much at heart to give them a complete drubbing before Peace is made – when I trust their

Northern limits will be circumscribed and the Command of the Mississippi wrested from them”.(73) His thoughts were to turn again later to New Orleans and the Mississippi, but for the present, taking Washington seemed attractive. “If Troops Arrive soon and the point of Attack is directed towards Baltimore I have every prospect of Success and Washington Will be equally Accessible. They may be either destroyed or laid under Contribution, as the Occasion may require...”.(74)

Three days later Cochrane reminded Melville that all “the principal Towns in America” were “Situated upon navigable Rivers – but none of Them Accessible to a direct attack from Shipping only, although open to a combined one with a land Force.”(75) The successful delivery of sufficient British troops, to either Baltimore or the American capital clearly required Royal Naval command of Chesapeake Bay and its rivers, including the Patuxent River on its eastern side, to avoid any interference with British troop carriers in confined waters, but by this time, fourteen named warships of the United States Navy, listed in Appendix A, Table 2(b), were either blockaded, taken or destroyed, and in no position to intervene.(76) Secretary of the Navy Jones’ report to Madison on American naval forces in the Chesapeake in June 1814 had listed 2 gunboats, 13 barges, a five gun cutter, a schooner and a pilot boat, clearly a potential threat. This situation was to change.(77)

### **The British in Washington.**

The extent of British command in North American waters paid remarkable dividends in August 1814. The containment or elimination of

American fighting vessels in Chesapeake Bay, especially after the self-destruction at Pig Point of Commodore Barney's flotilla of a large sloop and gunboats, gave British land forces unhindered access to the Patuxent river, as shown on Map 2.(78) After a short running battle at Bladensburg, this allowed a successful British attack on Washington on 24 and 25 August. During a deliberately brief military occupation until 26 August, much of Washington was burnt. The proximity of British forces led the Americans to burn Washington Navy Yard with its valuable timber stores and ropewalks. (79) American losses also included two almost completed warships, the heavy frigate *Columbia* and the sloop *Argus*.(80) In Madison's absence, the British Army briefly occupied and burned the White House and other large government buildings, the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress met in Washington's Post and Patent Office, the only adequate venue remaining. Important financial results followed; the British action caused a major run on Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia banks where many deposits were withdrawn, mostly as specie. Especially following the earlier export of \$3.8m of specie to Canada largely used to buy British Government securities, this contributed to the American administration's critical shortage of coin, soon to have far-reaching fiscal, financial and political consequences.(81)

The degree of British control in Chesapeake Bay also gave access to the Potomac river, allowing the port of Alexandria to be attacked on 28 August, and occupied until 2 September. Twenty-one American merchant-ships with cargoes of tobacco, sugar and wine were either captured or destroyed, as well as weapons and "public stores". The British force made an opposed but successful withdrawal down the Potomac river.(82)

### **The British “Essay on Baltimore”. (83)**

After success at Washington and Alexandria, the next logical step was the proposed British attack on Baltimore, the largest port at the head of Chesapeake Bay, which Cochrane believed was “the richest in the Country”.(84) Before the British commercial blockade of the Chesapeake, Baltimore’s exports of grain and flour, and its imported luxuries had made a significant contribution to American overseas and internal trade. These were now heavily curtailed, but the port remained populous, important and accessible. Furthermore, despite the British naval blockade, it still remained a base for persistent American privateers. There had been anti-Federalist riots when news of Madison’s declaration of war first reached Baltimore, and even after damage to livelihoods by blockades, its largely Republican population remained fiercely anti-British. “[T]his Town” Cochrane was convinced, “ought to be laid in Ashes.”(85)

However, precautions against a British attack had begun early in 1813, when Samuel Smith, a Senator and militia major-general, had begun earthworks and the recruitment of volunteers. Around 4,500 British troops landing under Major-General Ross on 12 September were heavily outnumbered by regular American troops and militia, and Ross was killed by an American sniper during a pyrrhic British victory at North Point. The absence of close naval support contributed to a decision to abandon further frontal attack on 13 September. Cochrane’s failure to capture Fort McHenry overnight on 13-14 September, and a barrier of scuttled American ships, meant that even the lightest British warships could not reach Baltimore harbour to fire on the American lines. Since Cochrane also failed to silence

the American guns on Lazaretto Point, and an attempt to attack Baltimore with 1,500 men in barges from the Patapsco River was defeated by fire from the shore, the whole raid was abandoned.

While off Baltimore, Cochrane had written to Cockburn ashore, “It is impossible for the Ships to render you any assistance – the Town is so far retired within the Forts. It is for Colonel Brook to consider under such circumstances whether he has Force sufficient to defeat so large a number as it [is] said the Enemy has collected”.(86) As a result, Brook called a Council of War which concluded that “from the situation I was placd in they advised I should Retire”.(87) Cochrane later wrote to Croker that high tides produced in Chesapeake Bay by a concurrence of a new moon with the equinox had made leaving the Bay “unsafe”, and had led him to decide on a “demonstration upon” Baltimore. Cochrane then asserted that since “the primary object” - the relief of pressure on the British Army in Canada - had “been already fully accomplished... it was mutually agreed we Should withdraw”.(88)

The same day, in a letter to Melville, Cochrane wrote “Your Lordship will see by my Public letter that we have made an Essay on Baltimore, an attempt Contrary to my Opinion, but extremely urged by the General, to which I reluctantly consented, but to preserve Unanimity between the two services; I have not stated my Objections to the measure in My letter to the Admiralty - I now exceedingly regret My deviation from my Original plan”.(89) As late as 3 September, Cochrane had expressed a preference for leaving Chesapeake Bay and sailing northward to refresh troops and ships at Rhode Island and had told Melville that “About the close of October we will

move to the Southward” and “if the reinforcements arrive I propose an attack upon Baltimore”.(90)

Although New York had always conducted more trade, Cochrane had perhaps missed a significant opportunity in economic warfare in failing to occupy or destroy Baltimore. But, tight commercial and naval blockades preventing movement in or out of Baltimore without British agreement would have been effective without giving the Americans the propaganda value of a repulsed attack. However, War Office instructions clearly gave Cochrane the right to select objectives, and his name remains associated with failure at Baltimore.(91) News of British failure at Baltimore had reached both the British negotiators and American Peace Commissioners at Ghent by October. Even then, there was time to give further thought to the British decision to attack New Orleans.

Long before the British attack on Baltimore, Cochrane had written in June to Croker that 3,000 regular troops, the Creek Indians and the local French and Spanish populations “would drive the Americans entirely out of Louisiana and the Floridas”.(92) In July he wrote to Bathurst that “Two Thousand Men would give to Gt.Britain the Command of That Country and New Orleans.”(93) In early September Cochrane still felt able to write “hitherto what I promised has been effected & if Peace makers will only stay their proceedings until Jonathan is brought to the feet of Gt. Britain, future Wars will be prevented.” To that end, and to avenge what Prevost had reported as American barbarities in Canada, Cochrane suggested that, “As the Season advances I propose going to the Carolinas Georgia &ca. and ending at

N Orleans which I have not a doubt of being able to Subdue & thereby hold the Key of the Mississippi.”(94)

On 17 September 1814, the same day that he had written to Croker about the abortive attack on Baltimore, Cochrane received a secret letter from Melville, dated 29 July, sanctioning an attack on New Orleans.(95) Despite the enthusiasm with which Cochrane had written of such an attack on 3 September, his letter to Melville was still at sea, and would be for at least another two weeks, but his earlier letters recommending an attack on New Orleans seem to have agreed with current thinking in London. Melville’s letter giving permission to attack New Orleans therefore long predated London’s receipt of news of the defeat at Baltimore, but could still have been re-considered when it arrived. The net cost of defeat at Baltimore could have been reduced by taking from it useful lessons in evaluating Cochrane’s long held aspirations for an attack on New Orleans.

Cochrane immediately left the Chesapeake for Halifax on 17 September.(96) Cockburn also left on 26 September to refit in Bermuda, leaving Rear-Admiral Malcolm in the Chesapeake until relieved by Barrie, refitting in Halifax, so that the blockades and attacks on the shore should continue uninterrupted.(97) On 1 October, Cochrane ordered Cockburn to attack Cumberland Island off southern Georgia partly to disguise his own preparations for the attack on New Orleans.(98)



## The British Commercial Blockade Continued.

Captain Barrie in the *Dragon* returned to the Chesapeake late in September, and by November could write, “There is no trade going on in the Chesapeak”, with only “meagre pickings” coming from ashore.(99)

Nevertheless, in December 1814, Cockburn ordered Captain John Clavell in the frigate *Orlando* “to use every Effort and Exertion to maintain in the most strict and rigid manner possible the Blockade of the Chesapeake”. He was also “to interrupt and prevent...the Communications by Water which the Enemy by small Vessels occasionally endeavors to renew and keep up between different Towns and Places in the Upper Parts of the said Bay”.(100)

Meanwhile, Rear-Admiral Hotham’s blockading squadron off the River Delaware had reported to him that between 6 August and 9 October 1814, a total of 83 vessels had been “captured, burnt, and destroyed”, in only two months.(101) Significantly, all were American. Such a list the year before would have included neutral vessels, which had evidently been deterred by the Royal Navy’s commercial blockade from attempting further use of American ports. Of these, only two, less than 2.5% of the total, were described as “ships”, both captured by the British frigate *Narcissus*. The remaining 81 were smaller, either sloops, schooners or brigs, while 5 were listed as “schooner boats”. Despite the list’s unambiguous title, five of the vessels appear to have been taken more than once by the blockading squadron, including the sloop *Sally*, apparently captured twice by the British gun-brig *Nimrod* early in the period covered, and later, for a third time by the British frigate *Pomone*. Similarly, the American sloop *Two Friends*, taken by

the *Pomone* twice towards the end of the list, is apparently the same vessel. This strongly suggests, as in Lieutenant Napier's earlier experience aboard *Nymphe*, that, despite being illegal, some prizes were being ransomed and released, to be taken again.

While the rig of prizes had generally changed, to the faster sloops and schooners rather than the American ships taken so frequently the year before, Hotham's nine blockading vessels included such powerful warships as the *Superb*, 74, the razee *Saturn*, 55, the new fir-built 4<sup>th</sup> rate *Forth*, 50, and four frigates, including *Niemen* and *Loire*, 40, and two brig-sloops.(102) One of the smallest, the 18 gunned brig-sloop *Nimrod*, accounted for no fewer than 38 of the 83 prizes named, more than 45%, while the other brig-sloop, *Dispatch* took only one. The *Pomone* took 19, the *Loire* and *Niemen* 7 each, the *Forth*, 6, and *Narcissus* and *Saturn*, 2 each. Even the heavier *Superb* is credited with one prize. The *Niemen*'s capture of the American schooner privateer *Daedalus* on 18 September, and the capture by the boats of *Narcissus* and *Dispatch* of the American revenue schooner *Eagle*, are listed separately.(103)

The Royal Navy's domination of the American coastline was everywhere becoming total, and the economic effects of the commercial blockade, a stranglehold from which neither American population nor administration could realistically expect to escape. In the six months between 12 May to 14 November 1814, 109 vessels "captured, detained or destroyed" were recorded at Bermuda alone. Among these was one ship of 400 tons, but 83 others, more than 76%, were either schooners or sloops.(104) The size of enemy vessels available as prizes was definitely decreasing. New vessels built

to replace those lost to the Royal Navy's commercial blockade, show an evident demand for smaller, handier and perhaps faster vessels. In 1813, 371 American vessels of all types had been built, totalling 32,583 gross tons, an average of 87.4 gross tons. By 1814, 490 vessels, totalling 29,751 gross tons were built across the country, an average of only 60.7 gross tons. Carrying capacity was apparently being sacrificed in an attempt to escape the British commercial blockade.(105)

### **The British Attack on New Orleans**

By November 1814, although with fewer troops than he had expected in July, Cochrane had planned an attack on New Orleans, 100 miles up the Mississippi estuary, and, with a population of 25,000, the largest city west of the Appalachians. Successful occupation of New Orleans by a British force of 6,000 men would deny Louisiana access to the sea, and make a useful bargaining point in peace negotiations. Cochrane's preliminary occupation of Pensacola, a Spanish harbour on the Gulf coast potentially useful in attacking New Orleans, was initially successful, but the American, General Andrew Jackson, with overwhelming numbers, re-occupied it on 7 November, despite risk of an American war with Spain.(106)

Cochrane's gathering of troops and ships in Negril Bay, Jamaica, implied for the Americans an attack either on Mobile or New Orleans, especially since any more northerly British objective than Cumberland Island, off the coast of Georgia, was unlikely in winter.(107) On 17 September however, a British force including the sloops *Hermes* and *Carron* had attacked Fort Bowyer, commanding Mobile Bay, but the *Hermes* had run

aground in range of American guns, and had been burned by her crew to prevent her capture.(108) The British force had withdrawn, focussing attention on New Orleans. The British forces left Jamaica on 26 November, not reaching Ship Island, still 70 miles from New Orleans, until 8 December.(109) American preparations had begun slowly until energetically directed by Andrew Jackson, who had arrived in New Orleans on 2 December.

Having dealt successfully on 14 December with a potentially dangerous flotilla of American gunboats, ideally suited to relatively sheltered waters of Lake Borgne, Cochrane faced a shortage of suitable landing boats, despite having written to Melville as early as 17 July, that “Mobile and New Orleans are equally [accessible] but the necessary Craft are wanting”, his having “only Three Flat Bottomed boats in the Country.”(110) Eventually the British troops were ferried ashore in less suitable boats. The British army commander, Major-General Sir Edward Pakenham, who had not arrived until 25 December, was killed on 8 January 1815, as the Americans defended prepared positions, which Jackson successfully resisted British attempts to outflank.(111) The *Carolina*, 14, an American naval vessel firing from the river, was belatedly destroyed on 27 December, but quickly replaced by the *Louisiana*, better positioned to avoid British gunfire.(112)

By 18 January, it was obvious that further costly frontal attacks were unlikely to succeed, and British forces withdrew, capturing Fort Bowyer off Mobile in their retreat, a new attack on Mobile being forestalled only by news of peace. An Anglo-American Peace treaty had been signed at Ghent on 24 December, although not yet ratified by Congress or President. News of

Cochrane's second failure in attacking an American land target might have encouraged either Congress or President to withhold their ratification but for the United States' by now untenable fiscal and financial position, increasingly obvious since August 1814, and known to the American Peace Commissioners. One of them, had himself been until his effective resignation in March 1813, Secretary of the United States Treasury, and was well aware of its predicament.(113)

With a letter of recall dated 30 December 1814, Cochrane sailed for the Chesapeake on 15 February 1815.(114) Perhaps partly out of loyalty, on 14 March, Warren's former secretary and still prize agent, George Hulbert, commented on the debacle at New Orleans to James Fraser, his 'substitute' at Halifax. "It has made a sad finish of the war", he wrote, "but it has shown the World who [were] dissatisfied with the small achievements of the former C in C how much less his successor has achieved with the most powerful means".(115)

Meanwhile, the Admiralty had ordered that British operations should not stop until definite news of American ratification had been received. Therefore, the Royal Navy's naval and commercial blockades of the United States continued until the Ghent Treaty was passed unanimously by the Senate, signed by President Madison on 16 February 1815, and exchanged with Anthony Baker, the British envoy, the following day.(116) Together, the blockades had brought about decisive commercial, fiscal and financial consequences, and their conclusive political results.

## **Chapter 6.**

### **The Impact of the British Blockades under Admiral Warren:**

**August 1812 - April 1814.**

“For war is quite changed from what it was in the time of our forefathers; when...the matter was decided by courage; but now the whole art of war is in a manner reduced to money;” Charles Davenant *An Essay Upon the Ways and Means of Supplying War*,1695.(1)

Both at the time and since, events seem to have conspired to disguise the impact of the British commercial and naval blockades of the United States, implemented after its declaration of war on Britain in June 1812. Yet in thirty-two months of war, a British naval blockade was to contain most of the American navy such that it was unable to prevent a British maritime commercial blockade. This, in turn, bankrupted a United States government heavily dependent on customs revenue and credit, and led to the abandonment of its original war aims in peace negotiations.

When news of Madison’s declaration of war was finally confirmed in London on 30 July 1812, the British Cabinet’s priority was to use the occasion of Warren’s arrival in North America towards finding a diplomatic solution to this additional problem. It was posed by an American refusal to accept the restraints on neutral trade made necessary by Britain’s need to blockade France, which some Americans had seen as a trading opportunity. The Royal Navy’s efforts to recover apparently British seamen from neutral vessels had exacerbated the problem. Should Warren’s diplomatic efforts fail, naval and commercial blockades of the United States would be added to the worldwide commitments of a hugely expensive and already overstretched Royal Navy, now in the ninth year of its renewed war with Napoleon.

The lack of conclusive naval action against American naval vessels and privateers during the unavoidably long wait for replies to Warren's diplomatic overtures can readily be represented as a lack of British incisiveness.(2) This lack of application is said to be equally evident in the British implementation of economic warfare against the United States. On 23 June, Britain had revoked its Orders in Council interdicting neutral trade with France as far as American vessels were concerned, and still waited for a reaction to what might be seen as a conciliatory gesture.(3) Although by 16 November 1812, Warren had received Monroe's rejection of British armistice proposals, it had not reached London. There, Warren's wait for an American reply was misrepresented as prevarication, perhaps most importantly by Castlereagh's opponent Canning, in the House of Commons. "The arm which should have launched the thunderbolt was occupied in guiding the pen".(4) In a long speech Canning argued that "the best way to carry on any war is the way that will lead soonest to peace; it is by vigour, not by forbearance and hesitation; it is by exertions calculated to make an enemy feel a dread of our power".(5) "It never entered into my mind", he continued "that we should send a fleet to take rest and shelter in our own ports in North America, and that we should attack the American ports with a flag of truce."(6) Delay, he argued, had handicapped American opponents of the war, and reduced the proponents' "notion of the mischiefs which we could inflict upon the coasts and navy of the United States. How they must now laugh at their own apprehensions."(7)

Nevertheless, investigation of the possibilities of a diplomatic settlement was considered worthwhile on economic as well as humanitarian

grounds. Continued trade was thought preferable to expensive warfare. Moreover, aggressive action during negotiations might be counter-productive, and expected to harden American resolve. Furthermore, money spent fighting a war which the British government avowedly sought to avoid, could be seen by its taxpayers and domestic political opponents as money wasted, as well as apparent evidence of hypocrisy. Nonetheless, the delay in Warren's implementation of British naval and commercial blockades, damaged his reputation both then and since.

The range of Warren's diplomatic and naval responsibilities, including convoy protection, and the safeguarding of influential West Indian interests with relatively limited resources, meant that progress in any one direction was to be constrained. Warren's scope for initiative was further limited by his knowledge that failure in any one objective could seriously damage Britain's prospects of eventual success, and his own professional reputation. Among the policies so handicapped was British maritime commercial blockade. In June 1812, potential British blockading forces outside several major American ports were diverted by Sawyer's unsuccessful search for Commodore Rodger's American forces, which the British government had feared would attack valuable British convoys. By early November 1812, the number of American merchantmen reaching their homeports safely, approached peacetime levels.(8)

Lord Bathurst, Secretary of State for War, had also been, until September 1812, President of the Board of Trade. His letter to the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, therefore clearly shows that the British Government was well aware of American vulnerability to war on its economy. At the same



time, letters to Liverpool from British cotton manufacturers, assuring him of their ability to survive American non-export legislation, meant that it could feel free to act on its perception, while the Royal Navy provided it with the means to do so. Attack on the American's trade, tax base and financial position, and thereby the American government's credit, would ultimately erode their ability and political preparedness to continue the war they had themselves declared.(9)

On 31 July 1812, the Privy Council issued a General Embargo on American merchant shipping found anywhere in the British Empire. This was to prove immediately effective, and demonstrates the potential economic consequences of British commercial blockade. The forty-six American vessels quickly seized by the Royal Navy and brought into Halifax, Nova Scotia, before 17 September 1812, represented more than half of the full-rigged ships, and more than a quarter of the brigs detained and brought there, during the entire war.(10) Even the temporary loss of such valuable vessels and cargoes, often made permanent in due course by the Halifax Vice-Admiralty Court, sobered even prosperous American owners, shippers and merchants, as well as their insurers and bankers. This served to reinforce their already considerable opposition to the war they had so long predicted and tried to prevent.(11) This warning to the Republican administration brought little constructive response.

Even before the British General Embargo was implemented in earnest, Thomas Ives, a rich and influential American merchant complained in November 1812 that "the course that our public affairs have taken seems to paralyze all business & if the War with England is to be continued, this part of

the Country must suffer great inconvenience”.(12) By mid-January 1813, as the number of American vessels taken into Halifax as prizes by the Royal Navy grew to 125, the psychological and financial impact of the British strategy increased.(13) Ives now felt that “the value in this Country of most foreign merchandize must in a great measure depend upon the continuance of the War in which we are foolishly engaged”. Funds had become difficult to “remit – the risk of Specie by water being too great”.(14) The pressure of British commercial blockade is clearly felt even in Rhode Island, the smallest of the New England states, so far deliberately excluded from the imminent British commercial blockade of the Delaware and Chesapeake in the hope of separating them from the Union.

As shown earlier, the level of American imports, on which government revenue so heavily depended, was extremely vulnerable to trade restrictions, whether self or enemy imposed. The speed and direction of changes in import levels, as well as the duties on them, will reflect the significance of these restraints of trade, whether American embargo, British commercial blockade, or occasionally both acting together. The American’s reliance on trade with Britain, and fiscal dependence on customs revenues, made import levels of crucial importance to the attainment of Madison’s ambitions while at war with a former major trading partner. Although American consumers had long been prepared to pay duties to obtain imports, and so add to American Treasury funds, they were to be prevented from doing so, such that the American government was forced to borrow in an increasingly disrupted economy, and to attempt belated, and only ever partially successful, fiscal reform.

For much of the war, it is difficult to determine to what extent the marked reduction in the level of American imports was caused by the British commercial blockade, facilitated by the Royal Navy's restraint of an American Navy potentially capable of lifting it, or by the American legislative restrictive system, occasionally concurrent, but widely evaded. However, it will be shown that, unsupplemented by American embargoes for the last ten months of the war, the British commercial blockade and its consequences contributed hugely to the American government's insolvency, and, by making the original American war aims clearly unattainable, hastened a negotiated peace. Falling import levels and therefore customs revenue, forced upon Madison fiscal, financial, economic and political realities which induced him to end the war from a weakened position. In making significant reductions in American imports, successful British commercial blockade would cause the American government at the very least, temporary financial embarrassment, and at worst, a need for peace at almost any price.

Therefore, the availability of reliable American import statistics between 1800 -1820, is crucial in measuring the effectiveness and relative importance of American embargoes and the Royal Navy's commercial blockade of the United States. However, as shown by Appendix B Table 2, total import figures were not recorded in the United States before 1821, incomplete figures being supplemented by later estimates.(15) But, by using the United States import figures for 1800-1815 compiled and adjusted by North in 1960, as given in Appendix B Table 1, the size, pace and direction of the changes are shown, revealing the impact of successive American legislative trade restrictions and the British maritime commercial blockade.

From a record figure of \$144,740,342 in 1807, American imports fell by almost 60% to \$58,101,023 in 1808, measuring the effect of Jefferson's Non-Importation Act of 1806, implemented on 14 December 1807, banning most British imports.(16) This was followed by the Embargo Act of 22 December 1807, prohibiting exports, and American ships, from leaving port, together theoretically curtailing almost all American overseas trade.(17) Both measures were widely evaded. Because of this evasion, and despite the embargo's reportedly serious economic effects, the initial decrease in imports was followed by a recovery to \$61,029,726 in 1809, and to \$89,366,069 by 1810, an increase of 53.8% on the figure for 1808. The extent of evasion resulted in the Congressional Act for Better Enforcement of the Embargo of 9 January 1809, and its replacement on 1 March that year by the Non-Intercourse Act, allowing repeal of the original embargo a fortnight later. Macon's No 2 Bill of 1 May 1810, re-opened trade with Britain and France, but would then withhold it from whichever European belligerent failed to remove its restrictions on neutral American trade. In August 1810, Cadore, Napoleon's Foreign Minister, implied that France intended to end its depredations on American shipping, provided that the United States resisted British trade restrictions.(18) Either from credulity or for convenience, Madison accepted this apparent change of policy at its face value. Accordingly, from 2 February 1811, the Non-Importation Act was applied solely to Britain. American imports of \$57,887,952 in 1811, only about a third less than 1810's, suggest that evasion of the restrictive system remained widespread.(19) It was against this background that Madison and much of Congress saw increased imports and customs revenue in 1812 as vindicating

their hopes of financing war with Britain without the need for fundamental tax reform, leading to fiscal difficulties, financial failure, and eventual bankruptcy.

Customs duties were usually recorded with other duties reflecting the level of imports, such as tonnage and lighthouse dues, but nothing illustrates with greater clarity the impact of even the threat of British maritime commercial blockade on American government income, than the raw data of the United States net customs revenue. This was gross customs duties, less the expenses of collection and “drawbacks”, i.e. the rebate of duty on some re-exports, as shown in Appendix B, Table 4.(20)

Therefore, an increase in American imports, and consequently of the United States’ net customs duty revenue, would seem to imply that Britain’s first attempt at economic warfare in this war had proved an abject failure. Seyburt’s figures for Net Customs Revenue were actually over 20% higher in 1812 than in 1811.(21) Indeed, the perceived threat of British commercial blockade had apparently proved counter productive. However, increased imports were not to last beyond the scramble to bring back to America those imports often already paid for by exports to Britain before the war. In 1812, anticipation of a British commercial blockade had produced consequences which seem to have lulled American fiscal decision makers into a false sense of security. American fear of economic isolation – the psychological impact of British commercial blockade – had had the initial effect of increasing American government revenue from import duties, appearing to justify the position of those in Congress who had argued that no fundamental changes in

American revenue collection were necessary, certainly not in their view before war had been declared.

The potential effectiveness of Britain's limited blockade policy of the first six months of the war had been disguised by a backlog of \$18m worth of British manufactures which their American owners sought to dispatch to the United States. The American declaration of war had found some of the goods already loaded onto American vessels in British ports; other American merchants sought exemption from restrictive legislation to fetch their property from Canada or the West Indies.(22)

The importers had been anxious to avoid the anticipated tightening of the British commercial blockade once war began in earnest. They had been convinced by the advice of Jonathan Russell, the American charges d'affaires in London that, after 1 August, the recent revocation of the British Orders in Council affecting American vessels, would allow them to return fully laden from Britain to the United States. They also knew that Madison's first 90-day embargo on American foreign trade had ended on 3 July. Given Gallatin's prediction, in November 1811, of a \$2m budget deficit for an 1812 at peace, both President and Treasury were understandably keen to collect the normal import duties, despite the merchant's and shipper's view that leniency was appropriate in these unusual circumstances.(23) By November 1812, Madison noted that "a considerable number" of previously stranded vessels had arrived in the United States. Despite Madison's announcement that the matter would be resolved by Congress, the owners, he said, had been "under the erroneous impression that the Non-Importation Act would immediately cease to operate", and resisted compromise.(24)

On 4 November 1812, Madison felt able to tell Congress, somewhat disingenuously, that, “The duties on the late unexpected importation of British manufactures will render the revenue of the ensuing year more productive than could have been anticipated”. While conceding that America was “not without its difficulties”, Madison added that, “the view here presented of our pecuniary resources” was an, “animating consideration”.

(25) This situation was not to last; Madison was living in a fiscal fool’s paradise. Within days, letters were to be written to the American Secretary of the Navy complaining of a British blockade of southern American ports, while in London, letters left Downing Street formalising British blockades of Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware.(26)

The threat of British commercial blockade, even when barely started, and certainly before being fully implemented, had had a measurable effect on the level of American imports, then a sensitive barometer of the United States’ fiscal and financial climate. As shown in Appendix B Table 1, the prospect of British commercial blockade had had the effect of raising total American imports from 1811’s \$57.9m, to 1812’s \$78.8m, an increase of more than 36%. Madison’s use of the then current, uncorrected estimated figures, probably led him to suggest a bigger increase to Congress, one of over 43%.(27) This appears to have induced Congressional, even Presidential, complacency. Madison was apparently encouraged by these figures to believe that increased rates of customs revenue, supported by loans, could produce sufficient funds to support the war, and would continue to do so long enough for the British to concede what Madison now asserted to be America’s major grievance, Britain’s alleged right to stop and search neutral vessels at sea,

followed as necessary by the impressment of apparently renegade British seamen. Those Americans whose incomes had up to this time been maintained, or even increased, by this temporary artificial boost to the United States' imports, may have contributed to the first partially successful loan of \$11m to the American government authorised on 14 March 1812. Later calls for loans were to be less successful, once British maritime blockades became tighter and wider.(28)

Nor can Madison have been unaware that the deceptively encouraging total customs revenue, accrued in 1812 and available for government expenditure during 1813, was in part due to American customs revenue figures having been inflated since 1 July 1812 by the Congressional decision to double all rates of import duty once war had been declared.(29) This had allowed Congress to postpone the necessity of re-introducing internal excise duties and what they called 'direct' taxes. Allowance for the increased rate of customs duties for the second half of 1812, reduces the net customs duties accrued for that year by 25%, from the \$13,331,467, to an adjusted \$9,998,600.(30) Even so, this adjusted figure for 1812 shows an increase in the real level of accrued net customs duty at original rates, of approximately 21.6%. This reflected the increased level of imports from \$57.9m in 1811 to \$78.8m in 1812, and served to hide the fiscal impact of Madison's 90 day Embargo and of the limited British commercial blockade to date. It may even have diverted some attention from the number of unmade commercial sea voyages cancelled under such American legislative restrictions as the Non-Importation Act, as well as the threat of wider and stricter British commercial sanctions. It will later be possible to allow for the



increased rates of import duties during 1813-14, to permit more accurate use of net customs revenue as a partial measure of the effectiveness of British commercial blockade, using as data the decreasing accrued totals for each of the war years.(31)

The customs revenue figure for 1812 enabled Madison to dismiss temporarily the criticism levelled at the consequences of his 90-day Embargo on foreign trade, which had operated from 4 April to 3 July 1812. This banned first imports and then American exports to Britain, but was in operation for only two weeks of the war.(32) However, although Madison's export embargo ended on 3 July, imports remained prohibited by the Non-Importation Act of 1811, an earlier part of his 'restrictive system' designed to gain concessions on British Orders in Council and impressments by withholding trade. Many Congressmen, notably John Calhoun, thought that the 1811 act should be modified or suspended to allow duties on imports from Britain to add to government revenue; leaving it in force, Calhoun thought, would "debilitate the springs of war".(33) Others, including the House of Representatives Speaker, Henry Clay, successfully argued that restrictions on Anglo-American trade would be as effective as war in obtaining concessions, and bills to allow the resumption of British imports were narrowly defeated. (34) Thereby, the United States continued to place itself at a fiscal and financial disadvantage.

The restrictive system, including Madison's short-lived second embargo of 1813, further complicates the use of American net customs revenue as a measure of the effectiveness of the Royal Navy's wartime commercial blockade up to April 1814. However, the intermittent nature and

relative brevity of the embargoes, and the widespread evasion and uneven enforcement of the Non-Importation Act, all limit the validity of the criticism, reducing the usefulness of American restrictive legislation as an alternative explanation to British commercial blockade for a debilitating decline in net customs revenue. Later, when neither of Madison's embargoes nor any legislative restrictions were in force, the reduction in American overseas trade may be safely attributed to the British commercial blockade alone. It was by then largely protected from American naval interference by the British naval blockade which progressively contained American warships as the war continued.(35)

Memories of the severe unemployment and other adverse economic effects of Jefferson's earlier embargo increased the determination with which Madison's first embargo was evaded. Merchant's efforts to "palsy the arm of government" were duly reported by contemporary American commentators. Niles' *Weekly Register* for 12 April 1812, asserted that in a frantic five days before the embargo came into force, goods worth \$15m, including 200,000 barrels of flour, left American ports in defiance of the export ban.(36)

Despite such resistance and evasion, the effects of Madison's 90-day embargo operating alone, would have been the temporary reduction of both American overseas trade and tax revenues. Many inward and outward sea voyages were reportedly embargoed, with American vessels left idle, but the value of American foreign trade lost is difficult to quantify beyond its apparent effects on employment and prices. The embargo's ending on 3 July, the Congressional doubling of import tax rates after 1 July, and the American merchants' attempts to retrieve their stranded goods, each increased 1812's

imports and customs duties revenue – effectively offsetting much of the embargo's impact. As a result, according to Madison's account to Congress, the total net customs revenue accrued in 1812 had been inflated to \$13,331,467 by the "unexpected" increase in the arrival of imports, apparently serving to disguise from him, as well as from later observers, the effectiveness of the threat implied by early British efforts to impose a commercial blockade on the United States.

Madison, however, made no apparent attempt to adjust the net customs revenue to under \$10m to allow for the doubled rate of duties in July. Had he chosen to emphasise the impact of doubled customs duty rates since 1 July, and the temporary nature of the fiscal windfall from the merchants' scramble to repatriate their profits as imports, Congress might have been less compliant, and a more urgent attempt at major tax reform made, before the limited success of government borrowing became all too apparent.

Since even the adjusted net customs revenue figure for 1812 exceeds that of 1811, its value as a measure of the effectiveness of the British maritime commercial blockade at the beginning of the war is limited, except perhaps as a starting point. Until Madison's second brief embargo and the Non-Importation Act were repealed in April 1814, the responsibility for any economic changes in America have to be shared between a range of factors including both British maritime commercial blockade and self-imposed American handicaps. However, despite these complications, adjusted net customs revenue can later be used as a measure of the effectiveness of the Royal Navy's commercial blockade of the United States, when the relatively

brief and intermittent embargoes, and the equally evaded Non-Importation Act, are all repealed.

By December 1812, after six months of war with Britain, the American budget deficit was more than predicted. Seyburt gives net customs revenue of \$8,223,715, collected in 1811, to form the bulk of the United States government receipts for 1812.(37) Dewey raises that to \$8,900,000 when including other import related taxes such as Registered and Enrolled tonnage duties, lighthouse dues and revenue from passports, and by adding miscellaneous income of \$800,000, reaches a total available for 1812 of \$9,700,000.(38) However, Total Expenditure for 1812 appears to have been \$20,280,000, creating a shortfall of \$10,580,000, summarised in Appendix B as Table 6.(39) Authority to raise a loan of \$11m at 6%, gained on 14 March 1812, had clearly been necessary, but was not unopposed.

Critics doubted whether loanable funds existed for so large a demand, without the imposition of internal excise revenues to create confidence that interest would be paid, and the principal eventually redeemed. However, after a slow start, the call produced \$6,118,900 at par in only two days, then however, the supply of funds faltered, such that by 24 June 1812, only \$6,500,000 had been collected.(40) The prices of existing government stock fell by between 2 and 3% while the 1812 loan was available, and Gallatin suggested re-negotiating its terms, and should perhaps have made the introduction of new taxes to meet interest payments, the price of his remaining in office. While the banks were willing to lend the government another \$2,150,000 in short-term loans, only \$8,180,000 of the \$11m sought

for this first war loan was ever eventually raised, resolving conclusively the subsequent, protracted discussion of its relative success.(41)

From the outset therefore, even before the end of 1812, the unpopularity of the war, the restrictive legislation, and the so far limited British commercial blockade, had evidently damaged the preparedness of some wealthy American citizens, particularly prosperous New England merchants and bankers, to lend to a government they had outspokenly criticised as having already damaged their interests by embargo, restrictive legislation, and the prospect of wartime commercial blockade.

Therefore, on 30 June 1812, the American government had resorted for the first time, to an issue of \$5m worth of Treasury notes, in denominations of \$100 or more. These were short-term loan certificates bearing 5.4% annual interest, redeemable by the Treasury a year after each issue. To create wide acceptability, and to stimulate their circulation, they could, despite not being intended as legal tender, be used to pay duties and taxes, or buy public lands. They enabled the government to receive money in anticipation of future tax revenues and long-term loans. Gallatin and others had insisted that, not backed by precious metal, their success depended on internal excise duties to meet the interest, and on issues being limited to avoid the notes being discounted during transactions, and to retain public confidence in government credit.(42) In ignoring this advice, the American government was to embark on an ultimately disastrous monetary policy.

The American government relied less for its revenue on the taxation of exports, so much so, that tax initially paid by importers on goods they intended to re-export, could be reclaimed by them as 'drawback'. These tax

rebates, on such products as coffee, cocoa, sugar and pepper, fell from \$2,227,245 in 1811 to \$1,542,623 in 1812, reflecting a 30% decrease in the re-export of products subject to rebate.(43) Most other goods paid *ad valorem* tax if re-exported; such goods were valued at \$8,815,291 in 1811, but only \$3,591,755 in 1812.(44)

Even by the end of 1812 therefore, the fall in the level of American exports was significant. As apparent from Appendix B Table 16, American total exports fell from \$61.3m in 1811 to \$38.5m in 1812, a fall of more than 37%.(45) Notwithstanding Madison's 90-day embargo on American overseas trade, in force between 4 April and 3 July 1812, this decline remains remarkable, since American and neutral ships with British licences continued to carry grain and flour from such American ports as Baltimore and Alexandria to British and allied armies in the Peninsula. Furthermore, in December 1812, the ports of New England were to remain exempt from British commercial blockade for almost another sixteen months. Exports of grain and flour from each, reduced the fall in American exports.

The decline in the level of American re-exports was even more marked. From over \$16m in 1811 to \$8.5m in 1812, a fall of almost 47%, although how much of this decline is due to Madison's three month Embargo, and how much to the Royal Navy's embryonic commercial blockade remains problematic.(46) Traditionally an important component of the United States total exports, re-exports comprised 26% of American exports in 1811, but only 22% in 1812, before beginning a catastrophic decline until after 1815.(47) Later, greatly reduced re-export figures during wartime periods without American legislative trade restrictions, will serve to measure the

effectiveness of the British commercial blockade. These falls in American exports and re-exports would reduce the incomes of growers, merchants and shippers, and consequently their spending, and the employment of others. This would therefore reduce the general ability to pay taxes, and the preparedness of many to lend to the government held responsible for the decline in American overseas trade.

However, as late as October 1812, the level of wages and employment in the maritime sector of the American economy seemed buoyant. While attempting to refit and man his command, the American frigate *Constitution*, Isaac Hull complained on 29 October 1812, that competition for seamen and dockside workers from the American merchant service, and those fitting out privateers, had raised wages and created maintenance and manning difficulties for him, and the United States Navy.

(48)

But, fiscal, financial and economic conditions for the American administration were about to worsen. Anticipating that Warren's diplomatic efforts would fail, the British Privy Council had, on 13 October 1812, issued General Reprisals against American ships, vessels and property where-ever found, a *de facto* declaration of war. On 16 November, Warren had received the expected rejection of his armistice proposals, together with unacceptable American counter proposals.(49) On 21 November Earl Bathurst, British Secretary of State for War, ordered the blockade of Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware river, and on 25 November the Admiralty relayed this order to Warren.(50) By 26 December, the London Gazette made the customary formal notification of the blockade to neutrals.(51) On 6 February 1813,

Warren made a local declaration that Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware were under blockade.(52) On 19 February, Warren assured the First Lord of the Admiralty that the blockade was in place.(53) He also announced that American vessels, apparently with British licences, would no longer be allowed to enter or leave the Chesapeake. His earlier demands for reinforcements, and clarification from London of the issues raised by the proliferation of British licences to trade, had been partly resolved.

Since its arrival there in 1808, the British Army in the Iberian peninsula had depended on American grain and flour, accounting for over 60% of American grain exports in 1811, including those to Britain.(54) However, on 3 February 1813, the British Foreign Secretary informed Anthony Baker that American grain and flour would no longer be needed by the Army in the Peninsula.(55) By May, Wellington had authorised the purchase of grain from Egypt and Brazil, despite which, American deliveries to the Peninsula continued throughout the remainder of 1813 until largely replaced by restored supplies from the Baltic.(56) The American vessels engaged, officially intended to return in ballast, in fact returned to the United States with British specie and such valuable cargoes as salt; activities incompatible with any form of economic warfare. Madison too, had long regarded such trade as inconsistent with the American restrictive system, and in May 1813 had finally succeeded in persuading Congress to ban the American use of British licences.

Significantly, from the summer of 1813, the possession by American merchantmen of an apparently British licence to trade, would become a progressively less effective protection against detention by a British



blockading squadron, and the possible confiscation by a Vice Admiralty Court of both cargo and vessel. The over-supply of grain and flour formerly exported from Baltimore, appears to have depressed its price by two dollars a barrel, a quantifiable link between American legislation, British blockade and domestic American prices, to become increasingly important as the commercial blockade was extended.(57)

The first British blockade, planned for Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware, had been supplemented in early November 1812 by a squadron stationed off Savannah, intended to intercept American shipments of timber and raw cotton. Increasingly important strategically, the interruption of southern timber supplies to the north caused American anxiety over repairs and maintenance of both the United States Navy and its merchant fleet.(58) By January 1813, Warren had felt able to assert that that he “may probably produce some Deficit ere long in the Revenue of the United States: If all my other Divisions are equally active and successful.”(59)

Warren had in fact extended the commercial blockade in anticipation of written Admiralty orders.(60) By February 1813, Niles' *Weekly Register* reported from Baltimore that British vessels were “blockading the Chesapeake and the Delaware and are occasionally off New York”.(61) On 26 March, the commercial blockade of New York was officially sanctioned, in both personal correspondence and official orders. Privately, Warren was told to expect “an order for blockading all the principal Ports in the United States to the southward of Rhode Island & including the Mississippi”, to put a “complete stop to all trade & intercourse by Sea”.(62) Officially, the Admiralty ordered him to “institute a strict and rigorous Blockade of the Ports

and Harbours of New York, Charleston, Port Royal, Savannah, and of the River Mississippi.”(63) Quoting the Order in Council of 30 March 1813, the *London Gazette* gave the usual notification to neutrals, and on 26 May, Warren issued from Bermuda a copy of his orders as a local proclamation.

(64)

Throughout the spring, summer and autumn of 1813, a series of local proclamations spelled out precisely which coasts, ports and estuaries were blockaded by Warren’s squadrons, while Niles catalogued American complaints.(65) Improving weather conditions in the spring allowed British blockading squadrons closer inshore. As early as April 1813, agents’ reports suggested that the commercial blockades were proving effective, and American coastal trade curtailed.

By 5 April 1813, Thomas Ives, a prominent Rhode Island shipper and businessman, well aware of the commercial significance of developments at sea, complained that,

British Cruisers are actually in the Sound and have taken one of the New York Packets, Capt. Walden, also a number of Coasting and other Vessels...as the communication by water with New York is of great importance to the trade carried on by New England with the Middle States, Govt. ought immediately to send a force sufficient into the Sound to give it ample protection – part of our naval force could not otherwise be so well employed”. (66)

This demanding attitude, in view of New England’s relative prosperity, and its frequently outspoken opposition to the war, and general failure to contribute proportionately to the Government’s call for loans, was precisely

the sort of view which drew hostility towards New England, both during and especially after the war, when the records of New England's contributions became better known.

By 15 June, Ives was being forced to admit that "the British force off N[ew] London is vigilant & employs a number of small vessels in all directions so that we consider the coasting trade between this [i.e. Providence R.I.] & New York thro' the Sound at an end for the present". His Boston agent replied the same afternoon that the price of "soft flour" was even "advancing in consequence" of "the probable rigorous blockade of the Sound".(67) The American coasting trade was economically important in gathering exports and distributing imports. The interruption of both was evidently reflected in producers, shipper's and merchant's incomes, and in consumer prices.

Warren gained invaluable secret intelligence, presumably gathered at considerable personal risk, from agents ashore. In April, a British agent reported that,

Rigidly cutting off all trade between towns in the bays, particularly Baltimore, disrupts the neighbourhood very much. Wood and several other articles from the Eastern coast are now very scarce, and commanding exceeding high prices. This plan...if persevered in, would injure them more than in any other way; great complaints are already made of the War. (68)

Another, apparently American "Federalist" agent, significantly noted in April that, "A very high traffic was carried on between Baltimore and Philadelphia by water before the Squadron [arrived], but...this trade is now

stopped...as it cannot be carried by land.”(69) Nevertheless, efforts were made to replace blockaded coastal traffic with land transport. One commentator writing in 1819 noted that, “Before the war, there were but two wagons that plied between Boston and the town of Providence, and soon after its commencement, the number increased to two hundred.”(70)

The extent to which American coastal trade could be replaced by land transport was by all accounts very limited. The quantity of goods that could be carried by either wagon trains or packhorses was restricted, and the rates expensive. Canals were often unavailable as a finished alternative, and where present were often short, shallow and discontinuous; in any case, transshipment added greatly to costs. After the war, Seyburt attributed the dislocation to the British coastal blockade adding that,

The inhabitants... in the immediate vicinity were not alone affected by the enemy; his operations extended their influence to our great towns and cities on the Atlantic coast. Domestic intercourse and internal commerce were interrupted, whilst that with foreign nations was in some instances entirely suspended, everything had to be conveyed by land carriage; our communication with the ocean was cut off. (71)

“Our roads, he wrote earlier “became almost impassable in consequence of the heavy loads”.(72) Since “a wagon trade between points as widely separated as Savannah and Boston” would take 115 days in peacetime, only serious inflation in the price of American-produced cotton goods would make such land transport of raw-cotton from the Southern states to New England remotely feasible in wartime.(73) Generally, “turnpikes were unable to offer cheap transport for long distances. To haul a ton from Philadelphia to

Pittsburgh...cost \$125. To move a bushel of salt 300 miles by any road cost \$2.50...to transport goods, wares or merchandise cost \$10 per ton per hundred miles.”(74) Hauling a ton from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh had cost \$90 in peacetime, and now cost almost 40% more, making the land haulage of even moderately heavy goods, such as grain and flour, uneconomic over more than 150 miles.(75)

In April 1813, the same “Federalist” agent reported to Warren the impact of British blockade and substituted land carriage on American prices. “Wood is 10 and 12 Dollars per load at Baltimore – Indian Corn cannot be got, with grain for Horses, Fish is very dear, and every other Eatable is high except flour which is 6 and a half and 7 Dollars per Barrel.”(76) Seyburt later saw the impact of British commercial blockade as being “not only deprived of revenue.” “The expenses of the government, as well as of individuals, were very much augmented for every species of transportation.”(77)

From 1 September, American access to inland waterways in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia was to be curtailed.(78) By 16 November 1813, Warren’s proclamation extending the blockade to Long Island Sound and southward of Narragansett Bay down to the border with Florida, interdicted neutral trade with New York.(79) By 2 December 1813, a local proclamation by the squadron blockading New London announced the closure of the northern approaches to New York.(80) Only the neutral trade of the ports of New England remained excluded, as Britain sought to widen their political differences with the rest of the Union.

By April 1813, the economic effectiveness of the British commercial blockade was being recognised by those directly affected. Vincent Nolte, a

New Orleans cotton merchant complained to Alexander Baring, a London merchant banker, that interrupted trade with the Atlantic states was causing “very heavy sacrifices on our part and bears so hard on all classes of citizens”. Only two foreign vessels had arrived at New Orleans in the past nine months. He suggested that Baring should charter neutral Swedish vessels in England and send them to him in ballast, to export raw-cotton to the Peninsula or Gothenburg, before returning to Britain under licence.(81)

Similarly, in May 1813, an unnamed Baltimore merchant wrote to a Nova Scotian newspaper that, “Our situation is more distressing than pride or obstinacy will permit most to allow”. The condition of Baltimore was “exactly that of a besieged city”. “All business” was “at a stand,” with “nothing talked of but the enemy and the war. What an enormous tax upon us is the war! The price of every thing almost doubled, and our supplies by water totally cut off!” Unemployment in Baltimore was evidently becoming serious. “If no change takes place in a few months the middling classes of society must leave the place, and go where they can get employ and support their families.”(82) Holding, and being prepared to express such opinions, once prosperous merchants would be unlikely to pay tax increases willingly, or to lend to the administration responsible for the war. For the American government, this created increasingly serious difficulties in meeting wartime expenditure.

In addition to their damage to trade and shipping and the fiscal consequences, Warren’s blockades of the Chesapeake and Delaware provided access for British amphibious forces raiding strategic targets in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. On 3 May 1813, for example, Cockburn reached

Havre de Grace, at the head of Chesapeake Bay. There he “gained Intelligence” of the Cecil cannon foundry at Principio, three miles further north, and “one of the most valuable Works of the Kind in America”. He caused “its destruction, and that of the Guns and other Material we found there” with “several Buildings & much complicated heavy Machinery”. As Cockburn reported to Warren, his “small Division” had “been on Shore in the Centre of the Enemy’s Country and on his high Road between Baltimore and Philadelphia.” Other boats had penetrated the Susquehanna river, “destroying five Vessels in it and a large Store of Flour”. With only one officer wounded, they had destroyed 51 guns and “130 Stand of Small Arms”.(83)

Actions of this sort created financial as much as practical problems for the Americans. The import-substitution made possible by the capacity of more than two hundred powder mills, of firms like the Dupont Company of Delaware, had long since solved the gunpowder shortages of the Revolutionary War.(84)The United States was virtually self-sufficient in powder and no longer so dependent on imported weapons, but commercial organisations still needed paying, while British attacks on trade and tax revenue had eroded both the administration’s ready cash and credit. In the long term therefore, it was not the damage to strategic targets that proved most effective, but the damage to the American economy and government creditworthiness that most reduced the administration’s preparedness to continue the war. However, the raids do appear to have forewarned the Americans of the probability of a British attempt to capture Baltimore, and gave those like Senator Samuel Smith time to prepare its effective defence.

(85)

Any successful British commercial blockade of the United States would have to include New York, a port of enormous commercial and therefore fiscal importance. On average between 1803-12, its registered tonnage employed in foreign trade was 122,603, and the net revenue derived from customs \$3,687,075.(86) With a population in 1808 of 83,530, it was the most populous as well as the most productive of customs revenue, its population having grown almost 40% since 1801, and more than three and a half times since 1786.(87) As well as being “the centre of local distribution”, it was also “the leading place in the foreign trade of North America.” As a result, John Lambert, an Englishman travelling in America before the war, could write that, “the moneys collected in New York for the national treasury, on the imports and tonnage have for several years amounted to one fourth of the public revenue.”(88)

On 5 May 1813, the Philadelphian merchant John Maybin wrote that “the Report of the Day is that New York is Blockaded – Should that be the case, the Middle States will then be completely Shut in”. By 13 May his correspondent feared that, “our coasting trade is nearly destroyed & it is found extremely difficult to supply the Town & Country with Corn, which has become very scarce as well as dear.”(89) In June, he found “the passage thro’ the sound is at present completely shut up – by the British force stationed off New London watching commodore Decaturs Squadron”.(90) As soon as 21 June, Maybin wrote “I fear the blockade of the Sound Will Prove an Injury to the Eastern States as they will Not be Able to get a Supply of Bread Stuffs – this wicked and unnecessary War is Ruining our Country – and it do not appear that Congress is doing anything to put a stop to it”.



By 14 September, “The British have moved their Squadrons in the Sound down towards New York so that it is impossible for Coasters to pass.” Four days later, Maybin assessed the consequences, “It is a lamentable thing that this Country is deprived of its regular Traid (sic) and Imports in General have got so high”, [i.e. in price] “– which operates both ways against the Citizens.”(91)

Consequently, while in December 1812, New York’s registered merchant tonnage was 162,885, by 31 December 1813, it had fallen to 146,512.(92) By 27 September 1813, “the number of ships and brigs laid up and dismantled in New York City was 122”, together with 18 sloops and schooners. In the same month, the privateer *Governor Tompkins* was sold at auction in New York for \$14,000; her cost the year before had been \$20,000.”(93)

In the House, in June 1813, Jonathan Fisk of New York had declined to argue that his electorate was “more exposed and less efficiently defended” than elsewhere. “It would be sufficient” he said “to state that three fourths of our seacoast had been declared in a state of blockade; that our waters were infested, and coast lined with the armed boats and barges of the enemy, which were engaged in marauding and destroying the property of our citizens, with an impunity that was deeply to be regretted.” He asked whether gunboats, or “any means could be devised to defend our coast from a warfare so distressing and vexatious.”(94)

By the end of 1813, the interruption of American imports, caused at this stage, by both British commercial blockade, and American legislative restrictions, was having a measurable effect on customs duties payable in

New York. In 1810, New York State had contributed \$4, 419,060 to net customs revenue, almost 35% of the national total. Raised in 1812 by New York's share of the "unexpected" British imports, to \$2,885,102, net customs revenue had fallen in 1813 to \$1,368, 618, a decrease of almost 53 %.(95) When allowance is made for Congress having doubled the rates of customs duties from 1 July 1812, the real decrease in net customs revenue collected in New York State between 1812 and 1813, is over 68 %.(96)

Shortages of previously imported commodities contributed to quantifiable inflation. An all-commodity index of New York wholesale prices standing at 127 in June 1812 when America declared war, rises to 160 by June 1813, by which time Warren's initial blockade of New York was officially sanctioned. By December 1813, with all approaches to New York strictly blockaded, this index rises to 189.(97) How far the lives of ordinary people were adversely affected is measured by changes in the basic commodity index of New York's wholesale prices between the declaration of war, and December 1813. This index, for June 1812, is 128, by June 1813, it is 163, and by December 1813, reaches 198.(98) Although far worse was to come, the end of 1813 saw the beginning of a marked decline in New York's standard of living, its shipping and tonnage duties, its overseas trade and customs revenue, even the city's population.(99)

New York was not alone. Throughout the summer of 1813, operation of the British commercial blockade of the Chesapeake had proved effective. By September, its commander, Captain Robert Barrie, wrote that "as Nathan has not had any trade whatever during the summer", he wondered whether the Americans would "venture to run any of their French traders during the

winter” and hoped that they “will dash a little now the bad weather is coming on.”(100) Perhaps more trustworthy than Barrie’s enthusiasm, is the more quantitative list showing that in less than three months, between 6 September and 25 December 1813 alone, his squadron went on to capture or destroy 72 American merchant vessels, and in addition to those “libelled” in Halifax, over the twenty-week period from 6 September 1813 to 12 January 1814, 81 vessels totalling more than 4,000 tons were registered in Bermuda as “captured burnt or destroyed” in Chesapeake Bay.(101)

With the British commercial blockade of the Delaware River and Bay also strictly enforced, the State of Pennsylvania, including Philadelphia, was similarly affected. Even by the end of April 1813, the unemployment of seamen along the Delaware was being attributed to the British blockading squadron and “the depredations committed by these Vessels”. Despite this however, “the people who from the interruption of the Navigation are at present without employment”, remained disinclined “to enter on board the Gun Boats” which might have provided some defence.(102)

Occasionally, the psychological effect of British maritime blockade becomes evident. The usually pragmatic Maybin wrote from Philadelphia on 5 May,

Messers Myers wrote to me from Norfolk that the Squadrons are close in with their Capes & make many Captures, I hope you are safe – should the Fleet visit Newport which is very much Exposed – in case the War is continued any length of time, I fear the British will act with more vigour along the coast the next Summer than they did the last. (103)

Even rumours of British commercial blockade were thought likely to have an impact on prices. On 16 June 1813, Ives described price changes “probably owing to the *expectation* of an immediate rigorous Blockade & the Stoppage in a great measure of the Coasting trade -”.(104)

By late July 1813, Maybin records just how severe the impact of the British blockade was becoming. “[A]t present” he wrote, “prices are merely Nominal as No Sales are making – Coffee Sugar and Pepper are articles also Expected to advance in prices as they are getting Scarce in our Markets. Indeed goods Generally are getting Scarce and if we do Not get an additional Supply soon, prices will be very high for Articles of Necessity”.(105)

An index of Philadelphia wholesale import prices standing at 155 in 1812, reaches 185 by 1813.(106) Although American agricultural wages had risen in 1813, rising prices and maritime unemployment would mean that demand for many goods, including imports would fall. (107) As a result, having contributed \$2,439,018 to net customs revenue in 1810, and \$2,090,298 in 1812, Philadelphia produced only \$311,030 in 1813.(108) This represents a decrease in Philadelphia’s contribution to net customs revenue between 1812 and 1813 of 85.1%. When allowance is made for the doubling of the rate of customs duties on 1 July 1812, the real decrease over the same period is a remarkable 90.1%.

Similarly, Maryland, which had collected \$1,780,365 net customs revenue in 1812, paid in only \$182,006 in 1813, an unadjusted decrease in its contribution to net customs revenue of 89.8%, and an adjusted decrease of no less than 93.2%.(109) With British commercial and naval blockades in place, even with the non-importation act as widely evaded as ever, according to

Adams, “after the summer [of 1813], the total net revenue collected in every port of the United States outside New England did not exceed \$150,000 a month”, producing only \$1,800,000 a year.(110) This did not bode well for meeting the inevitably high wartime expenditure of the following year.

The current fiscal situation was becoming critical. Given the disparity between the United States revenue in 1813, essentially the net customs revenue of \$13.2m accrued in 1812, and the current level of expenditure in 1813 of \$31.6m, as measured by Dewey, and shown in Appendix B as Table 6, virtual dependence on net customs revenue alone was clearly no longer adequate.(111) Especially following the shortfall of \$10.6m in 1812, a deficit of no less than \$17.3m in 1813, began to look serious.

By the end of 1812, the prospect of borrowing all of the \$11m loan at par, began to look poor. Until now this had been the usual American practice for such government loans as that authorised in the Spring, but the outlook for the coming year was worsening. (112) The immediate shortfall had been met on 30 June 1812 with a \$5m Treasury note issue, and a \$5m windfall tax yield from the “unexpected” British imports, but despite Gallatin’s views, Congress had later cancelled the merchant’s tax debt, costing the Treasury \$9m in revenue. (113)

By mid 1813, all this had contributed to the first serious American financial setback of the war. Faced by Madison with the irreconcilable tasks of financing the war by taxing shipping and imports, while at the same time expected to support the administration’s increasingly draconian enforcement of the government’s trade restrictions, Gallatin’s continued success at the Treasury looked improbable. Gallatin had long held that any war with Britain

could be financed by borrowing, but only with continued foreign trade and the resultant prosperity of farmers, bankers, merchants and shippers, all traditional lenders to the government. He agreed that proposed 'direct' taxes, internal duties, additional tonnage duties and "the diminution of drawbacks" could all be avoided, but only "in the event of the suspension of Non-Importation".(114) In this, he was again frustrated by Congress, although unemployment and hardship were reportedly increasing under the Republicans' legislative trade restrictions, and increasingly by British blockade. Already, preparedness to lend to the government was demonstrably less than required.

In January, Gallatin's revised estimate of outgoings for 1813 had been \$36m, while expected income was only \$17m, a shortfall of \$19m. (115) On 8 February 1813, Congress authorised the call for a second, larger wartime loan, this time for \$16m, initially at 7% interest. To complete this loan, it was necessary from the outset for the American government to accept bids below par, despite which, not all American banks considered themselves to be in a position to help. After Congressional failure to renew the charter of the first United States Bank in February 1811, state and local banks had proliferated, but their capital was often in credit rather than assets, making them wary of long term commitments. The American government had missed the chance of creating a major lender, and of launching a paper currency, thereby making itself dependent on private and state banks in which politicians often had a personal interest. On 5 March 1813, Gallatin had to inform Madison that, "We have hardly money enough to last to the end of the month."(116)

Furthermore, the worsening shortage of British manufactures on the American market, caused by American restrictive legislation and British commercial blockade, was sheltering previously uncompetitive American manufacturing businesses from British competition. The prospect of abnormal profits attracted as financial capital those funds which might otherwise have been lent to the government.

On 25 February 1813, another \$5m in Treasury notes were issued, paying little regard to Gallatin's advice for strict regulation of their number. Congress still made no provision for internal duties or 'direct' taxation to provide funds for the interest payments, and still refused to repeal the Non-Importation Act (117) The loan subscription books were opened to the public on 18 March, with less than \$4m subscribed.(118) The government's financial difficulties could not be kept confidential. The perceptive Providence merchant Thomas Ives, had deduced by 19 March that, "The Loan Subscription must have fallen very short of the Sum proposed, & if money is found difficult to raise, it may tend to bring our Rulers to thinking seriously of their Ruinous War."(119)

The loan was filled only in April, after the books had been officially closed, when three foreign-born financiers were approached who between them produced almost two-thirds of the \$16m needed. Even this was at a 12% discount, producing only \$88 in specie and Treasury notes for every \$100 in bonds. This stratagem was probably unrepeatable, having caused at least one lender financial embarrassment.(120)

Gallatin's frustration with continued Congressional obstruction, especially in the Senate, and disputes with John Armstrong, the Secretary of

War, would end for the time being with the adjournment of the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress on 3 March 1813. But the arrival in Washington of the Russian government's offer of mediation on 8 March, had presented Gallatin with an alternative to accepting personal responsibility for increasingly likely American fiscal and financial collapse and its resultant military and political defeat. On 11 March 1813, Madison had accepted the Russian offer. Gallatin at once offered himself as one of the team of American Peace Commissioners to be needed in Europe, which would necessitate his leaving both Treasury and Cabinet, although perhaps, not immediately.(121)

Extraordinarily, Madison agreed, persuading Gallatin to remain at least nominally at the Treasury, while someone was sought to deal with the Department's daily affairs, an arrangement never likely to succeed. Nevertheless, on 9 May 1813, before Congress reconvened, Gallatin left the Delaware for Europe.(122) Madison had lost his most experienced and financially best-qualified advisor. A special session of the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress began on 24 May 1813. On 3 June, Madison still insisted that the Treasury office was not vacant, but on 7 June, he declared William Jones, already Secretary of the Navy, as also Acting Secretary of the Treasury. (123)

Gallatin's wish to avoid supervising financial failure cost Madison much standing in Congress. Even after Gallatin had reached St Petersburg on 21 July 1813, Congress still refused to endorse his appointment as Peace Commissioner. Although his ability was widely recognised, he had long been resented as foreign-born. Some Senators thought he would be better kept at the Treasury, for others the opportunity to defy and embarrass Madison proved irresistible. Gallatin was eventually "appointed in recess of the



Senate”, on 29 March 1814.(124) He may not have been, as Adams later asserted, “the most fully and perfectly equipped statesman”, but in losing such an experienced Cabinet colleague this early in the war, Madison lost his best hope of financing it to a successful conclusion. (125)

The \$16m loan of 8 February had been filled, but at the cost of the breach of a number of important principles. The first had been Gallatin’s own; that any war could be funded by borrowing only so long as neither domestic embargo nor British maritime commercial blockade interrupted American overseas trade, which could be relied on to provide the necessary funds and co-operative attitude. Madison’s initial 90-day embargo had ended on 3 July 1812, but continued neutral and collaborative trade with the British were leading him towards suggesting another.(126) Having seen previous embargoes erode government revenue, Gallatin would not welcome another. Gallatin had also called in past favours to affluent friends, who had made very large personal contributions at some risk.(127) Almost certainly, this could not be repeated.

Formerly, American stock had been issued at par; bids for this loan had been accepted at a discount from the outset. Conventionally, bids were made before subscription lists closed, now apparently they could be re-opened. The Treasury was becoming reliant on the routine issue of Treasury Notes to supplement loans, without repeal of the Non-Importation Act or the introduction of new taxes to guarantee that funds would be available to meet interest payments.(128) 1812’s Treasury notes had been of \$100 denomination, deliberately too large for general circulation. Those of 25 February 1813 were for \$20, more likely to be commercially discounted for

cash-in-hand, eroding their status, value, and future usefulness. Meanwhile, the government itself would have to accept them at face value in loans and taxes. Once relinquished, all these principles were unlikely to be successfully re-established. By preventing net customs revenue from meeting wartime expenditure, the British commercial blockade had forced the American government to borrow on increasingly vulnerable terms, and once established, the blockade was unlikely to be relaxed.

Meanwhile, British naval squadrons had continued their intelligence-gathering role. As early as March 1813, Warren's apparently well-informed contacts ashore clearly led him to believe that the Royal Navy's commercial blockade was proving effective. Prizes listed as carrying American grain and flour show that unlicensed exports of such commodities were becoming more difficult. On 9 March 1813, Warren wrote to Melville that he was, "happy to observe that the blockade established has already produced great Effect as the Farmers and others are under great apprehension of their produce not being sold: & the Distress it must occasion in the Eastern States". (129) The reduction of imports by the British commercial blockade was also contributing to increasingly evident fiscal and political problems for the American administration. Even while at sea, Warren was able to write to Melville on 29 March that "Madison is alarmed from not obtaining Cash...& the apprehension of the Discussion which must ensue in the Congress from the Necessity of Imposing Taxes to Pay the Interest of the Debt already created by the War".(130)

Amongst other reports Warren forwarded to London on 5 June, was an agent's "letter out of Boston", dated 24 February 1813. It asserted that "the

had to do, the writer suggested, was maintain its “vigorous plan of hostility”.(133)

Throughout 1813, the crucial level of American imports had continued to fall. According to North’s corrected figures, shown as Appendix B, Table 1, total imports had fallen by almost 72%, from \$78,788,540 in 1812, to only \$22,177,812 (134) by 31 December 1813. This had a predictable effect on net customs revenue. Even without taking into account the doubling of customs duty rates in July 1812, by 31 December 1813, the unadjusted totals of net customs revenue, intended to provide the bulk of tax revenue for 1814, had been almost halved between 1812-13, having fallen by more than 48%.(135) When adjusted for the changed rates of duty, net customs revenue for 1813 had fallen by no less than 65%.(136) Recognition of the sharp decrease in the major source of tax revenue in wartime was to lead during the summer of 1813 to urgent Congressional debate on alternative ways of raising revenue.(137)

The size of discount evidently needed to fill the \$16m loan apparently concerned even those Congressmen reluctant to offend their constituents by supporting legislation for higher taxes formerly used by Federalists. In July 1813, Congress belatedly ended its almost sole dependence for revenue on customs duties, by passing laws for a duty on imported salt, stamp duty on bank notes and bills of exchange, and internal excise duties on stills, sugar refining, carriages, and auctions, and for gathering \$3m in ‘direct’ taxes on the ownership of land and slaves. Including an additional duty on foreign tonnage, these should produce net revenue of

\$5.6m.(138) Congress still contrived to drag its feet; these laws would not come into effect until 1 January 1814.(139)

By the summer of 1813, the impact of the British commercial blockade was discussed in Congress, in terms which reflected the warnings given, for example, by Ezekiel Bacon before the United States declared war. On 21 July 1813, the Senate heard a letter from the still “Acting Secretary of the Treasury” William Jones, which revealed that an “additional sum of about \$2m” would be needed before the end of the year to avoid “delay and embarrassment”. This was in addition to \$5.5m needed for the first quarter of 1814. Significantly, Jones estimated that “custom-house duties” payable during the first three months of 1814 would provide only \$1.5m. Another \$250,000 might come from the sale of public lands, and the new “internal duties” due in operation on 1 January 1814. An additional \$250,000 from the Treasury balance should make up the \$2m.(140)

This however, left a shortfall of \$5.5m in meeting the \$7.5m total expenditure until the end of March 1814, including \$6m for the War and Navy departments, \$400,000 for miscellaneous and diplomatic expenses, and \$1.1m “for public debt”, exclusive of the Treasury notes falling due in the new year. Senators heard that, without a further loan, in addition to that of \$16m agreed on 8 February 1813, “there would be, at that time, in circulation the sum of seven millions of dollars” in Treasury notes, “a sum greater, considering the limited state of our commerce,... than might perhaps be maintained in circulation without some difficulty or depreciation.” Jones sought Congressional authority for a further loan, this time for \$7.5m,

allowing the issue of another two million dollars worth of Treasury notes to be postponed until after those issued in 1812 had been redeemed.(141)

This loan was sanctioned on 2 August, on condition that the stock was not sold at less than 88, a 12% discount.(142) It was completed at a lower discount of 11.5%, perhaps reflecting hopes of peace after the Russian offer of mediation. But, during 1813, the American government had sought to borrow a total of \$28.5m in support of the war, and after this occasion, no further attempt to borrow would be more than partially successful. Even the success of this loan would later be questioned.(143) Furthermore, the administration's overuse of Treasury notes, and a developing shortage of specie to redeem them or pay their interest, contributed to their becoming an unpopular liability.

During October 1813, Warren seems to have feared that the effectiveness of the British commercial blockade had been undermined by the American government's ability to borrow the \$7.5m sought on 2 August, albeit at a discount. Warren appears to have been convinced that the British banker Alexander Baring, who had acted since before the war for both American merchants and the American government in London and Europe, had contributed towards the \$7.5m government loan. On 26 October, he wrote to Melville, evidently angered that "British money" had been lent towards "the vindictive war carried on against us".(144)

Not having received an answer on this specific point from Melville, on 16 November 1813, Warren wrote a private letter, in his own hand, to Prime Minister Lord Liverpool;

I wrote to your Lordship some time ago from the Chesapeake and stated my opinion respecting the Embarrassment of the American Government from the pressure of the War: I am however sorry that the great Source of their Difficulties have been removed, in obtaining an additional Loan of seven Millions of Dollars, through the aid of Messers Parish of Philadelphia, & the Mr Baring who was settled belonging to that House in America; consequently British Money is now used in the vindictive War carried on against us: and from his supply it is supposed the Government party may be enabled to continue their operations: without levying Taxes for another Year. (145)

Although partly perhaps because of his American marriage and business connections, Baring was later prepared to lend the American government small sums of money to avoid immediate embarrassments, nothing suggests his ever having lent enough to make any real difference to the outcome of the war. Baring was not unpatriotic by contemporary standards, much less traitorous. He was forthright in his condemnation of American opposition to British impressment. Writing from London on 22 July 1813, as the American Peace Commissioner's bankers, to Gallatin in St Petersburg, Baring insisted that,

highly as I value a state of peace and harmony with America, I am so sensible of the danger to our naval power from anything like an unrestricted admission of your principles, that I should consider an American as an inevitable concomitant of a French war, and to provide for it accordingly. It is useless to discuss the abstract question of right when it becomes one of necessity, and with us I sincerely believe it to be so. (146)

Baring even went so far as to continue,

If therefore, the disposition of your government be to adhere pertinaciously to the determination to give us no better security than the Act of Congress lately passed, I should certainly think your coming here or negotiating anywhere, useless for any good purpose. (147)

These opinions leave little room for doubt on Baring's support for Britain's position. Even if Baring had lent a significant sum to the American government at this stage, for which no evidence seems to exist, it would certainly not have allowed Madison's administration to meet an annual expenditure of \$31.6m in 1813 without further taxation. As shown in Appendix B, Table 3, the customs revenue of \$13.2m for 1813 was added to by only \$1.1m of miscellaneous receipts, making total receipts of \$14.3m. This left a deficit of \$17.3m. Even completely filled, the \$7.5 loan would still have left \$9.8m unfound. If all of the proceeds from the 25 February 1813 issue of \$5m of Treasury notes had remained unspent, this would still have left an annual deficit of \$4.8m. In this sense, even in 1813, the American administration was already bankrupt.

Warren concluded his intemperate letter to the Prime Minister with the incautious hope that "the success of the Allied arms in Europe" might make possible "some decisive strokes against the Enemy either upon the Lakes...or by a vigorous attack to the Southward in taking Possession of New Orleans".(148) Furthermore, a private letter from a naval officer, written over Melville's head to the Prime Minister, is unlikely to have improved Warren's

standing at the Admiralty, despite his earlier achievements and the clear effectiveness of his current commercial blockade.

Certainly, throughout 1813, the level of American exports had continued to decrease. According to Seyburt, total exports had fallen from \$38.5m in 1812 to \$27.9m in 1813, a further fall of almost 28%.<sup>(149)</sup> North's corrected statistics produce almost identical results.<sup>(150)</sup> The continuation into 1813, of licensed sales of American grain and flour, largely to the Peninsula, had so far slowed the rate of decline in domestic exports.<sup>(151)</sup> No such British needs protected the American re-export markets. Both the transoceanic import to America of exotic products like cocoa and pepper were vulnerable to British commercial blockade, as well as their re-export to Europe in American and neutral vessels. Traditionally, the British had an interest in the development of their own colonial re-export markets, increasingly threatened before 1812 by Americans.<sup>(152)</sup> Consequently, the fall in the American re-export trade was much more pronounced, from nearly \$8.5m in 1812, to almost \$2.9m in 1813, a decrease of 66.5%.<sup>(153)</sup> Although not as important to government revenue as falling imports, these figures meant unemployment at a time of rising prices, and falling incomes for merchants and shippers, good customers of the banks, potentially the administration's most reliable lenders.

Madison was apparently concerned, not so much by the level of American exports, but by their destinations. Foodstuffs especially were being sold to the vessels of the British blockading squadrons offshore and exported by American producers to British land forces in Canada, and to the West Indies. Despite American use of British licences having become illegal in



May 1813, grain and flour was still being shipped from the United States to Spain in useful quantities until October. Furthermore, the ports of New England were still so far open to neutrals.(154) The British maritime commercial blockade was clearly being selectively applied.

After failing to obtain a Congressional ban on this “insidious discrimination”, Madison made an Executive Order on 29 July 1813, making such trade illegal, to be implemented by the Secretary of the Navy and the War Department.(155) Illicit trade nevertheless continued in both American exports and British imports, as well as in supplies and intelligence between the American shore and British blockading vessels.(156) Madison’s final Embargo was eventually ratified by Congress on 17 December 1813, including its ban on coastal trade and the ransoming of ships and cargoes.(157) However, its enforcement by the limited means at the American’s disposal, especially around New Orleans, Savannah and Charleston, was later described by Mahan as “manifestly impossible”.(158) Smuggling methods included the ransoming of vessels and cargoes, mock ‘captures’ by privateers, and unofficial clear passages given in exchange for services rendered, but most significantly, such smuggling, however achieved, added nothing to American government revenue.(159)

New York was not unique in experiencing price instability by 1813. By August 1813, something was having an effect on the prices producers received and consumers paid, throughout the United States. How far these changes were caused by the American’s own restrictive system, or by British maritime commercial blockade, or by both in unquantifiable proportions, is of fundamental importance. Attribution remains as difficult now as it seemed

then. Writing in the mid 1890's, and citing Niles' *Weekly Register*, Henry Adams appears to have had no reservations in asserting that, "the pressure of the blockades was immediately felt."(160)

The pressure included increasingly serious congestion of American ports by unused shipping. In early September 1813, Boston was reported to be holding 91 redundant square-rigged ships, usually employed in international trade, contributing to a total of 245 unemployed vessels, importantly excluding coasters.(161) By 25 September, the *Columbian Centinel* reported that the interruption of coastal traffic was widening the economic impact of British blockade and American legislation. "[T]he long stagnation of foreign and embarrassment of domestic trade, have extended the sad effects from the seaboard through the interior, where the scarcity of money is severely felt. There is not enough to pay the taxes."(162) By December 1813, 200 square-rigged vessels reportedly lay idle in Boston harbour.(163) Efforts were made to supplement reduced coastal traffic with overland transport. A Senate Committee discussed a Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, to cost \$850,000, but postponed any decision until the next session of Congress.(164)

The difficulties agrarian producers experienced in reaching markets by overseas shipping, traditional coasting, inland waterways or overland transport, were evidently beginning to produce local gluts and distant shortages. The dislocation of international and local trade inevitably made an impact on prices. Niles recorded for August 1813, that superfine flour sold in the port of Baltimore for \$6.00 a barrel. Nearer its source, in Richmond Virginia, it cost only \$4.50, while in Boston, the same quantity cost \$11.87.

(165) Similarly, upland cotton sold at Charleston, South Carolina, for 9 cents per lb, and in Boston for 20 cents a pound. In both Charleston and Savannah, Georgia, rice sold at \$3.00 a hundredweight, but cost \$12 in Philadelphia. A hundredweight of sugar, fetching \$9 in New Orleans, cost \$18.75 in Boston, between \$21 and \$22 in New York and Philadelphia, and \$26.50 in Baltimore. Adams concludes that, “Already the American staples were unsalable at the place of their production. No rate of profit could cause cotton, rice or wheat to be brought by sea from Charleston or Norfolk to Boston.”

(166) Land transport was prohibitively expensive over long distances, and inland waterways were narrow, discontinuous and difficult to approach; finding their entrances often needed detailed local knowledge.(167)

Adams notes that “soon speculation began”, arguing that price inflation for imported commodities was due principally to scarcity created by British commercial blockade.(168) Certainly, by December 1813, price inflation in such commodities had become marked. A pound of coffee, which had sold for 21 cents in August 1813, cost 38 cents by the end of the year, an increase of almost 81% in five months.(169) The price of tea also rose by between 76 and 135% having risen from \$1.70 a pound in August to between “three and four dollars in December”, by which time, sugar had almost doubled in price.(170) However, what proportion of these changes was attributable to British commercial blockade alone, remains problematic.

Contemporaries had similar difficulties in attributing changes to either British blockade or American trade restrictions. On 21 December 1813, John Sheldon wrote a report to Congressman William Lowndes to “assist in forming an opinion on the number of American seamen thrown out of employ

by the war...or the embargo".(171) Without referring to their reduced wages or ability to pay, Sheldon reported that four-fifths of merchant seamen were unemployed by the end of 1813. This produced a sharp decline in revenue from a seaman's hospital tax, levied on wages decreased by competition for work, and increasing reluctance to pay such contributions amongst those still so far employed. The employers' use of casual labour at lower wage rates reduced the seamen's concern for their own future welfare, that of others, and hospital incomes.

The repeal of Madison's last Embargo within four months of Congressional approval, together with repeal of the Non-Importation Act, would resolve the problem of whether British maritime blockades or the American restrictive system had been more responsible for American economic difficulties. After these repeals, American economic problems may be attributed more safely to British maritime blockades, no longer at times coinciding with American restrictive legislation. Madison became prepared to consider these repeals largely as a result of important news from Europe, which served to sharpen perceptions of reality amongst those Americans hitherto reluctant to face unwelcome truths.

On 30 December 1813, the British schooner *Bramble* arrived at Annapolis with a letter from British Foreign Secretary Castlereagh, to Secretary of State Monroe, offering the American administration direct peace negotiations at Gothenburg in Sweden, in preference to Russian mediation. Constant awareness of British blockades, damaging both United States overseas trade and government revenue, as well as virtually preventing American naval intervention, may well have made immediate acceptance of

the offer seem attractive, especially when considered with discouraging news of recent American progress in the land war. Disconcertingly outspoken criticisms of the war continued, especially from New England. First reports came from New London, Connecticut, of 'blue lights' being shown at night, apparently by traitors, to warn the British blockading squadrons of vessels attempting to break the blockade of the Thames. These alone might have induced in Madison's Cabinet an increased sense of realism.(172)

The *Bramble* however, had also brought British newspapers. These included official reports of a comprehensive French defeat by Austrian, Prussian, Russian and Saxon Allies at Leipzig, between 16 and 19 October 1813, which frustrated Napoleon's campaign in Germany. Just as British maritime blockade had hindered the American government's communication with potential European allies, this "Battle of the Nations" ended any hope of financial, diplomatic, or military help from France. Furthermore, it also meant that European markets were once again open to British exporters, making the French decrees which had formed the Continental System wholly ineffective. With British manufacturers and processors also importing their raw materials from alternative sources, such as raw cotton supplies from Brazil, adding to what could be smuggled from the southern United States, any further hope of the economic isolation of Britain was clearly unrealistic. As well as stopping Napoleon, the battle of Leipzig appears to have brought Madison to the conclusion that the last parts of the American restrictive system may as well be repealed.

## **Economic Warfare in the Pacific.**

During 1813, in addition to Warren's commercial blockade of the American Atlantic coast, the Royal Navy's economic warfare against the Americans had also been extended into the Pacific. By the end of November, the British government, the Admiralty, and a London financed fur-trading company had achieved their joint ambition to seize American assets in a contested area of Oregon, on the Pacific north-west coast of North America. The decision to attempt this had been taken as long before as the previous March. The British North West Company had successfully convinced the government that the seizure of an American fur-trading settlement on the Columbia river would serve national as well as their commercial interests. As a result, the company storeship *Isaac Todd*, with partner Donald McTavish, had left Portsmouth on 25 March 1813, escorted by the frigate *Phoebe*, 36, commanded by Captain James Hillyar. His sealed orders were to proceed to the settlement known as Fort Astoria, and "totally annihilate any settlement which the Americans may have formed either on the Columbia River or on the neighbouring Coasts".(173) The trading post was named after John Jacob Astor, the same foreign born entrepreneur who had earlier been sponsored by Secretary of the Treasury Gallatin, and who had, in return, raised over \$2m of the \$16m lent to the American government in April 1813. Astor had suspected British intentions, and had in June written two warnings to Secretary of the Navy Jones, but despite having given financial help to the government, had been told that naval resources needed on the Lakes could not now be spared to help him.(174) This may very well have affected his

preparedness to contribute further financial help to Madison's administration when later, the need was even more urgent.

Reinforced with two 18 gunned sloops at Rio de Janeiro by Rear Admiral Manly Dixon in July, Hillyar rounded Cape Horn with his squadron, but lost touch with the *Isaac Todd* en route. Near the equator in October however, Hillyar sent the sloop *Raccoon*, under Commander William Black, onto the Columbia river alone, while diverting himself southward into the Pacific to search for the American heavy frigate *Essex*, known to be preying on the British whaling fleet there.(175) However, before HMS *Raccoon* reached Fort Astoria, McTavish had arrived with a party of seventy-one trappers, and by 12 November had persuaded local Americans to transfer the fort to North West Company ownership.(176) On his arrival on 30 November, Commander Black had only to formalise the arrangement, claiming sovereignty and renaming the settlement Fort George. By mid-December 1813, Black could inform Croker in London that the Americans were "quite broke up", and left with "no settlement whatever on this River or Coast". While provisions lasted he would endeavour to destroy enemy vessels said to be "on Coast and about Islands", in weather which had "set in very bad".(177) As on the other side of the Continent, the Royal Navy's world-wide reach had contributed to the erosion of the American financial capacity to sustain the war it had declared on the predominant naval power. When compared to the cumulative damage to the American economy and its taxable capacity, the loss of an enterprise on the Pacific seaboard is less important, except perhaps in its impact on morale in Madison's administration.

Other aspects of the current economic warfare were also discouraging for the Republican administration. Throughout 1813, the ports of New England, primarily Boston, had remained open to neutral shipping, largely Swedish, Spanish and Portuguese, which Britain had allowed to continue in the hope of widening New England's differences with the rest of the Union. Nonetheless, New England's merchants, shippers and shipyards had suffered a marked decline in trade. Some referred openly to "Mr Madison's War", and had long called the inverted tar barrels on the mastheads of disused vessels, intended to inhibit rotting, as "Madison's nightcaps." (178) Some trade in grain and flour to Canada continued, but by 1813, the re-export of West Indian products from New England in American vessels had fallen by 94.9% since 1811, to only just over 300,000 tons. (179) By 15 December 1813, Boston harbour held 91 ships, 2 barks, 109 brigs and 43 schooners, totalling 245 vessels excluding coasters, an accumulation Mahan attributes to the "lack of employment". (180) Similarly, Niles' *Weekly Register* recorded that from 1 December to 24 December 1813, forty-four vessels were cleared from Boston for abroad, only five of which were American. (181) Evidently, by the end of 1813, even where neutral vessels were still so far allowed, and the cargoes imported in them paid some customs duties, the United States was not paying for its war by taxing foreign trade.

By orders dated 25 January 1814, Warren was to be replaced by Vice- Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, although his command was not to include responsibility for the re-separated West Indian stations. Cochrane was quick to express concern that the volume of apparently neutral trade through



New England ports like Boston could increase to such an extent that duties paid on imports arriving there might make a significant contribution to American fighting funds.(182) Cochrane officially assumed command on 1 April 1814, and promptly took steps to address the problem. The foundations for effective British naval and commercial blockades had been laid under Warren's direction, despite his multi-faceted responsibilities and numerous constraints. How effectively his successor might build on these foundations remained to be seen.

One measure of the effectiveness of the British blockades under Warren might be the amount of prize money made during his United Command. His estimated earnings of almost £100,000, including flag-money shared with junior flag-officers, were exceeded by very few commanders in other contemporary theatres.(183) Warren's earnings apparently became one of his major concerns, and so accurately reflected the intensity of the British commercial blockade. Warren's reputation for avarice again surfaced in the correspondence of his prize agent and flag secretary George Hulbert, who in November 1813, wrote to his brother that Warren was "growing so miserably stingy & parsimonious, that nothing occupies his thoughts but remittances, and it is an increasingly worrying conversation ten times a day." This may have been something of an exaggeration since Hulbert continued that, "but for getting rid of the Flag occasionally, and the prizes having been tumbling in pretty thick, I should desire to quit the concern." This seems improbable since Hulbert too was to make a fortune of perhaps £40,000 while in Warren's employment .(184)



