Crisis XI

from the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 22, 1782

ON THE PRESENT STATE OF NEWS

SINCE the arrival of two, if not three packets, in quick succession, at New-York, from England, a variety of unconnected news has circulated through the country, and afforded as great a variety of speculation.

That something is the matter in the cabinet and councils of our enemies on the other side of the water is certain; that they have run their length of madness, and are under the necessity of changing their measures, may easily be seen into; but to what this change of measures may amount, or how far it may correspond with our interest, happiness and duty, is yet uncertain; and from what we have hitherto experienced, we have too much reason to suspect them in every thing.

I do not address this publication so much to the people of America as to the British ministry, whoever they may be; for if it is their intention to promote any kind of negociation, it is proper they should know before-hand, that the United States have as much honour as bravery; and that they are no more to be seduced from their alliance than their allegiance; that their line of politics is formed and not dependent, like that of their enemy, on chance and accident.

On our part, in order to know, at any time, what the British government will do, we have only to find out what they ought *not* to do, and this last will be their conduct. For ever changing and for ever wrong; too distant from America to improve in circumstances, and too unwise to foresee them; scheming without principle, and executing without probability, their whole line of management has hitherto been blunder and baseness. Every campaign has added to their loss, and every year to their disgrace; till unable to go on, and ashamed to go back, their politics have come to a halt and all their fine prospects to a halter.

Could our affections forgive, or humanity forget the wounds of an infant country, we might, under the influence of a momentary oblivion, stand still and laugh. But they are engraven where no amusement can conceal them, and of a kind for which there is no recompense. Can ye restore to us the beloved dead? Can ye say to the grave, give up the murdered? Can ye obliterate from our memories those who are no more? Think not then to tamper with our feelings by an insidious contrivance, nor suffocate our humanity by seducing us to dishonour.

In January, 1780, I published part of the Crisis, No. VIII. in the Philadelphia news-papers, but did not conclude it in the following papers, and the remainder has lain by me till the present day.

There appeared about that time some disposition in the British cabinet to cease the further prosecution of the war, and as I had formed my opinion, that whenever such a design should take place it would be accompanied by a dishonourable proposition to America respecting France, the remainder of that number, was intended to expose the baseness of any such proposition. But the arrival of the next news from England, declared her determination to go on with the war, and consequently, as the political object I had then in view was not become a subject, it was unnecessary in me to bring it forward, which is the reason it was never published.

The matter which I allude to in the unpublished part I shall now make a quotation of, and apply it as the more enlarged state of things at this day shall make convenient or necessary. It was as follows:

"By the speeches which have appeared from the British parliament, it is easy to perceive to what impolitic and imprudent excesses their passions and prejudices have in every instance carried them during the present war. Provoked at the upright and honorable treaty between America and France, they imagined that nothing more was necessary to be done to prevent its final ratification, than to promise, through the agency of their commissioners (Carlisle, Eden, and Johnstone) a repeal of their once offensive acts of parliament. The vanity of the conceit was as unpardonable as the experiment was impolitic. And so convinced am I of their wrong ideas of America, that I shall not wonder if, in their last stage of political phrenzy, they propose to her to break her alliance with France and enter into one with them. Such a proposition, should it ever be made, and it has been already more than once hinted at in parliament, would discover such a disposition to perfidiousness, and such disregard of honor and morals, as would add the finishing vice to national corruption. — I do not mention this to put America on the watch, but to put England on her guard, that she do not, in the looseness of her heart, envelope in disgrace every fragment of reputation." — Thus far the quotation.

By the complexion of some part of the news which has transpired through the New-York papers, it seems probable that this insidious aera in the British politics is beginning to make its appearance. I wish it may not; for that which is a disgrace to human nature throws something of a shade over all the human character, and each individual feels his share of the wound that is given to the whole.

The policy of Britain has ever been to divide America in some way or other. In the beginning of the dispute, she practised every art to prevent or destroy the union of the States, well knowing that could she once get them to stand singly she could conquer them unconditionally. Failing in this project in America, she renewed it in Europe, and after the alliance had taken place, she made secret offers to France to induce her to give up America; and what is still more extraordinary, she at the same time made propositions to Doctor Franklin, then in Paris, the very court to which she was secretly applying, to draw off America from France. But this is not all.

On the 14th of September, 1778, the British court, thro' their Secretary, Lord Weymouth, made application to the Marquis D'Almadovar, the Spanish Ambassador at London, to "ask the *mediation*," for these were the words of Spain, for the purpose of negotiating a peace with France, leaving America (as I shall hereafter shew) out of the question. Spain readily offered her mediation, and likewise the city of Madrid as the place of conference, but withall proposed that the United States of America should be invited to the treaty, and considered as independent during the time the business was negociating. But this was not the view of England. She wanted to draw France from the war, that she might uninterruptedly pour out all her force and fury upon America; and being disappointed in this plan, as well through the open and generous conduct of Spain, as the determination of France, she refused the mediation she had solicited.

I shall now give some extracts from the justifying memorial of the Spanish court, in which she has set the conduct and character of Britain, with respect to America, in a clear and striking point of light.

The memorial, speaking of the refusal of the British court to meet in conference with Commissioners from the United States, who were to be considered as independent during the time of the conference, says,

"It is a thing very extraordinary and even ridiculous, that the court of London, who treats the colonies as independent, not only in acting, but of right, during the war, should have a repugnance to treat them as such, only in acting during a truce or suspension of hostilities. The Convention of Saratoga; the reputing General Burgoyne as a lawful prisoner, in order to suspend his trial; the exchange and liberation other prisoners made from the colonies; the having named Commissioners to go and supplicate the Americans, at their own doors, request peace of them, and treat with them and the Congress; and finally, by a thousand other acts of this sort, authorized by the court of London, which have been, and are true signs of the acknowledgment of their independence.

"In aggravation of all the foregoing, at the same time the British cabinet answered the King of Spain in the terms already mentioned, they were insinuating themselves at the court of France by means of secret emissaries, and making very great offers to her to abandon the colonies and make peace with England. But there is yet more: For at this same time the English ministry were treating, by means of another certain emissary, with Doctor Franklin, Minister Plenipotentiary from the Colonies, residing at Paris, to whom they made various proposals to disunite them from France, and accommodate matters with England.

"From what has been observed it evidently follows, that the whole of the British politics was to disunite the two courts of Paris and Madrid, by means of the suggestions and offers which she separately made to them; and also to separate the colonies from their treaties and engagements entered into with France, and induce them to arm against the house of Bourbon, *or more probably to oppress them when they found, from breaking their engagements, that they stood alone and without protectors*.

"This, therefore, is the net they laid for the American States; that is to say, to tempt them with flattering and very magnificent promises to come to an accommodation with them, exclusive of any intervention of Spain or France, that the British ministry might always remain the arbiters of the fate of the colonies.

"But the Catholic king (the King of Spain) faithful on the one part of the engagements which bind him to the Most Christian king (the King of France) his nephew; just and upright on the other to his own subjects, whom he ought to protect and guard against so many insults; and finally, full of humanity and compassion for the Americans and other individuals who suffer in the present war; he is determined to pursue and prosecute it, and to make all the efforts in his power, until he can obtain a solid and permanent peace, with full and satisfactory securities that it shall be observed."

Thus far the memorial, a translation of which, into English, may be seen in full, under the head of *State Papers*, in the Annual Register, for 1779, page 367.

The extracts I have here given serve to shew the various endeavours and contrivances of the enemy to draw France from her connection with America, and to prevail on her to make a separate peace with England, leaving America totally out of the question, and at the mercy of a merciless, unprincipled enemy. The opinion, likewise, which Spain has formed of the British Cabinet's character for meanness and perfidiousness, is so exactly the opinion of America respecting it, that the memorial, in this instance, contains our own sentiments and language; for people, however remote, who think alike, will unavoidably speak alike.

Thus we see the insidious use which Britain endeavoured to make of the propositions for a peace under the mediation of Spain. I shall now proceed to the second propositions under the mediation of the Emperor of Germany and the Empress of Russia; the general out-line of which was, that a Congress of the several powers at war should meet at Vienna, in 1781, to settle preliminaries of peace.

I could wish myself at liberty to make use of all the information which I am possessed of on this subject, but as there is a delicacy in the matter, I do not conceive it prudent, at least at present, to make references and quotations in the same manner as I have done with respect to the mediation of Spain, who published the whole proceedings herself; and, therefore, what comes from me, on this part of the business, must rest on my own credit with the public, assuring them, that when the whole proceedings, relative to the proposed Congress of Vienna, shall appear, they will find my account not only true but studiously moderate.

We know at the time this mediation was on the carpet, the expectations of the British King and Ministry ran high with respect to the conquest of America. The English packet which was taken with the mail on board, and carried into l'Orient in France, contained letters from Lord G. Germaine to Sir Henry Clinton, which expressed in the fullest terms the ministerial idea of a total conquest. Copies of those letters were sent to congress and published in the News-papers of last year. Colonel Laurens brought over the originals, some of which, signed in the hand writing of the then Secretary, Germaine, are now in my possession.

Filled with these high ideas, nothing could be more insolent towards America than the language of the British court on the proposed mediation. A peace with France and Spain she anxiously solicited, but America, as before, should be left to her mercy; neither would she hear any proposition for admitting an Agent from the United States into the Congress of Vienna.

On the other hand, France, with an open, noble and manly determination, and a fidelity of a good Ally, would hear no proposition for a separate peace, nor even meet in congress at Vienna, without an Agent from America: and likewise, that the independent character of the United States, represented by the Agent, should be fully and unequivocally defined and settled before any conference should be entered on. The reasoning of the court of France on the several propositions of the two Imperial courts, which relate to us, is rather in the stile of an American than an ally; and she advocated the cause of America as if she had been America herself. — Thus the second mediation, like the first, proved ineffectual.

But since that time a reverse of fortune has overtaken the British arms, and all their high expectations are dashed to the ground. The noble exertions to the southward under

General Greene; the successful operations of the allied arms in the Chesapeake; the loss of most of their islands in the West-Indies, and Minorca in the Mediterranean; the persevering spirit of Spain against Gibraltar; the expected capture of Jamaica; the failure of making a separate peace with Holland, and the expence of an hundred millions sterling, by which all these fine losses were obtained, have read them a loud lesson of disgraceful misfortune, and necessity has called on them to change their ground.

In this situation of confusion and despair their present councils have no fixed character. It is now the hurricane months of British politics. Every day seems to have a storm of its own, and they are scudding under the bare poles of hope. Beaten, but not humbled, condemned, but not penitent, they act like men trembling at fate and catching at a straw. — From this convulsion in the entrails of their politics, it is more than probable that the mountain groaning in labour will bring forth a mouse as to its size, and a monster in its make. They will try on America the same insidious arts they tried on France and Spain.

We sometimes experience sensations to which language is not equal. The conception is too bulky to be born alive, and in the torture of thinking we stand dumb. Our feelings, imprisoned by their magnitude, find no way out, and, in the struggle of expression, every finger tries to be a tongue. The machinery of the body seems too little for the mind, and we look about for helps to shew our thoughts by. — Such must be the sensation of America, whenever Britain, steaming with corruption, shall propose to her to sacrifice her faith.

But exclusive of the wickedness, there is a personal offence contained in every such attempt. It is calling us villains: for no man asks the other to act the villain, unless he believes him inclined to be one. No man attempts to seduce the truly modest woman. It is the supposed looseness of her mind that starts the thoughts of seduction, and he who offers it calls her a prostitute. Our pride is always hurt by the same propositions which offend our principles; for when we are shocked at the crime, we are wounded by the suspicion of our compliance.

Could I convey a thought that might serve to regulate the public mind, I would not make the interest of the alliance the basis of defending it. All the world are moved by interest, and it affords them nothing to boast of. But I would go a step higher, and defend it on the ground of honor and principle. That our public affairs have flourished under the alliance, that it was wisely made and has been nobly executed, that by its assistance we are enabled to preserve our country from conquest and expel those who sought our destruction, that it is our true interest to maintain it unimpaired, and that while we do so no enemy can conquer us, are matters which experience has taught us, and the common good of ourselves, abstracted from principles of faith and honor, would lead us to maintain the connection.

But over and above the mere letter of the alliance, we have been nobly and generously treated, and have had the same respect and attention paid to us, as if we had been an old established country. To oblige and be obliged is fair work among mankind, and we want an opportunity of shewing to the world that we are a people sensible of kindness and worthy of confidence. Character is to us, in our present circumstances, of more importance than interest. We are a young nation just stepping upon the stage of public life, and the eye of the world is upon us to see how we act. We have an enemy who is watching to destroy our reputation, and who will go any length to gain some evidence against us, that may serve to render our conduct suspected, and our character odious; because, could she accomplish this, wicked as it is, the world would withdraw from us, as from a people not to be trusted, and our task would then become difficult.

There is nothing sets the character of a nation in a higher or lower light with others, than the faithfully fulfilling, or perfidiously breaking of treaties. They are things not to be tampered with: and should Britain, which seems very probable, propose to seduce America into such an act of baseness, it would merit from her some mark of unusual detestation. It is one of those extraordinary instances in which we ought not to be contented with the bare negative of Congress, because it is an affront on the multitude as well as on the government. It goes on the supposition that the public are not honest men, and that they may be managed by contrivances, though they cannot be conquered by arms. But, let the world and Britain know that we are neither to be bought nor sold. That our mind is great and fixed; our prospect clear; and that we will support our character as firmly as our independence.

But I will go still further. General Conway, who made the motion in the British Parliament, for discontinuing *offensive* war in America, is a gentleman of an amiable character. We have *no* personal quarrel with him. But he feels not as we feel; he is not in our situation, and that alone, without any other explanation, is enough.

The British Parliament suppose they have many friends in America, and that, when all chance of conquest is over, they will be able to draw her from her alliance with France. Now, if I have any conception of the human heart, they will fail in this more than in any thing that they have yet tried.

This part of the business is not a question of politics only, but of honor and honesty; and the proposition will have in it something so visibly low and base, that their partizans, if they have any, will be ashamed of it. Men are often hurt by a mean action, who are not startled at a wicked one, and this will be such a confession of inability, such a declaration of servile thinking, that the scandal of it will ruin all their hopes.

In short, we have nothing to do but to go on with vigour and determination. The enemy is yet in our country. They hold New-York, Charlestown, and Savannah, and the very being in those places is an offence, and a part of offensive war, and until they can be driven from, or captured in them, it would be folly in us to listen to an idle tale. — I take it for granted that the British Ministry are sinking under the impossibility of carrying on the war. Let them then come to a fair and open peace with France, Spain, Holland and America, in the manner they ought to do; but until then we can have nothing to say to them.

COMMON SENSE.