The First Presidency

* 1. The new republic of the United States of America was not without its challenges. The new government created by the Constitution was now able to collect taxes, and it desperately needed to do so in order to pay off the large amounts of debt created by borrowing during the revolutionary war. One of these taxes was on homemade whisky being manufactured by farmers on the western edge of the colonies.
  2. Sadly, many of these farmers were the very same men who had fought as soldiers in the Continental Army through the long years of the revolutionary war, often without enough pay or equipment from the Second Continental Congress. Now the new Congress was trying to tax one of their best ways of making money, after they had fought a war to free themselves from taxation without representation. It was a small wonder that they chose to once again take up arms in the fight that would be known as the Whisky Rebellion.
  3. The new federal government claimed that the new taxes were legitimate, and that the farmers *were* represented in the Congress that had passed the new tax laws: very locally by representatives in the congressional house, and more indirectly through state senators in the Senate. The farmers instead argued that they were not truly represented in the congress, and by refusing to pay the tax they were upholding the ideals of the revolution.
  4. The real question was what President Washington would do about it. In a sense, these were his own men who were taking up arms against his own government. Where would his loyalties lie? Washington's first response was to send peace commissioners to persuade the leaders of the rebellion to back down. When this failed to resolve the conflict, he invoked a law that required states to supply soldiers from their militias. The resulting force of 13000 men was commanded by Washington himself, but by the time his Army arrived, most of the rebels had quit and gone back home. In the end, only a few men were rounded up for trial, only two were convicted, and Washington pardoned those before they could be hung.
  5. Overall, the Whisky Tax had been a failure...not much money had been collected from it, and it had only created discord. At the same time, the Rebellion had shown that the new national government was able to pass unpopular measures and also was willing to back its rights to do so through force. The first major internal challenge to the national union had passed.
  6. On the global stage, the world was rapidly changing. Great Britain may have ended the war with the U.S., but it was still funding and arming the nations of Native Indians along the new nation's western frontier. By 1790, the United States was effectively losing the war with the Native Tribes, which were led by the trio of War chiefs: Tecumseh, Little Turtle and Blue Jacket. The next few years would see the U.S. put armies in the field to fight that would be for the most part destroyed in detail due to a lack of training, poor tactics, and bad strategy.
  7. In the meantime, Europe was experiencing its own crisis. Ironically, the very kingdom that had assisted the United States in breaking away from its monarchy during the revolutionary war was now experiencing its own revolution, and many of the men who had assisted the U.S. in gaining independence were at risk of imprisonment and death. This led to tension in the U.S., where some argued that as a democracy, America had an obligation to assist the rebels in France. Others argued that the U.S. owed too much to the French king and the nobility that had aided them so much in gaining their freedom.
  8. Washington chose a third path. Convinced that the U.S. was still too weak to risk alliances with anyone else, he cautioned that we should be kept free of "Foreign Entanglements." This would keep the U.S. out of war, but at the same time, the new republic stood by and watched silently as the king who was likely the single man the most responsible for the current existence of the United States as an independent nation was tried, convicted, and executed. King Louis XVI's death would launch the period in Paris known as the Reign of Terror, and the U.S. would start drifting away from its friendship with France as the bloody excesses of the French Revolution got underway.
  9. A happy effect of this was that as relationships with France grew strained, the relationship with Britain improved. By 1794, a new American Army was in the field to fight the Indians under the command of General "Mad" Wayne, and the British were withdrawing support from their Native Allies. In the end, Wayne trained his men to fight Indian-style, and gradually took back land by defeating the natives and constructing a series of forts to hold the area against attack. By the year 1795, the British had signed the Jay Treaty that surrendered control of the western frontier to the U.S., and soon after the Native tribes would also sign a treaty at Greenville where they surrendered most of their land before retreating west out of Ohio and a part of the Indiana Territory.
  10. The Jay Treaty had been a long time in coming. After the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War, the British had not completely honored their promises. They had kept up a series of western forts and forts along the Great Lakes. They had continued to support Natives against the nascent U.S.A., and they were not allowing American merchant ships to trade freely with Britain's enemies like France. To resolve these issues, Washington sent the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to negotiate a solution in Great Britain. By 1795, relationships had soured with France, and Britain was willing to make concessions.
  11. The final challenges during Washington's second 4-year term as President were both foreign. In the Mediterranean, nations in the north of Africa had the practice of sending ships out to attack and capture merchant vessels. They would seize and sell the trade goods, and then sell the resulting prisoners as slaves or ransom them back to their nations. These nations were collectively known as the Barbary Pirates. In order to protect U.S. merchants around the world, it was deemed necessary to have a Navy to protect U.S. ships. Washington signed the Naval Act of 1794, thereby authorizing the design and construction of 6 of the most advanced warships of the age: American Frigates.
  12. His second challenge was dealing with Spain. The Spanish had assisted the U.S. during the Revolutionary War in order to hurt the British, but since then had used their control of Florida and the Mississippi River to arm Natives and prevent the U.S. from expanding. Under Washington, the Pickney Treaty was signed that opened up trade on the Mississippi to the U.S., established a clear border between Spanish Florida and the United States, and ceded some territory to the growing American Republic. By the time Washington left office, many of the global risks seemed less severe, and the new Nation was on firm footing. He left office warning the nation to avoid alliances and foreign entanglements, although in many ways the greatest successes of his administration had been in the creation of treaties and agreements. If anything, the real problem he left behind was a radical split in his own government. Washington had been larger than life, ultimately a pragmatist, and was bigger than the idea of political parties. His successors were not so broad minded. The war between the Federalists and the Jeffersonians was about to begin.

Answer the following questions using the SARs format.

1. What were the general causes and effects of the Whisky Rebellion?

2. Explain three of the major foreign policy challenges the Washington Administration encountered, and explain how each was resolved.

3. Explain the situation for France during this period. Why were these results awkward for the U.S.?

4. What was the intent and the effects of the Jay Treaty? The Greenfield Treaty?

5. What were the final challenges during Washington's administration, and how were they addressed?