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British Indian Policy in the Northwest, 1807-1812

BY REGINALD HORSMAN

The partisan view that British agents were the sole cause of Indian discontent in the period before 1812 has rightly been subjected to considerable criticism in recent years. Historians have pointed out that had there been no British in Canada, the United States would still have been beset with the same Indian problem. It was the advance of the American frontier, not a secret British conspiracy, that caused the Indian to take to the warpath. The pertinent question is not, "Did the British cause the Indian discontent?" but rather, "To what extent did they take advantage of a discontent that already existed?" Unfortunately, the necessity of combating partisan views has prevented a completely adequate answer to this far more relevant question.

Between the years 1794 and 1807 British interest in the Indians had undergone a steady decline,¹ and it was not until the turmoil in Anglo-American relations brought about by the *Chesapeake* affair in June, 1807, that the British in Canada once again actively sought the aid of their old allies. The news of the incident, and of the bellicose American reaction, reached Canada in July, and immediately produced a fear of invasion.² This fear prompted British action among the Indians in the years preceding the War of 1812. In the summer and autumn of 1807 the officers of the Indian Department in Canada began the task of regaining the affection of the In-

¹ See Francis Gore to Sir James Craig, April 2, 1808, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* (Lansing), XXV (1896), 240; also Thomas McKee to Prideaux Selby, August 12, 1804, *ibid.*, XXIII (1895), 31-32.

² The best treatment of this effect is Ernest A. Cruikshank, "The *Chesapeake* Crisis as It Affected Upper Canada," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records* (Toronto), XXIV (1927), 281-322. There is very little analysis, but considerable source material. See also Isaac Brock to Thomas Dunn, July 17 and 23, 1807, and Brock to Castlereagh, July 25, 1807, Ferdinand B. Tupper, *Life and Correspondence of Major General Sir Isaac Brock* (London, 1847), 60-63.

dians. Those who had gathered at Amherstburg in the fall for the usual distribution of supplies were warned before they left that they might be summoned in the near future, and messages were sent to the nations west of Lake Michigan asking them to visit the post.³

The formulation of a general policy in the face of the threat of war was the task of the newly appointed governor-in-chief, Sir James Craig, who reached Canada in late October, 1807.⁴ The instructions he issued between December, 1807, and May, 1808, laid the basis of British policy in the vital years before the spring of 1811. They reflected his belief that in the event of war the Indians would not be idle, and that if England did not employ them there was not the slightest doubt that America would.⁵ Craig himself had no desire to precipitate a conflict, but he had to insure that if war came the Indians would flock to the British standard. His problem was to conciliate the Indians without sending them in premature attacks on the American frontier, and without driving the Americans into a war to prevent the Anglo-Indian alliance. His solution to this problem was in effect the suggestion of a dual policy — one public, one private. He apparently thought that the Indians could be kept from actual warfare if the agents could persuade them to join the British cause without any discussion of the possibility of war against the Americans. Thus he advised that in dealing with the Indians the agents should avoid coming to any "explanation," as he termed it, for as long as possible, though he was careful to qualify this with the significant, "at least to any public explanation."⁶

Several weeks later, at the end of December, 1807, the hint that more could be said in private than in public received more definite expression. At this time Craig explained that there was every reason for the British to be successful in wooing the Indians; the long-lasting ties between them, the protection and supplies that Britain could give, and the Indian antipathy toward the Americans, who obviously desired to take their lands, were all conducive to this end.

³ William Claus to Gore, April 20, 1808, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XV (1889), 47-48; Cruikshank, "The Chesapeake Crisis," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records*, XXIV (1927), 286-87.

⁴ Cruikshank, "The Chesapeake Crisis," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records*, XXIV (1927), 288. Sir James Henry Craig was appointed commander of the forces and governor-in-chief in August, 1807. He resigned in November, 1810, because of ill-health, and left for England in the following June.

⁵ Craig to Gore, December 6, 1807, Douglas Brymner (ed.), *Report on the Canadian Archives, 1896* (Ottawa, 1897), Note B, 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

These facts not only should be held up to the Indians in great councils, he said, but they should also be urged privately to some of their leading men. "Two or three gained over to us," he wrote, "will be of more avail than all that can be said in a Council."⁷

The reaction of Francis Gore, the lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, to Craig's instructions helps us to develop this theme further. At the beginning of January, Gore had expressed agreement with Craig's plans, adding that they should take care "not to be too passive."⁸ Toward the end of the month, writing to William Claus, the deputy superintendent of Indian affairs, he formulated more clearly the ideas of the governor-in-chief. Claus was to proceed personally to Amherstburg and assemble the chiefs of the Shawnees and other nations. He was "to consult Privately" with them on the critical situation, and when a favorable opportunity appeared he was to remind them of the "artful and clandestine manner" in which the Americans had taken their lands, and of the fact that the Americans intended ultimately to drive them from the whole country. The dominating theme of these instructions was secrecy. Claus was to establish contact with the Shawnee chief, Captain Johnny, and, if he found him trustworthy, was to use him to communicate confidentially with the other chiefs. He should, if possible, confide in only one interpreter. If he found it necessary to make a speech in public council, he was to limit his remarks to general comments on the wish of the Great Father to remain in friendship and harmony with the Indians.⁹

Thus, by January, 1808, a dual policy was inaugurated by which, in public, very little of importance should be said and the Americans conciliated, while in private the Indians were to be reminded of the sins of the Americans. Within a few weeks the British had intensified this policy, and, surprisingly enough, for reasons unconnected with the danger of American invasion. In May, 1808, because of rumors of Napoleon's desire to re-establish the French

⁷ Craig to Gore, December 28, 1807, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XXV (1896), 232-33.

⁸ Gore to Craig, January 5, 1808, *Report on Canadian Archives, 1896*, Note B, 36. Francis Gore was appointed lieutenant governor of Upper Canada in March, 1806, and arrived at York in August of that year. He requested leave of absence in August, 1810, and returned to England in the autumn of 1811.

⁹ Gore, Secret Instructions to William Claus, January 29, 1808, Cruikshank, "The Chesapeake Crisis," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records*, XXIV (1927), 297-98. Claus, the grandson of Sir William Johnson, had become deputy superintendent of Indian affairs in Upper Canada in 1799.

Empire in America, Craig became alarmed over the possibility of the arrival on the American continent of French forces, who would be more adept than the British at making friends with the Indians.¹⁰ As a result, he came to the conclusion that the Indians were more important than he had thought when he first arrived in North America, and even greater efforts would have to be made to attach them to the British cause. In particular, he suggested that some means might be employed for opening an intercourse "with the nations situated to the Southward."¹¹ Gore, in Upper Canada, was quick to oblige, and in June he replied that trusty and confidential persons would be employed to communicate with the Indians to the south and west.¹² The old bogey of French action in the New World had combined with the fear of American invasion to produce a policy of active secret communication with the tribes in American territory. To be sure, the British policy was to secure allies for a probable future war, not to precipitate war itself, but the policy in action would hardly increase the probability of peace.

In discussing the Anglo-Indian relations of this period it is necessary to realize that carrying on negotiations with the Indians was a vastly different proposition from conducting relations with a sovereign, independent state. The dispatches between England and the governor-in-chief, and between the governor-in-chief and Upper Canada, cannot be treated as though they were a part of a Bismarckian diplomacy. Ultimately, British policy in the Northwest was channeled through two small posts — Amherstburg, near Detroit, and St. Joseph's near Michilimackinac. Amherstburg, the post near the main American line of settlement, was by far the more important of the two,¹³ and it was from this spot on the Detroit River that the official British policy was disseminated to the Indians of the

¹⁰ Craig to David M. Erskine, May 13, 1808; Craig to Edward Cooke, July 15, 1808, *Report on Canadian Archives, 1893*, pp. 10, 13.

¹¹ Craig to Gore, May 11, 1808, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XXV (1896), 245-47. This possibility of French action in the New World had already been voiced in England by Castlereagh. "Memorandum re South America," December 21, 1807, Charles W. Vane (ed.), *Correspondence, Despatches, and other Papers of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry* (12 vols., London, 1848-1853), VIII, 96-100; see also Alfred L. Burt, *The United States, Great Britain, and British North America from the Revolution to the Establishment of Peace after the War of 1812* (New Haven, 1940), 251-52.

¹² Gore to Craig, June 5, 1808, Cruikshank, "The Chesapeake Crisis," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records*, XXIV (1927), 304.

¹³ *Ibid.*, and Gore to Craig, January 5, 1808, *Report on Canadian Archives, 1896*, Note B, 36.

Northwest. Here the Indians came to receive supplies, meet in public council, and talk in confidence to the representatives of their Great Father. The Indian agent, who verbally communicated the policy of his government, held the key to Anglo-Indian relations. He had the responsibility of putting the dispatches from his superiors into language that the Indians could understand, and in doing this he obviously had a power to influence policy far beyond his actual position in government. Working without adequate supervision, his character and prejudices could make or mar a policy as subtle as Craig's, whose instructions had given great powers of discretion to the man on the spot.

At the time of the *Chesapeake* crisis, Thomas McKee, son of the more famous Alexander, was superintendent of Indian affairs at Amherstburg. McKee, however, was apparently seldom sober,¹⁴ and, once it became clear that there was need for intricate negotiations, the officials of Upper Canada began to exert pressure for his removal, and for the appointment of Matthew Elliott.¹⁵ Elliott, who became superintendent at Amherstburg in May, 1808, and who was to hold the key position in Anglo-Indian affairs in the years before 1812, deserves more attention than has hitherto been given to him. An Irishman who had emigrated to America during the French and Indian War, Elliott had spent a lifetime among the Indians. As a trader in western Pennsylvania and Ohio in the 1760's and 1770's, and as a captain in the British Indian Department during the Revolution, he had lived and fought among the tribes of the Northwest, particularly the Shawnees. After the Revolution he had traded and acted as a British agent in western Ohio. Married to a Shawnee woman, and speaking the language fluently, his sympathies were with the Indians. In the years before *Fallen Timbers* he was active in organizing resistance to the Americans.¹⁶ He had

¹⁴ Gore to Craig, January 8, 1808, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XXV (1896), 238. See also Ernest A. Cruikshank (ed.), *Documents Relating to the Invasion of Canada and the Surrender of Detroit, 1812* (Ottawa, 1912), 142 n. Thomas McKee, the son of the famous Indian agent Alexander McKee, had been appointed superintendent at Amherstburg in 1799.

¹⁵ Gore to Craig, January 5, 1808, *Report on Canadian Archives, 1806*, Note B, 36; Gore to Craig, January 8, April 2, 1808, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XXV (1896), 239, 240; Craig to Gore, February 10, 1808, *ibid.*, 237; Claus to Gore, April 20, 1808, *ibid.*, XV (1889), 48; Claus to Selby, February 15, 1808, Craig to Gore, March 10, 1808, Cruikshank, "The *Chesapeake* Crisis," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records*, XXIV (1927), 300-301.

¹⁶ For a brief account of Elliott's early life, see, Alexander Fraser (ed.), "Proceedings of the Loyalist Commissioners, Montreal, 1787, Vol. 20," *Second Report of the*

become superintendent at Amherstburg in 1796 but had been dismissed two years later, after a dispute over irregularities in the issuing of provisions. In spite of repeated petitions, and even a trip to England, Elliott, up to 1808, had not succeeded in obtaining a reversal of this decision.¹⁷

The crisis of 1807-1808 found Elliott living in considerable splendor, with numerous slaves, on his farm at Amherstburg.¹⁸ Elliott himself could not have relished the prospect of an American invasion. The Americans hated him. When he visited Detroit in October, 1807, in a futile attempt to recover some of his escaped slaves, who, along with others from Amherstburg, had been formed into a renegade company of militia by the Americans, he had to return home by a devious route to avoid being tarred and feathered. And, in November, reports came from American sources that if war came Canada would be invaded and Elliott, among others, would surely be put to death.¹⁹ It is not really surprising that, even before his reappointment, he entered on voluntary service for Claus. When Claus arrived at Amherstburg in February, 1808, in accordance with Gore's orders, and found no one he could trust among more than six hundred Indians assembled there, he naturally turned to Elliott. A messenger recommended by Elliott was sent to the Auglaize to ask the Shawnee chiefs and the Prophet to come to the post.²⁰ In March these chiefs, though not the Prophet, arrived, and Claus, following Craig's instructions, held a private meeting with three of them. He told them that the British were trying to preserve peace, and that if these efforts failed their friend Elliott would send for them. He also told them how the Indians were being cheated out

Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario, 1904 (Toronto, 1905), Part 2, pp. 985-87. See also, Reuben G. Thwaites and Louise P. Kellogg (eds.), *Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777-1778* (Madison, 1912), 249-50 n; Ernest A. Cruikshank (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lieutenant-General John Graves Simcoe* (5 vols., Toronto, 1923-1931), *passim*.

¹⁷ For the correspondence concerning this dispute and Elliott's efforts to obtain reinstatement, see *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XII (1888), 268-70, 300-301; XX (1892), 519-669 *passim*; XXV (1896), 155-216 *passim*.

¹⁸ An excellent description of Elliott's house and farm is in Isaac Weld, *Travels through the States of North America and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada during the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797* (London, 1799), 349. See also Hector McLean to James Green, September 14, 1797, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XX (1892), 538.

¹⁹ *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XXXVI (1908), 181-89, 201-205; XV (1889), 42. See also McKee to Selby, December 4, 1807, *ibid.*, XXIII (1895), 42-43.

²⁰ Claus to Gore, February 14, 1808, *ibid.*, XXIII (1895), 45; also, Claus to Gore, February 27, 1808, *ibid.*, XV (1889), 44-45.

of their lands by the Americans.²¹ When Gore reported this visit to Craig, he spoke of the great attachment of the Shawnees to Elliott.²²

The reason for the frequent occurrence of Elliott's name in these negotiations is not hard to understand. He had a connection with the Shawnees stretching back over forty years, and he naturally maintained it in spite of his dismissal in 1798. Two Shawnee chiefs — the Bonner (who, along with Tecumseh and Blackfish, was reputed to have been first in General Arthur St. Clair's camp in 1791)²³ and the Berry — had lived with Elliott at Amherstburg in the early years of the century.²⁴ An Elliott underling, the half-breed interpreter Frederick Fisher, was established at Greenville in 1806.²⁵ Thus, in December, 1807, when Craig asked Gore for information about the Prophet, and suggested that he might be bought, Gore was able to reply that Elliott was personally acquainted with him.²⁶

Although the Prophet did not come into Amherstburg with the Shawnee chiefs in March, 1808, he did send a message of friendship through Fisher, who had just been reappointed as interpreter.²⁷ Elliott himself, after having served voluntarily through the earlier part of 1808, finally regained his position in May. Craig, who had been under constant pressure from Upper Canada to reappoint him, finally yielded when he decided there was a French as well as an American threat in the New World.²⁸ Shortly after Elliott took over as Indian superintendent, in June, Tecumseh came to the post in place of his brother, who had been summoned again in May. Claus, who was still at Amherstburg co-operating with Elliott, had three hours of private conversation with Tecumseh and four other

²¹ Claus to Selby, March 25, 1808, *ibid.*, XV (1889), 45-46, and "Proceedings of a Private Meeting with the Shawenoes," *ibid.*, XXV (1896), 242-45.

²² Gore to Craig, April 8, 1808, *ibid.*, XXV (1896), 245.

²³ Account of Thomas Forsyth, Draper Manuscripts (State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 8YY54.

²⁴ Hector McLean to James Green, August 8, 1799, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XX (1892), 656; also, Thomas Ridout's narrative of his captivity by the Shawnees, in Lady Matilda Edgar (ed.), *Ten Years of Upper Canada in Peace and War, 1805-1815; Being the Ridout Letters* (Toronto, 1890), 370.

²⁵ Account of John Johnston, Draper MSS., 11YY17; also, *ibid.*, 1YY24, and 3YY60.

²⁶ Gore to Craig, January 5, 1808, *Report on Canadian Archives, 1896*, Note B, 37.

²⁷ Claus to Selby, May 3, 1808, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XV (1889), 49; also, Claus to Gore, May 22, 1808, *ibid.*, XXIII (1895), 62.

²⁸ Craig to Gore, May 11, 1808, *ibid.*, XXV (1896), 246.

members of his band.²⁹ Craig's policy, transmitted by Gore, of innocuous speeches in public and weighty meetings with influential chiefs in private, was proceeding smoothly by the summer of 1808. As he had desired, confidential intercourse had been opened with the nations to the south, and efforts were still being made to communicate with the nations to the west. The tribes west of Lake Michigan, to which invitations had been sent in the previous October, had not yet arrived, so yet another messenger was sent to visit them.³⁰ It is not surprising that the American records of this period are filled with references to the British agents working among the Indians.

These activities of 1808, which culminated in the visit of some five thousand Indians to Amherstburg in the fall,³¹ were apparently very satisfactory to Elliott. In February, 1809, he estimated that with only one regular regiment Detroit and all the country between it and the Ohio would soon be in British possession, and the Indians actively in support. Gore thought him too sanguine in his hopes of Indian assistance,³² but Gore had no way of knowing what had been said in private between Elliott and his old friends.

Far away in London, Viscount Castlereagh, the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, had no time to spare for the organization of an Indian policy in Upper Canada. If possible, he wanted Canada defended, but he certainly wanted to give no overt offense to the United States.³³ Far from the scene of affairs, he was obliged to depend upon the policy of the British officials in Canada. In April, 1809, he wrote to Craig agreeing with his principle that, in the event of war, if the British did not use the Indians the Americans would. He was ready therefore to support any temporary arrangements that Craig might make.³⁴ Castlereagh depended on Craig, Craig on Gore, Gore on Claus, and Claus on Elliott, and there was no written proof by which to check the final policy.

Governor Craig's interest in the affairs of the Indian Depart-

²⁹ Claus to Gore, May 22, 1808, *ibid.*, XXIII (1895), 62; also, Diary of Claus, May 16, June 11, 13, 14, July 1, 1808, *ibid.*, 50, 53-57.

³⁰ Claus to Gore, April 20, 1808, *ibid.*, XV (1889), 48.

³¹ Claus to Selby, January 18, 1809, *ibid.*, XXIII (1895), 67.

³² Gore to Craig, February 20, 1809, *ibid.*, XV (1889), 53.

³³ See Castlereagh to the Earl of Chatham, December 31, 1807, Vane (ed.), *Castlereagh Correspondence*, VIII, 104-107.

³⁴ Castlereagh to Craig, April 8, 1809, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XXIII (1895), 69.

ment, which had waned after the excitement of 1808,³⁵ was revived in the fall of 1810. From that time it became increasingly obvious that the Indians were preparing for war on the Americans, and the British felt sure that they would be blamed. Elliott, in October, 1810, had already written of this danger, and in November, when Tecumseh visited Amherstburg and made it plain in his speeches that the Indians were ripe for war, Elliott wrote again, asking for detailed and explicit instructions to regulate his future conduct.³⁶ Since 1808 the British position had changed. In 1808 the British had been afraid that they had lost their influence over the Indians, and that the Indians were not sufficiently embittered against the Americans. In the fall of 1810 these doubts were at an end — the Indians were now anxious for war, and the new problem was how to keep them in check until the British needed them, and yet still retain their friendship.

Craig was now in a most embarrassing position, for if he allowed the Indian Department to follow his own earlier instructions he ran the risk of provoking the Americans into a war that his own government did not want. The result was that, for the first time, Craig was forced to maintain a true neutrality in regard to the Indians and the Americans. Already, before receiving Elliott's request for instructions, he had written to John Philip Morier, the British chargé d'affaires in Washington, asking him to warn the Americans of their danger,³⁷ and now he made a genuine direct effort to prevent the impending Indian war. In his instructions of February, 1811, he stated that the officers of the Indian Department should use every effort to dissuade the Indians from war with the United States, and should make it clear that they could expect no assistance from Great Britain.³⁸ This conduct was above reproach, but one cannot escape the conclusion that in the early months of 1811 Craig was desperately trying to avert hostilities toward which his own policy had contributed.

³⁵ Craig's fear of invasion subsided in the summer of 1808, as did Castlereagh's. See Burt, *United States and Great Britain*, 253.

³⁶ Matthew Elliott to Claus, October 16 and November 16, 1810, and Speech of Tecumseh, November 15, 1810, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XXV (1896), 272-78.

³⁷ See Augustus Foster to James Monroe, December 28, 1811, William R. Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Canadian Relations, 1784-1860* (4 vols., Washington, 1940-1945), I, 608-609. See also Foster to Monroe, June 7, 1812, *ibid.*, 612-13.

³⁸ Craig to Gore, February 2, 1811, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XXV (1896), 280-81.

Perhaps the best proof of this is to turn once again to the visit of Tecumseh to Amherstburg in November, 1810. The first point of interest is that though Elliott wrote for full instructions immediately after Tecumseh's warlike speech, he did not receive them until some four months later.³⁹ Thus Elliott, in treating with the Indians in the annual fall visit of November, 1810, was not guided by Craig's new restrictive policy, and by the next November Tecumseh was among the southern tribes, and Tippecanoe was being fought. Elliott, in writing for instructions, had stated that he realized that he should do nothing overtly, but wondered whether it would not be proper to keep up "the present spirit of resistance."⁴⁰ Available evidence points to the fact that, having to make the decision himself, this was exactly what he did.

Colonel Isaac Brock, military commander in Upper Canada, wrote to Craig in February, 1811, on the subject of the November council. This letter was a condemnation of Elliott. Brock regretted that when the Indians had retired from the council at which they had declared their intention of going to war, they were fully convinced that although they could not look for active co-operation they could rely with confidence upon receiving from the British every requisite of war. How, he asked, could a cold attempt to dissuade the Indians from war be expected to succeed, when the distribution of a liberal quantity of military stores plainly indicated a contrary sentiment? If the Indians determined to commit any acts of hostility in the spring, they would be too far away for the acts to be averted by the British. Elliott, he said, was a good man and well respected by the Indians, but having lived a good deal among them in his youth, "he has naturally imbibed their feelings and prejudices, and partaking in the wrongs they continually suffer, this sympathy made him neglect the considerations of prudence, which ought to have regulated his conduct."⁴¹

Brock was not the first British officer to express his distrust of Elliott and of the Indian Department at Amherstburg. At the time of Elliott's dismissal in 1798, Hector McLean, military com-

³⁹ Gore to Claus, February 26, 1811, *ibid.*, 282, transmitting Craig's letter of February 2.

⁴⁰ Elliott to Claus, November 16, 1810, *ibid.*, 277.

⁴¹ Brock to Craig, February 27, 1811, Tupper, *Life and Correspondence of Brock*, 94-96. Brock, who had been in Canada since 1802, became a major-general in June, 1811, and in October, after the departure of Gore for England, he was given complete command in Upper Canada.

mandant at the post, had been particularly sarcastic over the Department's contact with the Indians. He had stated that the whole of the Indian Department at Amherstburg was connected to the Shawnees "either by Marriage or Concubinage," and that this was the cause of that nation being more troublesome than any other.⁴² He had also attacked the veil of secrecy with which the Department cloaked its affairs, and the fact that the interpreters were all completely under the influence of Elliott.⁴³

Craig joined Brock in reviving this distrust of Elliott in 1811. In fact Brock's letter on the subject was prompted by a confidential letter from Craig. Only two days after issuing definite instructions that the Indians should be restrained, Craig wrote to Brock asking him to have the military officers at the different posts, particularly Amherstburg, report confidentially on what happened at the councils between the Indian agents and the Indians.⁴⁴ Once Craig had decided on a policy of absolute restraint in regard to the Indians, he considered it necessary to spy upon Elliott, though he had given him a free hand for three years. One month later, in March, 1811, Brock communicated Craig's order to Major Taylor at Amherstburg. He repeated large sections of the Governor's letter, and took the opportunity on his own account to warn Taylor about Elliott. "I should be unwilling," Brock wrote, "to place entire dependence, in an affair of such manifest importance, upon a judgement biassed and prejudiced, as his is known to be, in every thing that regards the Indians. To act with due prudence, he participates in and feels too keenly the grievous wrongs they have suffered."⁴⁵

It may justly be observed that dependence had been placed on Elliott in this matter for some three vital years, and whereas supervision might have been useful in 1808, it was a little late in 1811. What was said in confidence between Elliott and Tecumseh in November, 1810, or earlier, will never be known. It is known, however, that in the following summer Tecumseh visited the southern

⁴² McLean to Green, August 27, 1799, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XII (1888), 305.

⁴³ McLean to Green, September 14, and October 9, 1797, *ibid.*, XX (1892), 535-39, 554-55; and "Remarks Submitted to the Commander in Chief relating to the Indian Department," November 10, 1797, *ibid.*, 571-74.

⁴⁴ Craig to Brock, February 4, 1811, David B. Read, *Life and Times of Major-General Sir Isaac Brock* (Toronto, 1894), 69-70.

⁴⁵ Brock to Taylor, March 4, 1811, Tupper, *Life and Correspondence of Brock*, 96-98.

tribes, and on that trip he was very confident of British assistance.⁴⁶ To what extent Elliott was conversant with Tecumseh's plans, then or earlier, remains an open question.

British Indian policy in the second half of 1811 and the first half of 1812 is perhaps best considered as an immediate prologue to the war itself, for the Indians during most of this time were in practically open warfare. In the fall of 1811 the British officials in Canada were engaged in energetically preparing for a war, which they now thought inevitable.⁴⁷ They again became convinced that they could not risk the alienation of the Indians, and by the close of 1811 Craig's newly adopted policy of perfect neutrality began to crumble.

At the beginning of December, 1811, Brock, who had become civil as well as military commander in Upper Canada in October, wrote an urgent letter to the new governor-in-chief, Sir George Prevost. Brock argued that Madison's warlike message to Congress justified the taking of every precaution, and he submitted his views on the state of Upper Canada. It was to the Amherstburg district that Brock attached primary importance, and he believed that the military force there would have to be increased. In the event of war he thought that it would be necessary for the British to reduce Detroit and Michilimackinac in order to convince the Indians that the war was being waged in earnest.⁴⁸

Prevost's reply to Brock is significant in showing to what extent he immediately returned to the Indian policy adopted by Craig in a similar crisis at the end of 1807. His instructions copied, at times word for word, the instructions issued by Craig on his arrival in Canada. Prevost wished the Indians to be attached to the British cause, but urged that if possible all "direct explanation" should be delayed until hostilities were more certain. Yet, whenever the subject of hostilities was mentioned, it was to be intimated that, as a matter of course, the British would expect the aid of their old

⁴⁶ See Draper MSS., 4YY *passim*, for Tecumseh's visit to the southern tribes; also Benjamin Drake, *The Life of Tecumseh and His Brother the Prophet* (Cincinnati, 1852), 144.

⁴⁷ See *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XV (1889), 54-61, 63-66, 68-83, 85-87, for letters detailing this activity from August, 1811, to May, 1812. See also Tupper, *Life and Correspondence of Brock*, 147-78, for information on Brock's preparations for war.

⁴⁸ Brock to Prevost, December 2, 1811, Tupper, *Life and Correspondence of Brock*, 123-30. Prevost became governor-in-chief and commander of the forces in British North America in October, 1811.

allies. "I am sensible this requires delicacy," wrote Prevost, "still it should be done so as not to be misunderstood."⁴⁹ The governor-in-chief had little to fear, for at the beginning of 1812 Elliott was able to report from Amherstburg that the majority of Indians from the St. Croix to the Wabash were on the side of the British.⁵⁰

The urgent letter written by Brock had clearly expressed his belief that, in the event of war, Detroit and Michilimackinac would have to be taken by the British.⁵¹ In January, 1812, British officials entered into discussions with the great fur companies — the North West and the South West — which had great influence in the area west of Lake Michigan, in an attempt to enlist their aid in at least the capture of Michilimackinac. The companies were not slow in offering their support. They reported to Prevost that they would "enter with zeal into any measure of Defence, or even offence, that may be proposed to them." The companies were confident of their influence over the Indians, and in the event of war promised the assistance both of their own men and of their Indian allies.⁵²

The British clearly realized that in the vast area west of Lake Michigan it was necessary to depend upon the co-operation of the fur trading interests. Robert Dickson, foremost British trader on the upper Mississippi, volunteered his services before leaving for his winter quarters in that area,⁵³ and during the winter he apparently did all he could to counter American efforts to gain control of the Indians. He was aided in this by the long, harsh winter of 1811-1812, which made the Indians dependent upon him for supplies. Inspired by both humanitarian and political motives, Dickson capitalized on the opportunity by distributing a large quantity of stores.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Prevost to Brock, December 24, 1811, *ibid.*, 133-35; cf. Craig to Gore, December 6, 1807, *Report on Canadian Archives, 1896*, Note B, 30-32.

⁵⁰ Ernest A. Cruikshank, "The Employment of Indians in the War of 1812," American Historical Association, *Annual Report, 1895* (Washington, 1896), 324.

⁵¹ Brock to Prevost, December 2, 1811, Tupper, *Life and Correspondence of Brock*, 125-27.

⁵² A. Gray to Prevost, January 13, 1812, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XV (1889), 70-72; Memoranda from the North West and the Michilimackinac Companies, January 13, and 31, 1812, *ibid.*, 68-69; Brock to Edward Baynes, February 12, 1812, Read, *Life and Times of Brock*, 93.

⁵³ Ernest A. Cruikshank, "The Military Career and Character of Major-General Sir Isaac Brock," New York State Historical Association, *Proceedings* (Albany), VIII (1909), 73.

⁵⁴ Statement of Robert Dickson, December 3, 1812, William H. Wood (ed.), *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812* (4 vols., Toronto, 1920-1928), I, 426-27.

The British officials were well aware of Dickson's value, and in February, 1812, a list of confidential questions was sent to him, asking for the number of Indians he could muster in the event of war, and the supplies they would need.⁵⁵ This letter, telling much of the primitive nature of frontier communications, did not actually reach Dickson until the early part of June, when he was at the Fox-Wisconsin portage, returning east from his winter quarters.⁵⁶ He replied on June 18, the day Madison was signing the declaration of war, that he had some two hundred and fifty or three hundred Indians ready to march when necessary. They would be ready at St. Joseph's by about the thirtieth of the month.⁵⁷ Dickson's aid insured the British of support from the western Indians at the strategic position at the outbreak of war.

In the winter of 1811-1812, while Dickson was working in the west, British officials in Upper Canada were still endeavoring to secure the full co-operation of the Indians south of the Great Lakes. Matters were complicated by the fact that a slight rift had begun to appear between the governor-in-chief, Prevost, and the official actually responsible for the defense of Upper Canada, Isaac Brock. Though Prevost had inaugurated his term as governor-in-chief in December, 1811, by reviving Craig's instructions of four years before, he did not elaborate these instructions in 1812 as Craig had in 1808. In the case of Prevost, the receipt of instructions from England in January, 1812, strongly urging him to avoid offending the United States, made him far more cautious in 1812 than Craig had been four years before.⁵⁸ Brock, however, who was anxious for the safety of Upper Canada, chafed under the restrictions imposed upon the Indian Department. He warned Prevost that each time the Indian officers advised peace and withheld ammunition British in-

⁵⁵ Confidential Letter to Dickson, February 27, 1812, *ibid.*, 423.

⁵⁶ John B. Glegg to Baynes, November 11, 1812, *ibid.*, 421. The Americans at Chicago detained a messenger from Amherstburg to Dickson on May 1, but the Indians with him escaped with the message. See Matthew Irwin to the Secretary of War, May 15, 1812, Clarence E. Carter (ed.), *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, Vol. XVI, *The Territory of Illinois, 1809-1814* (Washington, 1948), 221-22; Deposition of Francis Reheam, May 1, 1812, *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, *The Territory of Louisiana-Missouri, 1806-1814* (Washington, 1949), 574-75; Ninian Edwards to the Secretary of War, May 26 and August 4, 1812, Ninian W. Edwards, *History of Illinois from 1778 to 1833: and Life and Times of Ninian Edwards* (Springfield, Ill., 1870), 324.

⁵⁷ Wood (ed.), *Select British Documents*, I, 424.

⁵⁸ Prevost to Lord Liverpool, January 13, 1812, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XXV (1892), 291; see also Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence: Canadian Relations*, I, 613 n.

fluence would diminish, until it was lost altogether.⁵⁹ Prevost, on the other hand, asked him to exercise forbearance, as England did not wish to commit any overt act which would give the Americans justification for war.⁶⁰

Throughout the spring of 1812 the same pattern continued. Prevost, anxious not to provoke war, urged caution, while Brock and the members of the Indian Department tried, as secretly as possible, to prepare the Indians for war.⁶¹ They were apparently confident of success, for in May a Canadian visitor to Francis Gore in London learned that Gore had received letters from the Indian Department in Upper Canada, and the visitor came away with the impression that "the Indians are all on our side."⁶²

At the beginning of the war friendly Indians were converging on the British posts both in the west at St. Joseph's, and in the east at Amherstburg. In early June, news was brought down from Detroit to Fort Wayne that the Indians were crossing over to Amherstburg in large numbers, and it was believed that some 1,800 were already gathered at the post.⁶³ Claus himself arrived at Amherstburg on June 14, and was able to transmit to Brock a message from Tecumseh, with whom Brock had communicated during the winter. Tecumseh expressed disgust at the rash action of the Indians while he was away — they had acted before his plans were fully matured — but now he himself seemed ready for war, and impatient for the British to engage in open warfare with the United States.⁶⁴ On June 20 the Indian agent at Fort Wayne reported that Tecumseh

⁵⁹ Brock to Prevost, February 25, 1812, Wood (ed.), *Select British Documents*, I, 169-71.

⁶⁰ Baynes to Brock, March 19, 1812, Tupper, *Life and Correspondence of Brock*, 159-61.

⁶¹ Prevost to Brock, April 30, 1812, *ibid.*, 171-72; Prevost to Brock, March 31, 1812, *Report on Canadian Archives, 1896*, Note B, 67-68; Brock to Prevost, May 15, 1812, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XV (1889), 85-86; Brock to Liverpool, May 25, 1812, Francis L. Bickley (ed.), *Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission on the MSS of Earl Bathurst* (London, 1923), 174-75.

⁶² Thomas G. Ridout to his father, May 23, 1812, Edgar (ed.), *Ten Years of Upper Canada*, 114. Gore had returned to England on leave of absence in the fall of 1811.

⁶³ B. F. Stickney to the Secretary of War, June 7, 1812, Letter Book of the Fort Wayne Indian Agency (William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan), 91. Stickney at this period was concerned with the activities of a suspected emissary of Elliott near Fort Wayne. See John Johnston to William Hull, May 25, 1812, Stickney to Elliott, May 30, 1812, Stickney to Hull, June 20, 1812, Stickney to Johnston, June 22, 1812, *ibid.*, 82-86, 95, 97.

⁶⁴ Claus to Brock, June 16, 1812, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, XV (1889), 88-90.

had visited the post three days earlier on his way to Amherstburg to get powder and lead.⁶⁵

The vital years in Anglo-Indian relations in this period were those from mid-1807 to the outbreak of open warfare between the Indians and the Americans in the fall of 1812. The fundamental cause of this conflict was the Indian realization that the advance of the American frontier was depriving them of their way of life. Yet it is apparent that the policy of the British officials in Canada had contributed to the Indian discontent, and had helped the organization of Indian resistance to the Americans. Governor Craig apparently thought that his agents could with one hand sketch the American design to appropriate the Indian lands, and with the other hold back the Indians in readiness for the defense of Canada. To undertake this complex task he consented, under pressure, to the appointment of an agent who, in the words of Brock, was "biassed and prejudiced . . . in every thing that regards the Indians." When we consider this in relation to the rapid encroachment of the Americans on the Indian lands, it is perhaps not surprising that by the fall of 1810 the Indians were ripe for war.

Craig did not desire to precipitate a war with the Americans, but in order to win the support of the Indians for the defense of Canada he gave his agents the power to communicate in secrecy with the Indians within American territory. Prevost, in the months preceding the war, faced the same difficulties as Craig. To insure Indian support he was obliged to delegate authority, and in delegating authority he reduced his own ability to maintain a true neutrality along the American border. Arguments used by the British to convince the Indians that they should fight at a future date for the defense of Canada could also be used by the Indians as reasons for offensive warfare against the Americans. The Indians accepted support and encouragement from Canada, but their needs were offensive as well as defensive, and the British in the period 1807 to 1812, as in earlier years, discovered that the Indians had a remarkable will of their own.

⁶⁵ Stickney to Hull, June 20, 1812, Letter Book of the Fort Wayne Indian Agency, 94-96.