

# Commodore perry's journey to japan

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After the conclusion of the War of 1812 and prior to the Civil War, the United States Navy entered into a peacetime role. Initially, this role was to protect commerce trading in both inland and international waterways. However, that role was soon expanded upon with Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry's journey to Japan. The journey had its immediate impact, including the signing of a comprehensive treaty that established trade relations with Japan and provided protection for sailors and their ships. Perry's expedition also had the impact of serving as a precursor for the change in what the Navy's responsibilities encompassed, which even carry on to the present day Navy. Commodore Perry left for Japan with the objectives of opening up Japanese ports to trade and ensuring American presence and protection in East Asia. These terms were outlined in "detailed instructions from the Secretary of the Navy John P. Kennedy, diplomatic instructions from the State Department, and a letter from President Millard Fillmore to the Emperor of Japan" 2 that Perry carried with him on his voyage.

From beginning to end Perry's voyage lasted nine months and was filled with trials and tribulations. The Japanese were initially turned off to the idea of Americans entering their country, and would not even let them step on land. Only twice did Perry and his squadron come ashore in the nine months prior to the signing of the official treaty. Most of the negotiations took place upon various ships in Perry's control and the meetings were often difficult to coordinate.

Based on notes from Perry's personal journal, these complications often lead to frustration and Perry was constantly considering employing "whole force" that he was granted to use if he deemed it necessary to achieve his goals. 3

However, this was ultimately unnecessary, and Perry did well to remind himself that his voyage was diplomatic and pacific in nature. The negotiations were an arduous process and Perry even left Japan returning later with twice as many ships, anticipating a struggle. This was unnecessary as the Japanese agreed to Perry's desires and the "black ships" saw no combat.

With the agreement of the Japanese the Treaty of Kanagawa was drafted and subsequently signed on 31 March 1854. This treaty allowed for a U. S. consul to be created at Shimoda, and allowed access to the ports of Hakodate and Shimoda for the purpose of obtaining "wood, water, provisions, and coal, and other articles their necessities may require." The treaty also required that "whenever ships of the United States are thrown or wrecked on the coast of Japan, the Japanese vessels will assist them, and carry their crews to Shimoda. Thirdly, men staying in Shimoda and Hakodate, or any seamen shipwrecked shall be free and "shall not be subject to...restrictions and confinement." <sup>4</sup>Although there was not a formal agreement on trade in these open ports, Perry assumed correctly that with an American presence in port, trade would come naturally. <sup>5</sup> The initial impact of Perry's expedition and the treaty with Japan gave the United States Navy many new roles and an international presence on the high seas. Japan had been a country focused on isolationism for centuries. This isolationism is mainly connected to the zeal of early missionaries who traveled to Japan.

The United States was able to avert this conflict in values by Commodore Perry's outright statement to the Japanese leadership that the United States government "does not interfere with the religion of its own people, much

less with that of other nations. " 6 Several attempts were made to open Japan to American trade, but all had failed. One such failure was that of Commodore James Biddle, which proved to be a complete embarrassment for the United States, as he made several mistakes in his conduct and on top of it all needed to be towed out of port by a Japanese ship. The fact that Commodore Perry was successful in his mission changed the status quo in regards to what the United States Navy could and could not do. Perry proved that the United States was capable of having a forward presence in foreign lands and was able to establish international trade in East Asia. The establishment of commercial relations with Japan furthered the Navy's responsibility in protecting trade. Perry's exploits also showed that diplomacy was a possible way for the United States to establish influence in other countries.

Thirdly, Perry and his "black ships" were the first sign of American deterrence. The fact that American ships were off the coast of Japan ready to attack an underprepared country made it very difficult for the Japanese to negotiate anything in their favor or make any tactical or strategic decisions to remove the threat of Perry's force. The roles of the Navy that Commodore Perry established in the mid-nineteenth century are still prevalent in the present day.

The idea of the Navy as a protector of commerce (although established before Perry, he was instrumental in expanding the Navy's prevalence in ensuring safe trade) continues into the present day. An example of this would be ships stationed in the Mediterranean Sea. This area, specifically around the Strait of Hormuz is crucial to trade in the Middle East. The

presence of the United States Navy maintains a safe trading environment between the United States and its allies, and other countries in the region.

Commodore Perry also introduced the idea of deterrence, which is crucial in the operations of the Navy in today's world. One example of American deterrence is the use of submarines, equipped with nuclear war heads and ballistic missiles, which are virtually invisible to our enemies. Perry also proved that diplomacy was a very potent way to establish influence in foreign countries and maintain a presence without force. This is also seen in the United States establishment of embassies in foreign countries and the use of diplomats to negotiate with foreign countries.

Commodore Perry's expedition to Japan had a tremendous impact on the United States at the time it occurred, but it also had an everlasting impact on how the Navy operates and what roles and responsibilities it chooses to take on. Notes 1. Walworth, Arthur. *Black ships off Japan; the story of Commodore Perry's expedition* 242. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1946. 2. Bradford, James C. *Quarterdeck and bridge: two centuries of American naval leaders* 115. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997. 3. Perry, Matthew Calbraith, and Roger Pineau.

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