

THE UNITED STATES AND THE BARBARY STATES
1785 - 1801

by

GERALD LORD

B. S., North Georgia College, 1961

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1974

Approved by:


Major Professor

LD
2668
R4
1974
L67
C2
Document

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE FAILURE OF DIPLOMACY	12
FOOTNOTES	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Piracy began in the Barbary States at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Moors from Spain. On leaving their homeland, the Moors crossed the strait and settled along the northern coast of Africa. Too weak to oppose the Spanish on the open battlefield, they employed their knowledge of the coast and the sea to retaliate against Spain. Employing a form of guerrilla tactics, the Moors struck the Spanish at their weak points, attacking either unarmed ships or undefended areas near the coast. When the Spanish attempted to remove this nuisance, the Moors allied with the Turkish Corsairs to form the forerunner of the Barbary Pirates.¹

The pirates made their home in the Barbary States which, in the eighteenth century, consisted of Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. This was the part of northern Africa bounded on the east by Egypt, west by the Atlantic, south by the Sahara, and north by the Mediterranean. By their geographic location, the Barbary States dominated Mediterranean shipping, pirating ships of all nations that did not pay ransom or tribute. As one Tripolitan Ambassador stated,

. . . the Barbary States, and Turkey, were the 'sovereigns of the Mediterranean', and would permit no nation to navigate it without a treaty of peace.²

The Corsairs also made frequent raids into the Atlantic, going as far north as the English Channel and west to the West Indies,³ capturing ships of any country not protected by treaty or cannon.

In order to protect their Mediterranean shipping, European nations customarily purchased treaties with the Barbary States. The weaker nations purchased treaties because they did not have the power to destroy the pirates. However, the stronger nations elected to pay tribute and leave the pirates to damage the commerce of other nations. This tactic of reducing competition was a particular favorite of Great Britain, whose aim was to secure a monopoly of the world's carrying trade and commerce. To accomplish this purpose she encouraged the pirates of the Mediterranean by paying them a small tribute to harass the commerce of weaker maritime nations, while leaving British ships unmolested.⁴ Lord Sheffield a member of Parliament summed up the British attitude when, speaking of American trade, he stated,

It is not probable the American States will have a very free trade in the Mediterranean; it will not be to the interest of any of the great maritime powers to protect them there from the Barbary States. If they know their interest, they will not encourage the Americans to be carriers--that the Barbary States are advantageous to the maritime powers is obvious. . . . The Americans cannot protect themselves. . . . They cannot pretend to a Navy.⁵

Reporting on Britain's attitude to R. R. Livingston, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Benjamin Franklin wrote on July 25, 1783, ". . . I have in London heard it is a maxim among the

merchants, that if there were no Algiers, it would be worth England's while to build one."⁶

American merchants found it difficult to adjust to this British policy, since before the Revolutionary War, Great Britain had protected a substantial amount of American commerce from the pirates. The loss or destruction of the records of many of the custom houses in the early days of the war preclude an exact account of Colonial trade, but as Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson estimated to Congress, before the Revolution,

. . . about one-sixth of the wheat and flour exported from the U.S. and about one-fourth in value of their dried and pickled fish, and some rice, found their best markets in the Mediterranean ports. That commerce loaded outwards, from eighty to one hundred ships, annually, of twenty thousand tons.⁷

Other commodities exported in considerable quantities to Southern Europe and Africa before the Revolution included rum; rice; pine, oak, and cedar lumber; beeswax; and onions. The value of American articles shipped to the Mediterranean in 1770 was estimated at £ 707,000. In the same year, American bottoms transported foreign merchandise to Mediterranean ports worth an estimated £ 6,287.⁸ Colonial imports for 1769 were estimated at £ 228,682 consisting largely of wines, salt, oil, and Moroccan leather.⁹

This was a substantial amount of trade for a young and growing merchant fleet and was expected to grow even more after peace was established. However a new nation, inexperienced in diplomacy and possessing a weak central government, was ill-equipped to deal with the problems of

piracy that had developed after 1783. The situation might have been handled had the nation been domestically sound and enjoyed well established diplomatic relations abroad. Since this was not the case, its only feasible alternative was to stall for time until it became domestically and internationally strong.

George Washington probably understood this far better than any other statesman. He realized during his presidency that the United States was not in a position to dictate the terms of treaties, but needed time to grow and mature. He emphasizes this view to his friend the Marquis De Lafayette in March 1787:

It seems almost nugatory to dispute about the best mode of dealing with the Algerines, when we have neither the money to buy their friendship nor the means of punishing them for their depredations upon our people and trade.¹⁰

He restated this view when, in his Farewell Address of September 1796, he remarked,

With me a predominant motive has been, to endeavor to gain time to our country to settle and mature its yet recent institutions, and to progress without interruption to that degree of strength and consistency, which is necessary to give it humanly speaking, the command of its own fortunes.¹¹

Washington's two successors, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, had opposing points of view concerning methods of dealing with the pirates. Having formed their ideas while the nation was still governed under the Articles of Confederation and while they were serving as Ministers in Europe, they carried these views into their respective administrations.

John Adams had considered using force to reduce the

piracy, but had ruled it out because he did not think the southern states would support a war.¹² After considerable thought, he concluded that the United States should follow in the footsteps of the European nations by purchasing peace from the Barbary States. As Minister to Great Britain, he wrote Jefferson in July 1786,

I lay down a few simple propositions. 1. We may at this time have peace with them, in spite of all the intrigues of the English or others to prevent it, for a sum of Money. 2. We shall never have peace, though France, Spain, England, and Holland should use all their influence in our favor, without a sum of money. 3. That neither the benevolence of France, or the malevolence of England, will be ever able materially to diminish or increase the sum. 4. The longer the negotiation is delayed, the larger will be the demand. From these premises, I conclude it to be wisest for us to negotiate and pay the necessary sum without loss of time. . . .¹³

Adams did not consider ransom a violation of American honor, but rather as an added rate to the insurance normally purchased by maritime merchants in order to protect against losses at sea. Being from New England, however, and concerned with protecting the investment of his friends engaged in international trade, he never proposed that the merchant pay the added expense, believing it should be paid by the government, so that all sections would have to share in the expense. It is difficult to understand why he believed the south would not support a war to further the interest of the New England merchants, but would contribute large sums of money to purchase a treaty for the same purpose.

In contrast to Adams, Thomas Jefferson rebelled at the idea of paying tribute to the North African pirates. As

Minister to France, he argued quite correctly that there would be no end to the payments once the American government showed a willingness to pay blackmail. Considering his own personal honor and the honor of his country to be at stake, he saw only one course for the United States, war--either unilaterally, or in convention with a league of maritime nations, which would reduce the expense to the United States. On July 11, 1786, he wrote Adams:

. . . I should prefer the obtaining it (treaty) by War. 1. Justice is in favor of this opinion. 2. Honor favors it. 3. It will procure us respect in Europe; and respect is a safeguard to interest. 4. It will arm the federal head with safest of all the instruments of coercion over its delinquent members. 5. I think it least expensive. 6. Equally effectual.¹⁴

Jefferson estimated that a fleet of 150 guns, which would cost only slightly more than the purchase of peace, would be large enough to humble the pirates. Realizing the United States did not have the money to build such a large fleet, he looked around for ways to reduce the expense to the United States. While not interested in trade in the Mediterranean, Portugal conducted a large commerce in the West Indies and found it necessary to blockade the pirates at the Straits in order to prevent losses in the Atlantic. Jefferson felt therefore, that Portugal would welcome a joint effort to destroy the pirates. Similarly, because Italy was barred from maritime commerce because of its fear of the pirates, Jefferson was convinced Naples would also accept a share in constructing the fleet. Therefore, in order to reduce the expense to the United States Jefferson recommended that

a convention be formed between the United States, Portugal, and Naples all of whom would share the expense of eliminating the pirates, according to their respective wealth.¹⁵

Neither Adams nor Jefferson had Washington's foresight. Both recommended that their plan be initiated immediately, apparently not realizing the limitations of the government under the Articles of Confederation. Foreign nations, aware of the weakness and inefficiency of the American government, refused to enter into commercial treaties; therefore, Adams' hope for a bargained treaty was reduced, and if a treaty could have been negotiated there was no money to conclude it. Jefferson's plan of war was just as far-fetched, since a navy would cost an enormous sum, and the treasury was empty and there was little hope of improvement.

As John Jay noted in a letter to Jefferson on December 14, 1786,

If Congress had money to purchase peace of Algiers, . . . it certainly would . . . but the truth is that no money is to be expected at present from hence, nor do I think it would be right to make new loans until we have at least some prospect of paying the interest due on former ones.¹⁶

Jay realized that under the Articles of Confederation the federal government had virtually no power. He knew that the central government could not regulate commerce among the states, nor provide adequate revenue, nor establish a sound monetary system. He also knew that relations with foreign countries were limited because, even though the central government could make treaties with foreign countries, it had no power to compel the States to abide by the treaties.

However, he anticipated that by their actions the Barbary States might force the Americans to form a stronger central government. Writing to the President of Congress in 1785 about the reported declaration of war against the United States by Algiers, Jay said, "This war does not strike me as a great evil. The more we are ill treated abroad the more we shall unite and consolidate at home."¹⁷ George Washington had virtually the same attitude about the Articles of Confederation. In 1789, he wrote, "Vain is it to look for respect from abroad, or tranquillity at home . . . till the wisdom and force of the union can be more concentrated and better applied."¹⁸

It was certain that the United States would wait until a strong government was formed to complete satisfactory negotiations with the Barbary States, but the question remains why freedom to navigate the Mediterranean was so important to the American merchant. To clear up that point it is necessary to look at the action of the British and French.

As mentioned above, prior to the American Revolution a lucrative Mediterranean trade was developed under British protection, but when peace was restored, Americans found themselves facing a closed mercantile world.¹⁹ The Treaty of Paris of 1783 closed the British West Indies to American vessels, thereby taking away a very profitable market, and England only allowed British goods to be shipped to the United States in British ships, which also cut into American profits. In 1789, the British placed heavy duties on the

chief products of the Northern states, including breadstuff, provisions, and fish in order to protect British domestic agriculture and to encourage domestic fisheries.²⁰ Also, most of the important European nations either prohibited the importation of tobacco and rice altogether, or placed heavy duties on them.²¹ Additionally, during the 1790's, because England was at war with France, the British issued at least thirty acts to reduce the flow of supplies to the French, which adversely affected American commerce.²²

When war broke out between France and England, the French demanded American assistance under the Treaty of 1778, but Washington, not prepared to risk war, issued the Neutrality Proclamation of April 22, 1793. Also, the Jay Treaty negotiated in 1794 with England, further widened the gap in American-French relations. To the French it appeared that the United States was aligning with England to defy France. Negotiations with France, after the Jay Treaty, led to the XYZ Affair by which agents representing the French Foreign Minister, Talleyrand, demanded an apology from President Adams and payment of a \$250,000.00 bribe. The American ministers left Paris in disgust.²³ Though war was not declared and President Adams was able to bring about a peace in February 1801, several French/American skirmishes did take place at sea during the period 1796-1800. Moreover, France, as well as England, restricted American commerce by issuing eighteen decrees from May 1793 through April 1808. While not as damaging as the British acts they

did take a toll, and also made the Mediterranean ports more important.

The British and French decrees were designed to further each country's respective war efforts as well as its own commerce. This was particularly true in the case of England. All ocean commerce was hampered by arbitrary rules and orders. The French declared that all provisions were contrabands of war; therefore, the French Navy was ordered to seize all vessels destined for British ports carrying such commodities. The English insisted that they had the right to stop and search American vessels and remove sailors suspected of English citizenship.²⁴ After one of the English searches, it was not uncommon for an American merchant ship to be so stripped of crew that it could not continue to operate.

While the action of the British and French restricted American trade, the European wars from 1793 to 1805 gave American merchants exceptional opportunities to expand as neutral carriers. Since the United States was the only major neutral carrier, trade grew rapidly. Having already discovered the profits of trade with the East Indies and China, the New England merchants were eager to expand trade with the Mediterranean countries.²⁵ Competition was almost nonexistent, especially since the British merchants had always favored the Western Atlantic or the Far East,²⁶ and paid little attention to the markets in the Mediterranean. The French, who had been the dominant carrier in the Mediterranean,

were forced to stay in port by the British Navy which had the strategic mission of preventing contraband from reaching French ports. The Italians, who might have claimed a large part of this trade, chose to remain in port rather than risk the possibility of capture by the pirates. This left the trade of the Mediterranean open, and American merchants, who had lost many former markets to the British, French, and Spanish were determined to claim a large portion of it. However, the Barbary States were still the menace of the Mediterranean; therefore, the United States was compelled to take some type of positive action to protect its commerce and allow the American merchant to fulfill his destiny.

CHAPTER II

THE FAILURE OF DIPLOMACY

When peace between England and America was restored, four possible alternatives existed concerning Mediterranean trade. America could continue the suspension of shipping into areas dominated by the pirates, obtain protection from another country, pay tribute to the pirates for protection or form a navy strong enough to protect American commerce by war, or threat of war.

While American leaders made a concentrated effort at solving the Mediterranean question through diplomatic efforts, by 1801 it was quite evident that only war could solve the dilemma. To understand why war was required, it is necessary to examine the first three alternatives and outline reasons for the failure of each.

It was not feasible to continue the suspension, as the markets were too lucrative and an alternate market had to be found to replace the West Indies, which had been closed to American ships as a result of the war. While American goods were still admitted to the West Indies, they had to be transported in British ships, and this severely injured the American shipping trade, since during the Colonial period British ships handled most of the commerce between America and England leaving, for American ships, the trade with the

West Indies and Southern Europe.¹ Emory R. Johnson in History of the Domestic and Foreign Commerce of the United States reported that:

The restriction of the trade of the British West Indies to British ships reduced the profits of a relatively large share of American shipping. Prior to the Revolution the trade with the British and foreign West Indies had given employment to fully a third of the Colonial shipping engaged in over-sea commerce.²

Attempts were made to secure a commercial treaty with England that would reopen the West Indies to American ships, but all efforts failed; consequently, it was necessary to secure trading opportunities elsewhere. James A. Field in America and The Mediterranean World reports there were three possible areas. The first was to bypass the established European markets on the north, seeking markets in Russia and the small commercial states along the Baltic. The second was to skirt Europe's southern flank, entering the Mediterranean and trading with all the small states enroute to Turkey. The final prospect was in the Orient, but of the three the Mediterranean trade was the most appealing.³ However, to open those markets the Barbary Pirates had to be dealt with.

The easiest method of harnessing the pirates appeared to be by obtaining a guarantee of protection from one of the stronger European powers. This means of protection was considered early, and in the plan of a treaty with France, which was discussed in September 1776, one article provided that the King should protect America's commerce from the Barbary Pirates. The American Commissioners to France were

unable to gain the desired degree of protection, but in accordance with Article VIII of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce of February 6, 1778,⁴ the King agreed that he would,

. . . employ his good Offices and Interposition with the . . . Barbary States, . . . in order to provide as fully and efficaciously as possible for the Benefit, Conveniency and Safety of the Said United States . . . against all Violence, Insult, Attacks, or Depredations.
. . .⁵

In August 1778, the United States tested French sincerity by requesting their assistance in moving some ships through the Mediterranean to Italy. The French replied that it would be impossible to make the American Flag respected by the corsairs, but if the Americans wanted to form treaties with the Barbary States, they would assist.⁶ Congress realized that the aid France was willing to give would not afford adequate protection; therefore, additional assistance was needed.

The United States then turned to the Netherlands for support. A letter from W. Lee, Commissioner of the United States to the courts of Vienna and Berlin, read in Congress of February 22, 1779, proposed that a treaty of commerce be entered into between the United States and the Netherlands, and that the treaty should contain an article which would guarantee the protection of American shipping from the Barbary powers.⁷ The treaty which was finally negotiated at the Hague by John Adams on October 8, 1782, contained an article which stated,

If at any time, the United States of America, shall

judge necessary, to commence negotiations . . . with the Barbary States, . . . Their High-Mightnessess promise, that, upon the Requisition, which the United States of America shall make of it, they will second such negotiations, in the most favourable manner, by means of Their Consuls, residing near the said King, Emperor, and Regencies.⁸

This agreement with the Netherlands provided little if any assistance; therefore, a third attempt to obtain European aid occurred in June 1783. The American Commissioners, negotiating the peace treaty with Great Britain, asked to have a provision included that would provide British aid to repel any attack by the Barbary powers against the United States. The British Cabinet refused to approve such a guarantee⁹ seeking to damage American trade, and to punish the former colonies for rebelling against British rule. While Great Britain did agree to a peace treaty, they refused to enter into a commercial treaty with the United States until Jay's Treaty of 1794.

Due to inexperience in diplomacy and the pressing problems of initiating a new government, the United States was extremely slow in establishing relations in the Mediterranean. Since all efforts were directed at soliciting European support, no attempt was made prior to 1784 to negotiate directly with the Barbary States. Finally, however, on May 12, 1784, Congress authorized a commission to conclude treaties of peace and amity with the Barbary Powers.¹⁰

Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were appointed to carry out the negotiations. Due to failing health, Franklin returned to America shortly after

the appointment, leaving Adams and Jefferson to conduct the negotiations. On March 11, 1785 Congress, realizing it would be more expedient to make treaties in the respective Barbary States, further authorized the Ministers to appoint agents to go to each state and negotiate treaties of peace and amity. A sum of eighty thousand dollars was appropriated for the purpose of financing Barbary Treaties.

Before beginning talks with the Barbary States, the Ministers realized that they needed to establish an order of priority for the negotiations. Algiers was the most powerful of the states,¹¹ but Spain, which was at war with the Dey of Algiers, maintained a naval blockade in the Straits of Gibraltar. This forced the Algerine Pirates to stay in the Mediterranean which, in effect, protected America's commerce with Europe. Tunis and Tripoli, which were very weak, maintained their fleets close to home. Morocco, with its western boundary on the Atlantic, was the only state able to damage American commerce in the Atlantic. Under Sidi Muhammand, Morocco was gaining in political stability and international prestige, and had almost given up sea raiding.¹² To show his good will Sidi Muhammand had attempted several times to establish relations with the United States, but the new nation was slow to respond; therefore, to get America's attention, a corsair of Morocco captured the American brig "Betsey" in October 1784. To demonstrate his friendship, the Emperor did not enslave the crew, and released it, and the vessel six months later.

With these facts in mind the Ministers agreed that Morocco must be contacted first, then Algiers and finally Tunis and Tripoli.

On October 5, 1785, the Ministers appointed Thomas Barclay to conclude a treaty with Morocco. Even though inexperienced in diplomacy, Barclay had the foresight to stop in Madrid to learn the latest intelligence on Morocco, and to seek Spanish aid in his negotiations. Spain was extremely cooperative in providing assistance and Barclay's mission was a complete success, terminating with a treaty signed June 28, 1786.¹³

The United States opened negotiations with Algiers but not before a treaty was concluded between that country and Spain, resulting in the withdrawal of the Spanish squadron blockading the Straits of Gibraltar. Immediately Algiers sent out her corsairs and captured two American ships--the "Maria" on July 25, 1785 off Cape St. Vincent, and the "Dauphin" on July 30, 1785 about fifty leagues west of Lisbon.¹⁴ Both ships were taken to Algiers where the twenty-one crew members were relegated to slavery.

The capture of the two ships increased the need for immediate negotiations with Algiers; therefore, Adams and Jefferson appointed John Lamb as their agent. Lamb was a merchant who had been engaged in Barbary trade; consequently, he knew the country. But apparently that was his only qualification for the job. Richard O'Brien, one of the captives in Algiers, reported that Lamb was not informed of

the methods generally used in redeeming captives, that he was despised by all the Consuls in Algiers, and that he threatened Madrid with the seizure of Spanish territory in America if he did not receive Spanish assistance in negotiating with Algiers.¹⁵ Furthermore Lamb spoke only English and he did not have the foresight to employ a reliable interpreter before leaving Europe.¹⁶ Neither Adams nor Jefferson had confidence in Lamb's ability, but felt obligated to appoint him as an agent since Congress apparently had sent him to Europe for that purpose.

While Lamb was in Algiers and Barclay in Morocco, the Tripolitan Ambassador in London met with John Adams and demanded thirty thousand guineas for peace with Tripoli, and a like sum for Tunis.¹⁷ Surprised by such a demand, Adams requested Jefferson to confer with him in London on the Tripolitan ultimatum. They decided to reject the terms since the price was too high and a peace with Tripoli would be useless until a treaty was concluded with Algiers.

As it happened, Lamb's mission to Algiers was a complete failure, but he cannot be blamed entirely for its lack of success. His instructions were completely inadequate. Because Jefferson and Adams had not received any instructions from Congress concerning the redemption of the captives held by Algiers, they were reluctant to initiate any action. While Jefferson, out of pity for the sailors in captivity, elected to secure their release, but not knowing how Congress would react to ransoming captives, decided to keep the price