

## From Concessions to Conflict: Strategic, Economic, and Ideological Drivers of U.S. Military Action Against the Barbary States in the Mediterranean in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Nguyen Thi Kim Tien<sup>1\*</sup>, Phan Nguyen Huy Chinh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> *University of Science and Education - The University of Danang*

\*Corresponding Author: [nktien@ued.udn.vn](mailto:nktien@ued.udn.vn)

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### ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the evolution of U.S. policy in addressing the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean during the 18th–19th centuries, a major issue impacting trade, national honor, and the image of the United States in its early years of independence. The study focuses on factors leading to a shift from appeasement through disadvantageous treaties to declarations of war and the use of military force. Employing historical methods, the paper examines sources ranging from diplomatic documents and firsthand witness accounts to studies on international relations and the American economy to clarify the issues at hand. The paper explores key aspects such as the impact of slavery and trade losses caused by the pirates, the budgetary burdens of ransom and tribute payments, the role of the newly established U.S. Navy, and policy changes across presidential administrations, particularly under Thomas Jefferson, which contributed to shifts in American policy toward the Barbary States. The research findings suggest that the changes in U.S. policy were driven by economic losses, social pressures, the need for free trade, and national honor. The development of naval forces and proactive diplomacy emerged as decisive factors leading to victories in the First Barbary War (1801–1805) and the Second Barbary War (1815–1816). The research not only sheds light on a pivotal period in American history but also offers perspectives on the transition from peaceful policies to the use of force against international threats, emphasizing the importance of building naval and diplomatic strength to protect national interests in an unpredictable global context.

**Keywords:** Barbary Pirates; Mediterranean; U.S. Diplomacy; Barbary Wars; U.S. Navy; Free Trade; National Honor

### INTRODUCTION

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the fledgling United States faced numerous challenges after gaining independence and striving to assert its position on the international stage. One of the most urgent issues was the acts of piracy carried out by the Barbary States in the Mediterranean. These pirate groups frequently attacked ships, captured American sailors to be enslaved, demanded ransom payments, and requested enormous tributes from the U.S. government. These actions not only disrupted America's critical trade routes but also caused severe economic losses, deeply affecting national honor and public trust in the government. This was a significant test for a newly independent nation, as the United States faced both external and internal pressures to implement solutions ensuring maritime safety and the protection of its right to free trade. In the early stages, with limited resources and no strong naval force, the United States was compelled to pursue a policy of appeasement. Treaties were signed with the Barbary States that required the U.S. to pay large ransoms to ensure free trade and secure the release of captured sailors. These payments not only placed a significant burden on the national budget but also

incited public outrage over the image of a nation bowing to pirate groups. Increasing public pressure, combined with the failure of treaties to prevent further attacks, underscored the need for a more decisive solution. The turning point occurred during President Thomas Jefferson's administration when the United States shifted from a policy of appeasement to actively employing military force to confront the pirates. The deployment of naval forces not only demonstrated America's determination to protect its national honor but also marked a significant turning point in the country's foreign and military strategy. The First Barbary War (1801–1805) and the Second Barbary War (1815–1816) not only helped the United States safeguard its right to free trade but also laid the foundation for the development of the U.S. Navy and affirmed the country's position on the international stage. This paper focuses on analyzing the factors driving the United States' shift in policy during its confrontation with the Barbary pirates, transitioning from appeasement to declarations of war. By analyzing historical documents, this study clarifies the economic, social, and political impacts that led to policy changes, while emphasizing the role of military and diplomatic power in protecting national interests. This research not only sheds light on an important period in U.S. history but also contributes perspectives on how small, young nations address international challenges in politically and economically turbulent contexts.

### **Abuse of Citizens and Damage to National Honor**

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the United States faced significant challenges in its nation-building process, one of which was the enslavement of white Americans in the Mediterranean. During this period, hundreds of Americans, primarily merchants sailing through the Mediterranean, were captured and sold as slaves by the Barbary pirates. This issue of white slavery had a profound impact on the economy, altered American perceptions of North African countries, and affected the national honor and public image of the United States both domestically and internationally. This reality necessitated important changes in U.S. diplomatic policy, including the need for more effective actions against the Barbary pirates.

The issue of white slavery or hostage-taking for ransom was not a new problem at the time. In fact, the capture of prisoners was one of the core activities of Mediterranean piracy from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Throughout its existence, this practice was vehemently condemned by nations for its brutality. During this period, the United States was still a colony under British protection, which generally ensured the safety of American trade passing through the Mediterranean. However, after the colonies declared independence, the U.S. lost this protection and sought assistance from France, but these efforts were unsuccessful. The failure left the United States with extremely limited means of self-defense. At the same time, America's success in trade in the West Indies and along the Atlantic coast of North America made it a prime target for the Barbary pirates. Between 1785 and 1815, American ships were frequently captured in the Mediterranean, with 22 ships seized by Algeria, 6 by Tripoli, 5 by Morocco, and 2 by Tunisia. As a result, over 700 American sailors were detained in North Africa.

The fate of American slaves in the Mediterranean was described as extremely harsh. They were forced into labor on construction sites and farms, performing grueling tasks such as rowing on Barbary pirate ships, often in dark, cramped spaces with little to no sunlight. They endured squalid, damp conditions teeming with insects and were confined alongside slaves of various nationalities or, in some cases, with wild animals like tigers and leopards as a form of intimidation. These individuals were frequently starved and fed spoiled food; many accounts even describe slaves resorting to eating rats and carrion to survive. They suffered severe mistreatment, including brutal beatings from their captors, and were subjected to relentless physical and psychological abuse. The addition describes the coercion faced by American captives in the Mediterranean, highlighting their forced conversion to Islam under the Barbary States. Those who complied escaped enslavement, as Islamic law forbade enslaving fellow Muslims, while those who resisted endured brutal torture or even execution. This practice deeply offended American values of dignity, faith, and national honor. Researcher Paul Baepler noted the Americans' perspective on these forced conversions, questioning, "What civilized individual would willingly join a lower culture? What white American would allow their identity to be symbolically erased?". The greatest fear endured by American slaves in the Mediterranean, alongside the harsh conditions, was the isolation in a foreign land, the humiliation of their enslaved status, and the constant dread of being abandoned by their own government. Over a prolonged period, U.S. diplomacy with the Barbary States repeatedly failed to yield effective solutions, fostering widespread public dissatisfaction. This situation left many Americans in captivity for decades, underscoring the need for more decisive actions from the government. Many of these slaves died or became disabled due to the mistreatment by their owners and the devastation caused by diseases. The first treaty between the United States and the government of Morocco was not signed until 1786. It was not until 1795 that treaties were signed with Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripoli, with the United States paying enormous ransoms to secure the release of its citizens. After being freed, many of these former slaves wrote numerous accounts detailing their harrowing experiences in the Mediterranean, which garnered widespread attention and sympathy from the American media and public. These narratives had a significant impact on contemporary American culture and placed pressure on policymakers to reassess U.S. policies and address the public's growing demands at the time. In 1794, news of Americans being captured by Algerian

pirates the previous year spread across the United States. This news sparked a wave of intense public reaction. Pirates quickly became a popular topic in contemporary American culture, primarily through firsthand accounts, media reports, stories, plays, literature, poetry, novels, and even rumors that circulated widely throughout the nation. These narratives became a central topic of discussion across the United States. Prior to this, the American public had little to no understanding of North Africa. However, through cultural works, stories, and rumors, the image of the Barbary States in the American imagination emerged as one of a backward and chaotic place—"a decayed world built upon the ruins of Western civilization". Americans referred to the people of North Africa as barbaric, brutal, and terrifying, describing them as plagued by vice, underdeveloped, and devoid of any trace of civilization. The region was portrayed as being rife with "bribery, treachery, rape, murder, and all the abhorrent offspring of accursed despotism, which often bloodied the streets and condemned its inhabitants to slavery, famine, dungeons, ruin, and destruction".

In stark contrast, America was celebrated as a civilized and moral nation. This contrast reflected a self-aggrandizing perception of America, which viewed itself as a beacon of progress, democracy, and freedom, standing opposite the brutal, autocratic, and backward Barbary States, relics of an outdated era. Narratives and cultural works became a form of cultural and social intervention, prompting demands for the U.S. government to reevaluate its policies regarding relations with the Barbary pirate states. The efforts of American captives in Barbary successfully brought the issue of slavery before the U.S. Congress multiple times. There, it became a subject of nationwide discussion. By emphasizing "humanity" and the harrowing experiences of American white slaves, the plight stirred compassion, solidarity, pride, honor, and outrage across the United States. Faced with the suffering of American slaves, the entire nation shared a deep sense of sorrow for their compatriots enduring hardship in distant lands. Citizens united to call for donations to pay ransoms for enslaved Americans, organized meetings to discuss the piracy issue, and exerted pressure on the U.S. government to change its policies toward the Barbary pirates. Alongside this outrage, fear of piracy engulfed the nation. Sailors and merchant fleets dreaded routes passing through the Mediterranean, forcing them to take longer detours or pay exorbitant protection fees, coupled with high insurance costs. These factors caused severe disruptions to American commerce, significantly impacting the nation's trade. The public's fear of piracy also negatively affected the image of the U.S. government. Many Americans expressed a loss of confidence in their government, viewing it as passive and powerless in the face of the Barbary pirates.

National pride and a strong sense of patriotism left the American public deeply disappointed with treaties and ransom payments made to the pirates. Americans found it difficult to accept that their nation—a proud country that had won independence from the British Empire and established a democratic republic—would concede to barbaric pirate forces. The public viewed the treaties and payments as humiliating, a disgrace to the nation's dignity, and called for the government to adopt stronger and more decisive policies against piracy. The pressure from the American public and society became a significant factor, compelling the government to focus on resolving the piracy issue and to implement increasingly assertive policies to liberate American slaves held in Barbary.

The development of America's fight against piracy was also driven by the nation's subjective will to protect its core values, which had previously been undermined. From its earliest days, American diplomacy was built on foundational principles of liberty, free trade, and independence, principles that were "deeply embedded in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution and significantly influenced how the United States sought to integrate into the global system". The value of free trade emerged as a response to the negative effects of economic blockades imposed by Britain to punish America's rebellion through the Orders in Council in the late 18th century. For young nations like the United States at that time, ensuring free trade was even more crucial to achieving developmental goals and asserting their place in the global arena. Free trade was regarded by America as a cornerstone for its development and a key to establishing its political standing. The United States viewed free trade as an absolute value, not just for itself but for the world at large. No individual or nation, whether pirates or the British Empire, had the right to interfere with the free exchange of goods. Thus, losing free trade meant not only a loss of economic benefits for America but also a loss of honor and the core values it upheld. In particular, the Mediterranean market and trade routes from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic had always constituted a significant portion of American commerce both before and after independence. These trade routes were highly valued by the United States, making the security of trade in this region of paramount importance. This necessitated the swift resolution of the piracy issue to establish the United States' desired position on the international stage.

From the perspective of international relations, piracy during this period was also viewed by European nations as an important "tool" for expanding mercantilism. Mercantilism aimed to maximize exports while minimizing imports to enhance competitive standing. During this era, most of the world's major trade hubs were under the control of European powers. These nations actively worked to prevent their rivals from accessing markets, particularly colonial markets, and imposed high import tariffs. Pirate groups indirectly aided European nations in obstructing trade rivals and smaller countries from accessing major markets, disrupting global commerce. This made it extremely difficult for smaller nations to trade goods, driving up their product prices, reducing their

competitiveness in international markets, and thereby elevating the status of larger powers. This dynamic explains the rational relationship between European nations and pirates, as well as the pirate states.

European countries often viewed these pirate groups as private enterprises under the administration of the Barbary states. They maintained regular relations with these states and paid tributes to ensure the safety of their ships. Despite economic losses and regional security concerns, the intangible benefits brought by piracy led European nations to overlook this international security threat, refraining from taking action against the pirates. In some instances, these nations were even accused by the U.S. of supporting piracy against America, aiming to hinder U.S. trade in the Mediterranean. However, not all European nations shared this perspective. Some sought to eliminate Barbary piracy but were constrained by limited resources or pressured by other European powers, preventing them from taking effective action. The United States, being one of the countries significantly impacted by European mercantilism, had firsthand experience with economic blockades and the adverse effects of mercantilist policies. As a result, America actively opposed European mercantilism and took a leading role in advocating for collective action against piracy to reclaim its freedom and trade rights.

At a time when commerce was a critical pathway for economic growth and the establishment of its core values, the North African pirate ships posed a significant challenge for the United States. Piracy obstructed America's efforts to establish the commercial standing it aspired to, severely damaging its interests, shrinking its markets, and pushing its trade to the brink of difficulty and stagnation. This also served as a test of the nation's diplomatic and military independence. In the early years of independence, particularly between 1795 and 1797, when the U.S. naval capacity was still weak, the United States signed peace treaties and paid tributes to the Barbary states as a temporary measure to stabilize trade security in the Mediterranean and ensure continued access to this critical region. However, this was always seen as a humiliation and a violation of the principle of free trade that America sought to uphold. Moreover, the relationship between the United States and the Barbary states became increasingly imbalanced. While the Barbary powers acted more aggressively, the United States continued to concede, reflecting the nation's weakness in the face of external threats. This dynamic risked undermining America's dignity, severely damaging the honor of an independent nation painstakingly built over time. One of the gravest dangers was the potential loss of America's political independence. As a result, the relationship between the United States and the Barbary states deteriorated further, highlighting that the peaceful solutions initially chosen by the U.S. were reluctant and only temporary. It became increasingly evident that the United States could not accept this situation, making a confrontation between America and the Barbary pirates seem inevitable.

During the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, the approach of confronting piracy through force replaced the previous strategies of negotiation and peace, which had been seen as concessions and failures. Jefferson's administration became a symbol of the core values that America aspired to uphold. The U.S. government under Jefferson implemented robust policies to address piracy, striving to ensure free trade and opposing European mercantilism. President Jefferson was particularly steadfast in his belief that America's commerce could only be safeguarded in the long term through the use of military force. He held that only war could definitively resolve the issue of piracy, protect America's core values, and restore the nation's status and honor. He articulated his perspective as follows: "The question is whether their peace or war will be the cheapest? That is a question that must be decided for our honor as well as our avarice... If we wish our commerce to be free and unassaulted, we must show these nations that we have a power which at present they do not believe. The contempt they have for our power cannot fail to draw us into a maritime war". In 1800, naval officer William Eaton expressed his views, stating "I consider it sufficient to declare that the United States is the only nation, at this time, possessing a wealthy commerce yet unprotected in the Mediterranean, and that the governments of Barbary are nothing more than pirates". Shortly afterward, U.S. President Thomas Jefferson, in his address to Congress explaining his decision to deploy naval forces to Tripoli, asserted that "our commerce in the Mediterranean has been blockaded, and that of the Atlantic threatened." Jefferson's statement highlighted the increasingly severe threat to America's commercial security and national honor in the Mediterranean, as tensions escalated toward open conflict. Engaging in war was seen as a critical step to securing independence, preserving national dignity, and avoiding dependence on foreign powers. Such a conflict would serve as a demonstration to European nations and others that the United States possessed the strength to defend itself, protect its young government, and deter any country with hostile intentions toward America.

The significant ideological differences between America's commitment to free trade, the Barbary pirates, and European mercantilism, coupled with the harm to America's status, honor, and the mistreatment of American merchants enslaved by the pirates, ignited a deep conflict between the United States and the Barbary states. These factors became crucial motivators for America to implement strong policies aimed at attacking and eliminating the threat posed by the Barbary pirates. The United States gradually became more resolute in its dealings with the Barbary states, driven by the need to uphold the principles of free trade, ensure maritime security, and assert its independence and sovereignty. This determination also served to protect and reinforce the nation's honor and international reputation.

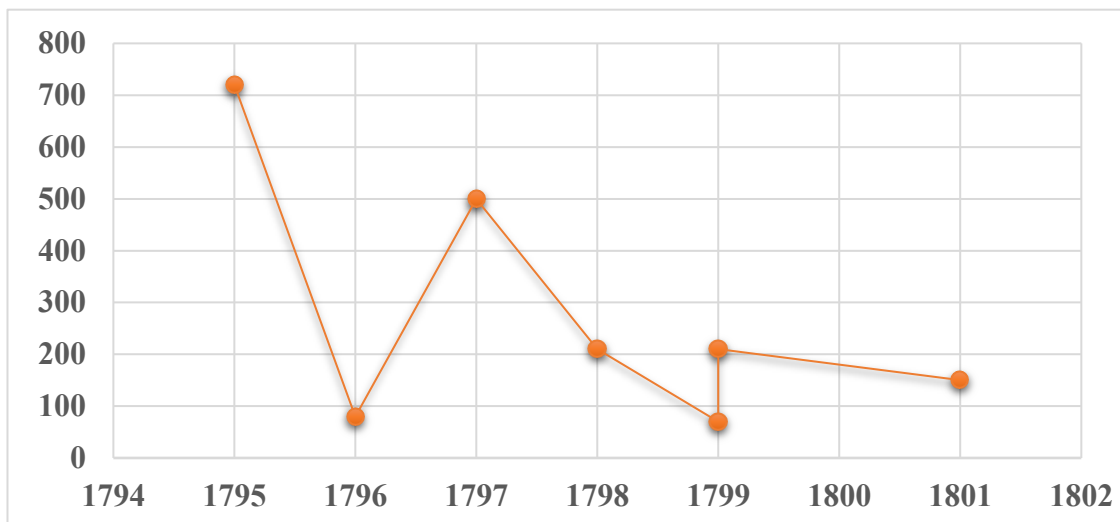
### ***The Cost of Ransom Payments***

In hostage-taking incidents, the primary aim of the Barbary pirates was monetary gain. Consequently, European nations and the United States conducting trade through the Mediterranean were compelled to pay ransoms to secure the release of captured sailors and ensure the safety of their trade activities. These tributes and ransoms consumed a substantial portion of the U.S. budget, particularly during a time when its economy was still in its infancy. This financial burden further fueled America's resolve to put an end to the practice of paying ransoms and tributes. By doing so, the United States sought not only to save a significant portion of its budget but also to protect and strengthen its status and honor in international relations.

Piracy had been closely associated with the Barbary states since their early days, becoming a highly profitable industry for the economies of at least three of the four Barbary nations (excluding Morocco). Both the people and governments of the Barbary states depended on the immense profits generated from piracy. The impoverished Barbary society organized into pirate groups operating across the Mediterranean, primarily engaging in looting and the trade of captured white slaves. This workforce became a crucial asset for Barbary governments to leverage in demanding payments from nations with merchant ships passing through the region. The Barbary governments were heavily reliant on these revenues. The Barbary states derived substantial profits by offering "protection packages" to vessels navigating the Mediterranean, shielding them from pirate attacks that these states themselves cultivated and funded. The impact of piracy was so significant that it shaped many aspects of governance in the Barbary states during certain periods. For countries conducting trade through the Mediterranean, achieving peace with the pirate forces required signing treaties, the core of which often involved one-time or recurring payments to the pirates. Similarly, financial tributes were an essential part of U.S. diplomatic relations with the Barbary states. The United States was compelled to pay substantial sums in ransom for hostages, trade protection fees, and annual tributes to Barbary leaders, merely to maintain peace in the region.

During the colonial period, maritime security in the Mediterranean was safeguarded by Britain through tributes and treaties established with the Barbary states. When the American colonies declared independence in 1776, they relied on support from France to continue this protection. However, the issue of piracy for the United States became severe immediately after losing France's protection. In 1784, Morocco captured American hostages and demanded negotiations with the U.S. That same year, the U.S. Congress approved an allocation of \$80,000 to negotiate treaties and ransom enslaved Americans from all four Barbary states. However, this amount was far too small to meet the demands, and the Barbary states rejected the offer. After this initial failure, the United States began to adjust its negotiation policy. The U.S. opted for a tailored approach, engaging separately with each Barbary state, prioritizing those that were more accessible and amenable to negotiations. Based on this strategy, in 1786, the U.S. successfully reached a treaty with Morocco. This treaty was accompanied by unofficial payments ranging from \$9,000 to \$23,000 for trade protection and the ransom of captured hostages.

The U.S.-Morocco treaty was considered a significant success, as Morocco did not commit any further acts of piracy against American interests thereafter. In addition to the treaty's success, Morocco was, in reality, the least hostile of the Barbary states, and its actions were driven more by political motives than outright aggression. The threat posed by Morocco was negligible compared to the dangers from the remaining three Barbary states: Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunisia. Confronting these three states presented far greater challenges for U.S. diplomacy and economic interests. The U.S. negotiation with Morocco revealed significant weaknesses in American capabilities, particularly the nation's limited naval power, to the other Barbary states. This made the United States an attractive target for profit-seeking Barbary states. These states launched repeated attacks on American merchant ships, capturing hundreds of hostages to be sold as slaves. In 1785, Algeria—the most dominant of the Barbary states—capitalized on America's lack of naval defenses by seizing two American merchant ships, the *Maria* and the *Dauphin*. The situation worsened in 1793, when Algeria captured 11 additional U.S. ships. This escalating crisis forced the United States to negotiate for the release of its captured citizens. As a result, the U.S.-Algeria Treaty was signed in 1795. Under the terms of the treaty, the United States agreed to pay \$642,500 upfront and an annual tribute of \$21,600 to secure peace and the freedom of its citizens. However, the United States' delays in fulfilling its financial obligations led Algeria to demand additional tributes, including extravagant gifts. Among these demands was a 36-gun warship, which cost the U.S. approximately \$1 million to provide to Algeria. This added a significant financial burden to the United States, further highlighting the challenges of maintaining peace through tribute payments. In 1796, the pirates of Tripoli and Tunisia also began engaging in slave raids across the Mediterranean. That same year, the United States signed a treaty with Tripoli, which required an immediate payment of \$56,486 in cash and gifts. In 1797, Tunisia agreed to a treaty involving a payment of \$107,000 in cash and provisions, spread over several years. Beyond these payments to the Barbary states for trade protection, nations seeking peace in the region were also obligated to pay annual tributes. Additional hidden costs, such as bribes and gifts to Barbary officials and leaders to secure favorable terms, further strained the U.S. budget. These expenses reflected the significant financial burden America faced in maintaining peace and securing its commercial interests in the Mediterranean.

**Chart 1:** Amount Paid by the U.S. to Barbary Pirates from 1795 to 1802Unit: *Thousand USD*

Looking at the chart above, it reflects the total amounts the United States had to pay to the Barbary pirates. From 1795 to 1801, apart from the years 1795 and 1797, the tribute payments increased significantly due to ransom and protection demands for treaties made by the pirates. For the remaining years, the payments consistently ranged from \$50,000 to \$200,000, with ransom and tribute payments rarely falling below \$100,000. This clearly illustrates the greed of the Barbary states. These nations continuously issued new demands without any limits, making it nearly impossible for the United States to achieve true peace. Instead, it was a constant cycle of concessions in the face of the pirates' growing avarice. The U.S.'s repeated financial outlays for such tributes posed a significant economic strain on the fledgling nation's economy. In reality, ransom and tribute payments were not the only costs that nations like the United States had to bear. Alongside these payments, piracy also incurred additional expenses related to naval protection and insurance premiums, which the U.S. had to pay to safeguard trade in the Atlantic. The U.S. government spent between \$200,000 and \$400,000 on naval protection alone.

As for insurance costs for American trade in the Mediterranean, these were directly proportional to the societal fear of piracy. The greater the fear of piracy, the higher the insurance costs. During this period, insurance premiums rose by approximately 10% to 30% above normal rates for merchant ships operating in the Mediterranean. The insurance expenses incurred by the U.S. ranged between \$250,000 and \$600,000. The high insurance costs also forced merchant ships to limit their activities or switch to longer routes, directly impacting American trade and causing a significant slowdown in U.S. commerce. According to statistics, the total annual costs for tributes, naval protection, and insurance amounted to approximately \$0.5 to \$1 million. Considering that government expenditures and revenues during peacetime in that era were about 2% to 2.5% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), these costs accounted for roughly 0.1% to 0.2% of GDP, equivalent to around \$10 billion to \$20 billion in today's terms. This was an enormous burden for the U.S. economy. Piracy rendered the insurance expenses incurred by the United States inefficient, increased naval protection costs, and placed significant pressure on the U.S., which had limited economic resources at the time. These factors posed substantial obstacles to the nation's development. In the long term, if the U.S. did not address the issue promptly, it would suffer far greater losses than any short-term benefits such measures might bring. Moreover, the growing greed of the Barbary states, with their relentless new demands on the U.S., made it increasingly difficult to secure long-term stability in the Mediterranean. The threat of piracy would persist regardless of how much money the U.S. paid. These economic damages and threats highlighted the urgent need for the United States to reassess its diplomatic policies toward the Barbary states. Thus, the large tributes, ransom payments, and soaring insurance costs, which escalated toward the end of the 18th century, placed significant pressure on the U.S. economy. The losses incurred from these contributions to the Barbary states were regarded as a fundamental catalyst for the United States to initiate its fight against piracy.

### The Development of the U.S. Navy

The United States' military strategy was primarily built around its naval forces. In 1775, the U.S. Navy was established for the first time as the Continental Navy, officially recognized by Congress as a crucial naval force for the nation. In practice, the U.S. Navy was initially a combination of merchants and sailors who used their ships to disrupt British naval dominance in American waters during the War of Independence. The federal government

purchased these ships and converted them into warships. As a result, the U.S. Navy acquired a fleet of 12 ships and a force of 4,000 personnel, including officers and enlisted men.

The young navy successfully delayed British attacks until French reinforcements could arrive. The army was also effective in disrupting British supply lines, significantly hindering Britain's war efforts. However, after the war ended, the navy was disbanded by Congress for various reasons. Firstly, the United States lacked the necessary funds to maintain a naval force. Secondly, the end of the war meant that the majority of Congress saw no need for a large navy. This view was further reinforced by the belief that the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans served as natural barriers separating the U.S. from its enemies. Lastly, a powerful navy was seen as a potential tool for central government control, which contradicted the republican ideals of a nation that valued individual freedom and opposed authoritarianism. From the abolition of the navy, between 1785 and 1794, the United States lacked a significant naval force to defend itself. However, circumstances changed in 1794, prompting the U.S. government to once again see the need for a small naval force. Another effort to develop the U.S. Navy was the Naval Act of 1794. This act was introduced as a direct response to attacks by Barbary pirates on American merchant ships in the Mediterranean Sea. The act initially authorized the construction of six small warships, which were commissioned in May and October of 1797. However, shortly after construction began, three of the warships were canceled by Congress due to arising financial issues. Nevertheless, the outbreak of the Quasi-War with France in 1798 forced the United States to complete its original plan to build six warships. This newly established U.S. Navy saw its first action during the Quasi-War, with smaller warships tasked with protecting American merchant vessels against French attacks. After the Quasi-War ended in 1800, legislation was finally passed to establish a permanent navy, ensuring that its dissolution would never occur again.

The U.S. Navy experienced rapid development after the end of the Quasi-War. It also gained combat experience and adopted several French warfare tactics. This was arguably a significant step forward in fostering confidence in the navy's strength and readiness to declare war on the Barbary States. The presence of six warships clearly instilled in the United States a sense of confidence and pride when confronting any nation, including the Barbary States. The U.S. felt that it was the right time to end the peace treaties that the Barbary States had blatantly disregarded. The construction of small warships brought hope to the U.S. government and merchant ships, offering assurance that they would receive protection from their government to navigate freely without fear of Barbary pirates. Compared to European navies, the naval forces of the Barbary States had become weak by the late 18th century, showing no intention of developing their coastal defenses. As a result, they became easy targets for European powers, and this reality emboldened the United States to effectively utilize its newly established Navy. From this shift, when the war with Tripoli broke out, the United States possessed an effective naval force. Had the decision to rebuild the navy not been made, not only would the war against Tripoli have been unfeasible, but the U.S. would also have faced significant difficulties in defending itself during the Quasi-War with France. The Barbary pirates' attacks demonstrated to the U.S. government that a peacetime navy was essential for any nation wishing to maintain its sovereignty. As a result, the Barbary pirates' attacks had a profound impact on the early military development of the United States. Congress was spurred into action and passed necessary countermeasures, paving the way for the Tripoli War to take place.

### **American Foreign Policy**

During the colonial era, American commerce often encountered the Barbary States' pirates. However, under British protection, piracy was not a significant threat to America's trade security. After losing British military protection, the United States sought to safeguard itself against piracy by invoking the naval protection promised by France under the 1778 treaty between the two nations. Nonetheless, France's support amounted to mere promises with no substantive action. The subsequent U.S.-France diplomatic crisis rendered this effort futile. Notably, in 1786, Thomas Jefferson proposed forming military alliances between the United States and Western nations to combat pirate forces. This call received positive responses from countries like Portugal and the Netherlands but ultimately failed to materialize. This situation left American commerce in the Mediterranean highly vulnerable to pirate attacks, creating an urgent need for the United States to quickly develop policies and solutions to address the threat.

During the colonial period, American commerce frequently encountered the Barbary States' pirates. However, thanks to the protection of the British government, piracy was not a major concern for American trade security. After losing British military protection, the United States sought to protect itself against pirates by invoking the naval protection promised by France under the 1778 treaty between the two nations. Nonetheless, France's support amounted to mere promises with no concrete actions. The subsequent U.S.-France diplomatic crisis rendered this effort futile. Notably, in 1786, Thomas Jefferson proposed forming military alliances between the United States and Western nations to combat pirate forces. This call received positive responses from countries like Portugal and the Netherlands, but these efforts ultimately failed. This situation left American commerce in the Mediterranean highly vulnerable to pirate attacks, creating an urgent need for the United States to quickly develop

policies and solutions to address the threat. Hostage-taking or ransom demands were not uncommon in global maritime activities at that time. Moreover, such acts were considered normal practices during disputes between nations. However, these actions were deemed lawful only if they were carried out by state-authorized ships equipped with arms and limited to attacking vessels of countries their governments had declared war against, a practice known as privateering.

In contrast, the hostage-taking activities of the Barbary States' ships were a different story. Regarding this issue, there were conflicting perspectives on the activities of the Barbary States' pirates, focusing on two main views: (1) they were merely privateering activities of individuals, or (2) they were acts of piracy. In reality, it was very difficult to distinguish between these activities. European nations viewed the actions of the Barbary States as privateering and thus agreed to pay tribute to secure safe passage through the Mediterranean. However, the United States regarded the activities of the Barbary States as acts of piracy. The U.S. viewed the actions of the Barbary pirates as criminal acts carried out by ruthless, lawless, and uncontrollable bands of pirates who could arbitrarily and mercilessly attack innocent people passing through the Mediterranean. Americans defined piracy as "robbery or other violent acts on the seas... without any authority from, and independent of, any organized government," a definition that perfectly matched the U.S. perception of the Barbary pirates. To Americans, the Barbary pirates were savage and barbaric individuals devoid of any concept of humanity or morality. Their activities were outside the cultural norms of civilized societies, driven solely by a desire for stolen wealth and property, and their actions were deemed the most despicable. The U.S. regarded the Barbary States as pirate nations, condemning them for sponsoring and harboring pirates and violating international law. This perception heavily influenced U.S. policies. While European countries preferred paying tribute to secure peace in the region, the U.S. adopted a much more assertive stance. The U.S. aimed to completely eradicate piracy to ensure security in the Mediterranean. This perspective led to America's active engagement in the fight against the Barbary pirates. For the U.S., combating piracy was not merely a political or military dispute but carried moral significance, including liberating slaves and upholding the ideals of American freedom. It provided motivation for the U.S. to attack the Barbary States and legitimized this war as a just cause. America believed it was justified in leading the war against the Barbary States to combat piracy and liberate slaves in the Mediterranean, without intending to oppose any specific nation, especially avoiding conflict with the Ottoman Empire, the governing authority over the Barbary States.

In addressing the piracy issue, the U.S. government was divided between two main approaches: peace through diplomacy and tribute payments or war to eliminate piracy. At different times and under different circumstances, the U.S. adopted varying attitudes and policies toward the piracy problem. Initially, due to limited resources, the U.S. could only pursue diplomatic policies and agree to pay tribute to the Barbary States in exchange for peace. However, at the beginning of the 19th century, the transition from President John Adams's administration to that of President Thomas Jefferson marked a significant shift from peaceful diplomacy, focusing on negotiation and ransom payments, to a firm, decisive approach advocating for military action against the Barbary pirates.

Representing America's peaceful stance were the administrations of Presidents George Washington and John Adams. Beginning in 1784, the U.S. Congress allocated a budget of \$80,000 and authorized John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin to negotiate treaties with Morocco, Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis as part of a broader plan to ensure free trade in the Atlantic. At that time, the U.S. chose to follow the European approach of paying tribute to secure peace, address trade security issues, and free slaves primarily through negotiation, diplomacy, and ransom payments. As a result, in 1786, the U.S. signed its first treaty with the Barbary States, specifically with Morocco. In 1795 and 1796, the U.S. subsequently signed similar treaties with Algiers, Tunisia, and Tripoli. However, the cost of this peace was significant, estimated between \$0.5 to \$1 million based on the exchange rate of the time.

In practice, the peaceful solutions implemented by the U.S. government had several limitations. First, the government was too slow in resolving issues, causing delays in American trade and skyrocketing maritime insurance costs. This eroded public trust and worsened the plight of hundreds of enslaved individuals. Second, the U.S. failed to completely resolve the piracy problem or liberate American white slaves. Signing treaties with the Barbary States did not reduce the number of pirate attacks but instead made the Barbary States greedier. The number of American ships detained increased, and so did the tribute amounts. Furthermore, the treaties fell short of U.S. expectations and created many disadvantages for the country. They forced the U.S. to pay excessive amounts to the Barbary States, with initial estimates of \$80,000 for treaties with four Barbary nations ballooning to hundreds of thousands of dollars per treaty, including additional tribute payments. These treaties also revealed inequities, as the U.S. continually made concessions to the pirates, damaging its international reputation.

Despite these challenges, given America's circumstances at the time, the country had few viable alternatives to avoid the limitations of peaceful solutions. First, there were structural limitations in America's government organization. Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress played the primary role in making national decisions, including addressing piracy. However, Congress lacked the authority to enforce solutions to piracy threats. Early on, the American states retained significant autonomy, connected only through a "league of friendship" among

member states. The Articles of Confederation restricted Congress from signing any treaties affecting state rights and obligations, making it difficult to unify and execute treaties. It was not until 1789, when the U.S. Constitution took effect, that the U.S. government could begin executing international agreements. Thus, in the early stages, it was challenging for Congress or the federal government to take decisive action against piracy, leading to prolonged delays in finding concrete solutions.

Moreover, America's military resources were still limited. The U.S. lacked a strong navy to protect its domestic and maritime security. At the same time, Congress was reluctant to build a navy or go to war due to fears of upsetting the balance of power in America. Congress feared granting more power to the president, potentially destabilizing the American republic and even leading to political upheaval. From an economic perspective, waging war was beyond the U.S.'s financial capacity. Naval construction and military operations in the distant Mediterranean would be extremely costly. Meanwhile, the U.S. economy, devastated by the War of Independence, was still recovering, and the federal government lacked a taxation system to fund national projects. This made war against piracy infeasible at the time. The absence of a self-defensive navy created numerous disadvantages for the U.S., leaving the country vulnerable to external attacks. Without naval forces to ensure maritime security in the Mediterranean, American ships became easy prey for Barbary pirates. Peaceful solutions also reflected the U.S. government's cautious approach to political and economic matters. Both Presidents Washington and Adams feared the financial challenges of war and public opposition, as well as political divisions within America. Additionally, relations with European powers complicated the situation. President Adams pointed out that as long as major maritime powers like Britain, France, and the Netherlands continued paying tribute and potentially colluding with the Barbary States to attack American ships, unilateral war declarations against pirate nations would not be the best option for the U.S.

## CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on a pivotal period in American history, when the young nation faced significant challenges from the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean during the 18th and 19th centuries. The acts of plundering, capturing sailors, and demanding ransom by the Barbary states not only caused severe economic and commercial losses but also threatened America's national honor and international reputation. In response, the United States transitioned from a policy of appeasement to military confrontation, marking a turning point in its foreign and military strategy, especially under President Thomas Jefferson. This shift was driven by economic, social, and national pride pressures. Initially, appeasement policies and peace treaties were temporary measures that failed to resolve the issue and, in some cases, emboldened the Barbary states' greed. However, the development of the U.S. Navy, combined with the political resolve of Jefferson's administration, enabled America to engage in the Barbary Wars. These victories not only safeguarded free trade but also affirmed the United States' position as a strong and independent nation on the international stage.

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of military strength combined with decisive diplomacy in protecting national interests. The fight against the Barbary pirates reflected America's determination to defend its national honor and marked its maturity in addressing international challenges. Furthermore, the study provides valuable historical lessons on how small or emerging nations can leverage economic, military, and diplomatic power to overcome pressures from larger powers and external threats. Broadly, this paper not only clarifies the evolution of America's strategy against piracy but also underscores the importance of free trade, national honor, and internal unity in building a nation's position. It stands as evidence of how a small nation can create significant changes in international relations through strong will and well-devised strategies.

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