

Thomas Jefferson primary sources

Weakness provokes insult and injury, while a condition to punish it often prevents it. This reasoning leads to the necessity of some naval force, that being the only weapo[n] with which we can reach an enemy. I think it to our interest to punis[h] the first insult: because an insult unpunished is the parent of many oth[ers].

Jefferson to John Jay, 23 August 1785

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We have taken some pains to find out the sums which the nations of Europe give to the Barbary states to purchase their peace. They will not tell this; yet from some glimmerings it appears to be very considerable; and I do expect that they would tax us at one, two, or perhaps three hundred thousand dollars a year. Surely our people will not give this. Would it not be better to offer them an equal treaty. If they refuse, why not go to war with them? Spain, Portugal, Naples and Venice are now at war with them. Every part of the Mediterranean therefore would offer us friendly ports. We ought to begin a naval power, if we mean to carry on our own commerce Can we begin it on a more honourable occasion or with a weaker foe? I am of opinion Paul Jones with half a dozen frigates would totally destroy their commerce: not by attempting bombardments as the Mediterranean states do wherein they act against the whole Barbary force brought to a point, but by constant cruising and cutting them to peices by peicemeal.

Jefferson to James Monroe, 11 November 1784

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I would make an additional observation or two as to the pyratival states. If we enter into treaty there, a consul must be kept with each to recover our vessels taken in breach of their treaty. For these violations they practise constantly against the strongest nations, and the vessels so taken are recovered with trouble and always some loss and considerable delay. The attempts heretofore made to suppress these powers have been to exterminate them at one blow. They are too numerous and powerful by land for that. A small effort, but long continued, seems to be the only method. By suppressing their marine and trade totally and continuing this till the present race of seamen should be pretty well out of the way and the younger people betaken to husbandry for which their soil and climate is well fitted, these nests of banditti might be reformed. I am not well enough acquainted with the present dispositions of the European courts to say whether a general confederacy might be formed for suppressing these pyracies. Such as should refuse would give us a just right to turn pyrates also on their West India trade, and to require an annual tribute which might reimburse what we may be obliged to pay to obtain a safe navigation in their seas. *Were we possessed even of a small naval force what a bridle would it be in the mouths of the West India powers and how respectfully would they demean themselves toward us.* Be assured that the present *disrespect* of the *nations* of *Europe* for us will inevitably bring on insults which must *involve* us in *war*. A *coward* is much more *exposed* to *quarrels* than a *man of spirit*.

Jefferson to James Monroe, 6 Feb. 1785

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From Jefferson's First Annual Message to Congress, Dec. 8, 1801

To this state of general peace with which we have been blessed, one only exception exists. Tripoli, the least considerable of the Barbary States, had come forward with demands unfounded either in right or in compact, and had permitted itself to denounce war, on our failure to comply before a given day. The style of the demand admitted but one answer. I sent a small squadron of frigates into the Mediterranean, with assurances to that power of our sincere desire to remain in peace, but with orders to protect our commerce against the threatened attack. The measure was seasonable and salutary. The bey had already declared war in form. His cruisers were out. Two had arrived at Gibraltar. Our commerce in the Mediterranean was blockaded, and that of the Atlantic in peril. The arrival of our squadron dispelled the danger. One of the Tripolitan cruisers having fallen in with, and engaged the small schooner Enterprise, commanded by Lieutenant Sterret, which had gone as a tender to our larger vessels, was captured, after a heavy slaughter of her men, without the loss of a single one on our part. The bravery exhibited by our citizens on that element, will, I trust, be a testimony to the world that it is not the want of that virtue which makes us seek their peace, but a conscientious desire to direct the energies of our nation to the multiplication of the human race, and not to its destruction. . . .

I wish I could say that our situation with all the other Barbary states was entirely satisfactory. Discovering that some delays had taken place in the performance of certain articles stipulated by us, I thought it my duty, by immediate measures for fulfilling them, to vindicate to ourselves the right of considering the effect of departure from stipulation on their side. From the papers which will be laid before you, you will be enabled to judge whether our treaties are regarded by them as fixing at all the measure of their demands, or as guarding from the exercise of force our vessels within their power; and to consider how far it will be safe and expedient to leave our affairs with them in their present posture.

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jeffmes1.asp