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*Editors*

# **BORDERS AND CONFLICTS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN**



The volume is available on the website:

<http://www.mediterraneanknowledge.org/publications/index.php/bookseries>

ISBN online: 978-88-99662-01-1

How to cite this volume:

D'Angelo G. & Martins Ribeiro J. (Eds.). (2016). *Borders and Conflicts in the Mediterranean Basin*. Fisciano, Italy : ICSR Mediterranean Knowledge.

On the cover:

The “Carta Genovese” (1457). National Library, Florence, Italy.

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## *Conflict and Peace in the Mediterranean. Barbary Privateering in the Late 18<sup>th</sup> and Early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

JORGE MARTINS RIBEIRO

The Mediterranean Sea has been for centuries a crossroads between the three continents of the old Western world (Europe, Asia and Africa). This interior sea (*mer Intérieure*), as Fernand Braudel calls it, contrary to what current events seem to show, has united peoples and civilizations more than it has separated them. While the political unity of the Mediterranean world did not survive the end of the Roman Empire, the actual rupture is cultural and, according to Henri Pirenne, occurred in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries when Islam first appeared. After this era, as Fernand Braudel wrote, the Mediterranean world has never been, as in ancient times, a major axis of one single civilization, but rather the frontier, the borderline between two closed universes, frequently hostile, but always unknown to each other. After 1580, quoting Fernand Braudel once again, Fontenay (2010) wrote that once the Mediterranean left the *Big History*, the main and decisive clashes between competing hegemonies took place in the Atlantic and in the battlefields of continental Europe (pp. 24-25, 32-33).

When the British colonies of North America became independent at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Mediterranean region was then, as it is now, a very important and sensitive part of the world. However, in the first years of the United States as a nation, they had to face, like the European countries, attacks from the so-called “Barbary pirates”. Note that the word Barbary in several European languages, at least since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, doesn’t mean Barbarian, as one might expect, but according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* it is the geographic name given to the Northern African area extending from Egypt to the Atlantic, which also gives its name to the states that shared this area (Chidsey, 1971, pp. 1-2; Saint-Vicent, 1999, p. 159)<sup>1</sup>. Donald Bar Chidsey (1971) wrote that «the Berbers consisted of Turks, Ar-

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<sup>1</sup> «All Barbary was divided into four parts, and these were, from west to east, Morocco, Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. There was also the semi-independent province of Barca, but this was generally thought as a part of Tripoli, which handled its foreign affairs» (Chidsey, 1971, pp. 1-2).

abs, Kabyles, Moriscos, or Moors who had lately been driven out of Spain, and a sprinkling of late-coming Jews» (pp. 6-7).

It seems that privateering in its early stages was a reaction of the victims of piracy against the injustice they had suffered. So, according to French Historian August Toussaint, this was a way for the sovereigns to try to regulate this violence by legitimising and controlling this activity through their own authority (Saint-Vincent, 1999, p. 159). The first letter of marque appears to have been issued in 1206 by French King Philip Augustus or Philip II, but was only valid for the English Channel (Saint-Vincent, 1999, p. 159). Historian Gardener W. Allen (1905), however, was of the opinion that

during the late Middle Ages the relations between the Barbary Powers and the Christian nations were amicable. They traded together and made enlightened treaties. But with the dawn of the sixteenth century appears a change in the conditions, and henceforth a state of chronic warfare between Christians and Moors. Then began the period of activity of the Barbary corsairs which lasted about three hundred years.

The author explains this fact with the conquest of Granada in 1492, which forced a great part of this kingdom's population to go to Africa. Besides increasing the North-African population they also carried with them a lot of hate towards the Spanish. Raids against the Iberian coasts would then be a form of vengeance (pp. 2-3).

Privateers were both European and North African, although nowadays we tend to consider only the Barbary corsairs, which is true in relation to the era we are discussing in this paper (Garrity, 2008, pp. 395-396). We would just like to mention that, besides the corsairs, the actual object of this paper, the Mediterranean had what we can accurately call pirates. They sailed under a black flag, no one knew their nationality, and they destroyed the ships and killed all their crews to avoid leaving any traces. It seems that some were commanded by Turks and that part of the crew was of this nationality, as well as from the Greek islands (Panzac, 2005, pp. 89-90).

In a book published originally in France in 1999 and in English in 2005, almost one hundred years after the appearance of Garden Allen's work, French historian Daniel Panzac (2005) also advocated that although the sea had always been important to North Africans, it was after the 16<sup>th</sup> century «with the arrival of the Ottomans» that it acquired an «undisputed pre-eminence», as Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli became the capitals of new Ottoman provinces. It is also interesting to quote this same author (2005) when he states that for over 300 years these corsairs «stroke fear» into the Europeans' hearts and «plagued their imagination», while on the south shore «these seamen were considered the spearhead of Islam and were the pride of the Muslims». However, he wrote (2005) that by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Europeans' naval superiority in the Mediterranean area was broadly settled, which meant that North Africans seamen avoided attacking warships, but instead assaulted merchantmen and unprotected coastal areas. As a consequence of these activities, its maritime trade was seriously impaired, their coasts were attacked and their capital cities were often bombed. As Daniel Panzac states (2005), «these were real wars exacerbated on both sides by the religious issue, and wars in

which slavery was practiced on both sides». Although the majority of Western sources and literature talk about the Christian captives, it is fair to say that the corsairs' biggest fear was to be captured and ending up «in the Christian galleys». In fact, the mentioned author (2005) affirms that of the 12000 Louis XIV's slaves, almost a quarter were Ottomans and Maghrebians. After the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we can find also North African slaves in Malta and Spain (pp. 2, 21, 23).

Although there were negotiations between the European powers and the North African Regencies on the exchange of slaves, this was seldom effective. In fact, buying back slaves was considered to be a religious duty, so it was strongly encouraged, and the mere exchange was not so important (Panzac, 2005, p. 23). A Portuguese historian, Filipe Themudo Barata, claims in an article published in 2008 that in Portugal, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, "buying captives" was an affair of state, with the king playing a very important role, so that it became a question of foreign policy (Barata, 2008, pp. 109, 122).

After several centuries of existence, in order to better control this enterprise, its regulation was definitely established in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Privateering became almost institutional and was used by several countries as a weapon to inflict damage on the enemies' commercial exchanges.

French historian Michel Fontenay divides this activity, in the French language, into two categories, "course" and "corso". The first word means privateering in general, but a seaman involved in the second activity is according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* a corsair, for e.g., «a privateer of the Barbary Coast». Xavier Labat Saint-Vincent explains that this second undertaking is a kind of perpetuation of the crusades against the Infidels. In fact, besides attacking the ships of the powers against whom their state had issued letters of marque, the corsairs were always prepared to seize all the Muslim ships, mainly those of Northern African states. Under the cover of a Holy War this was an endemic activity for Malta and the Barbary Regencies. With the Counter Reformation, it achieved its apogee in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and declined during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, corsair activities were re-born, although in a modest way, in the last third of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. We have also to bear in mind that the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a "golden century" for both the Mediterranean as well as for international trade (Saint-Vincent, 1999, pp. 159-167).

On another hand, Patrick Garrity (2008) also explained that these North African political entities, commonly referred to as regencies,

fall somewhere between what we generally characterize today as "states" and "nonstate actors" and could even be "termed as quasistates"; it also seems that their rulers exercised a various and limited degree of control over the territories they claimed to control, especially the Berber (Moorish) and Arab peoples of the interior.

It is also important to explain that Morocco was an independent kingdom, while the other three regencies «were still nominally part of the Ottoman Empire and the Sultan still had important influence on them» (pp. 395-396). It is probably interesting to recall this detail to which Timothy Walker (2012) drew attention when he wrote

that «Morocco is sometimes credited as the first country to recognize US independence, but the Sultan of Morocco only did so formally on 23 June 178» (p. 280, footnote 104). However, «American officials did not treat its sovereign status differently from that of Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers» (Garrity, 2008, p. 433, footnote 2).

So, during the three centuries of Ottoman rule over North Africa, we must bear in mind that these “states” enjoyed a considerable autonomy towards «the central power in Istanbul», an independence that gave them «diplomatic emancipation» and the possibility of establishing dynasties in Tunis and Tripoli (Garrity, 2008, p.3). Donald Barr Chidsey (1971) explained that these rulers «were to all intents and purposes independent princes, though they had no blood claims to their thrones and were only military adventurers or at best, the sons or grandsons of such» (p. 2).

Although they paid Istanbul an annual tribute, they were in fact «absolute monarchs answerable to nobody»<sup>2</sup>.

Although exercising power in the sultan’s name, they tried to extend «their influence to the hinterland as they needed to have access to supplies for their «capital cities» and money to pay the janissaries. Due to the fact that after 1660 the naval supremacy was handed over from Spain to Great-Britain and France, by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century a lot had changed, their port capitals had managed to control the “inland territory”, they traded across all the Mediterranean countries, and signed treaties with several countries, prompting Daniel Panzac (2005) to state that «the corsairs’ period of glory was over» (pp. 10-12).

The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw “political stabilisation” as well as a more peaceful establishment of the “system of the succession” in Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. All this stability helped the development of these young states that shared similar characteristics and *modus operandi*. In these three regencies, the Dey of Algiers, the Bey of Tunis and the Pasha of Tripoli whose main function was «to command the army» all ruled their “states” together with a trustworthy group of men (Panzac, 2005, p. 13-14).

Patrick Garrity stated (2008) that for the 18<sup>th</sup> century American minds the Barbary regencies were «based on a way of life fundamentally at odds with the United States and the rest of the civilized world». So, it was hard for them, even for someone like Benjamin Franklin, to understand why Great-Britain and France suffered this outrage. Nevertheless, the real truth is that this quasi state of war served all parties involved. As far as European powers were concerned, it was good to have someone else do the dirty work of harming the rival’s commerce, without having to go to war. What the regencies cleverly understood was that this was a way of receiving tributes and presents, as long as they did not go over the top with their attacks, so as not to attract heavy reprisals. On the other hand, as Patrick Garrity stat-

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<sup>2</sup> «The words bey and dey are often confused. They mean substantially the same thing, though they come from different roots. Bey was the Turkish noun “beg,” which meant maternal uncle. It was a semiaffectionate nickname that might be given to any likable or admirable old man. Dey definitely was a title, meaning more or less lord or lord-governor. The offices were called beylik and deylik» (Chidsey, 1971, p. 151, footnote 1).

ed, these corsair activities helped the North African powers to maintain domestic peace (p. 396).

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European states managed to sign peace agreements with the Regencies, with the exception of Spain, Naples, Venice and the Order of Malta, all catholic powers whose fleets had fought against the Ottomans in the famous battle of Lepanto, in 1572. Eventually, these countries ended up negotiating with these powers, especially after the Seven Years War. So, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Barbary regencies that had survived two centuries of pressure from the most powerful Western powers had won «de facto – then official – diplomatic recognition, in total independence of the Ottoman state» (Panzac, 2005, pp. 38-40).

The merchantmen from the independent United States had to face three threats in the Mediterranean, although these waters were not unknown ground to them. The American merchants had experienced difficulties in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but as relations between Great-Britain and the North African Regencies improved they were able to develop trade. However, after the 1783 treaty, in which Great-Britain recognised United States' independence, they could not count any more on the protection of the Royal Navy. In fact, Lord Sheffield was of the opinion that none of the great maritime powers were interested in protecting American ships from the Barbary Corsairs. In view of this, the Congress decided to sign a treaty with Morocco in 1786, but with the other Regencies things were more complicated (Ribeiro, 1997, p. 325). Morocco, as we have seen, was an independent kingdom that had abandoned privateering at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and only few captains carried on this activity in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In our opinion, as it was a very sporadic enterprise it did not do much harm to the Portuguese or American merchant vessels (Panzac, 2005, p. 201).

Nevertheless, in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, ships hoisting the flag of the new American nation sailing in Mediterranean waters could be attacked, without being at odds with Great-Britain. At the same time, the United States had not yet a Navy powerful enough to counterattack, so it was forced to sign treaties with these Regencies. In fact, the young Republic's trade was increasing rapidly, as described by Daniel Panzac (2005) – «several dozen American ships were in the Mediterranean» (p. 40). In 1797, the United States appointed three consuls to these states, William Eaton to Tunis, James Leander Cathcart to Tripoli and Richard Brian to Algiers, who was also «consul general for the entire Barbary coast» (Wright and Macleod, 1945, pp. 16, 18).

However, it is perhaps little known that in the first years of the United States as an independent nation, taking into account all we wrote about the quasi nonexistence, in the country, of a capable navy, the Portuguese fleet helped to protect the American shipping activity. In fact, after two naval expeditions against Algiers conjointly with Spain, Naples and the Order of Malta, Lisbon, incapable of signing a peace treaty with the Algerians, sent a squadron patrol to the Strait of Gibraltar to protect Portuguese ships, namely those involved in the Brazilian trade. In fact, as Spain and Algiers had concluded a truce, this made it possible for the Algerians to cross the Strait

of Gibraltar and enter the Atlantic Ocean. The Spaniards paid dearly for this cease-fire, but the Portuguese refused to pay a tribute. In 1786, the year following the seizure by the Algerians of two American merchant vessels, the *Maria* from Boston and the *Dauphin* from Philadelphia, off the coast of Portugal, the United States sent a representative to Algiers to negotiate an agreement between both parties, but as usual the Algerians demanded money (Walker, 2012, p. 283). In view of all this, the Portuguese government ordered its fleet in the Strait to protect American ships from the Algerian corsairs. This decision was particularly well received by American officials and this unilateral measure met the desires of Thomas Jefferson. In view of this, the Congress sent a letter to Queen D. Maria I expressing its gratitude for the help granted. This message was delivered by Colonel William Stephens Smith, son-in-law of John Adams and secretary of his country's legation in London. He had the honour of being received by the Queen and the Royal Family. During the audience, the protection to American merchantmen by the Portuguese fleet was reaffirmed and, at the same time, the Court of Lisbon expressed its desire to maintain good relations between both countries. In the report he sent to the United States government, Smith drew attention to the importance of Portugal's geographic position, the advantage of having its ports open to American shipping, and the Portuguese attitude towards the corsairs.

It was only because Portugal insisted that the federal government had to appoint David Humphreys (who among other things was aide-de-camp and a close friend of George Washington) Resident Minister with the Portuguese Court. We believe that one of the reasons why the United States complied with Portuguese wishes has to do with the fact that Lisbon, the capital, was a seaport, making it a good place to find information about the North African Regencies, policies and activities. Besides this being also the opinion advocated by Thomas Jefferson since at least 1785, Humphreys stated that this city was the best place to establish communications between the United States and Morocco (Ribeiro, 1997, pp. 633-638, 709).

This is even more interesting if we think that Patrick Garrity (2008), in the paper we have been quoting, says that although the United States tried to obtain help from other European powers, France and the Netherlands turned it down. In fact, Britain did not want to have any post-war contacts with its ex-colonies and Lord Sheffield stated that he knew how valuable and strategic trade with the regencies was, and that any of the great powers would be interested in protecting American shipping (pp. 397-398). We would also like to stress that besides Portugal, the Netherlands and Spain also protected American vessels, which used forged or bought passes to pretend to be British merchantmen. The Algerians could not tell the difference, considering that both spoke English, and this avoided them the risk of being captured (Gardner, 1905, p. 15).

When the peace agreement was signed with Morocco, United States officials, like Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, were trying to conclude a treaty of Friendship and Trade with Portugal. Americans entertained high expectations with this agreement, so did the merchants that lived in Portugal and traded with



North America since colonial times. John Jay, Secretary of State in 1787 even wrote in one of his dispatches that «the treaty with Portugal it seems meets with obstacles. I wish they may not be insuperable, for I view a commercial connection with that nation and also with Spain, as beneficial to all the parties» (Ribeiro, 1997, 325)<sup>3</sup>

Two years earlier Thomas Jefferson had stated that all the negotiations in order to develop trade with Portugal would fail if Algerian plundering could not be avoided (Cappon, L. (ed.), 1987, p.103; Magalhães, 1991, p. 41; Ribeiro, 1997, p. 325). Jefferson also thought that these political entities were only «partially covered by the law of nations» while John Adams regarded them as «nests of bandity». On the other hand, we must not forget that there were frequent dissensions between these regencies, except when they had to deal with the Christian countries (Garrity, 2008, pp. 396-397).

Thomas Jefferson believed that before the Declaration of Independence trade with the Mediterranean was very important, as the then British colonies sent to this part of the world about 1/6 of the total of the wheat and flour exported and 1/4 «in value of dried and picked fish». It employed between 80 and 100 ships, annually, amounting to about 20.000 tons and 1,200 seamen. American officials wanted to divert «their merchants, financiers, and shippers» from the «English-oriented trade» and the Mediterranean seemed a good option (Garrity, 2008, p. 398).

Both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson realised that «the two agents at Algiers» were «money and fear» and that Tripoli was asking a very high price to sign a peace treaty. However, in the early 1780s, the US Confederation Congress had neither the money nor a powerful navy at its service. Earlier on, Adams had been in favour of paying a tribute to these Regencies, as the country had no power to fight them. He argued that the losses in money and reputation would be less than if United States shipping continued to be subject to these attacks. On the other hand, trade with North African states was not so important for the Americans. If these African States had to face a powerful navy, they would lose more than the United States.

Thomas Jefferson was not of the same opinion, but rather in favour of military measures. He therefore thought that if «a league of second-tier naval powers, such as Portugal, Naples, Venice, Malta, Sweden and Denmark, joined by the United States» it would be a blockading force with the expenses being shared by all those involved. On the other hand, with such a united front it would be very difficult for the Regencies to launch attacks against the European countries (Panzac, pp. 114, 116). This plan did not work as Spain had signed a treaty with Algiers, and Great-Britain as well as France did not show much interest in it (Garrity, 2008, pp. 398-400). Thomas Jefferson very realistically thought that once the American administration began to accept this kind of blackmail there would be no end to it. He even refused the offer

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<sup>3</sup> N.A.R.A. General Records of the Department of State, Central files, *Diplomatic and Consular Instructions. Foreign Letters of the Continental Congress and the Department of State, 1785-1790*, vol. 1 (14January 1785 – 23 December 1790), (National Archives microfilm publication, M61, roll 1), p. 234-235. Dispatch from the Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs, John Jay, to William Carmichael, New York, 4 January 1787.

made to him by General Lafayette to command a naval expedition against these “pirates” as he knew he had to deal with the «jealousies of the European powers» along with the isolationism and stinginess of his own government (Wright and Macleod, 1945, p. 23; Allen, 1905, p. 40). By 1789, with the new Constitution, the Federal Government had more tools to deal with this threat, but, at first, George Washington’s administration was more in favour of negotiating than using force, so the establishment of a powerful navy was delayed (Garrity, 2008, p. 400).

In fact, in 1791 Thomas Barclay was appointed special envoy to the Emperor of Morocco, with the main objective of obtaining the ratification of the treaty his predecessor had signed with the United States in 1787.

Adam’s negotiation penchant can also be seen when in 1791 he tried to free Americans held captive in Algiers, as until then negotiations had been conducted by the Spanish consul in that city, but Jefferson sent funds so that all the expenses could be paid by David Humphreys (Humphreys, 1917, p. 12; Ribeiro, 1997, p. 710). At the same time, Humphreys was informed of the state of the negotiations with Algiers for the release of the 24 American prisoners in that Regency and that until that moment those talks had been conducted by the Spanish consular agent. Unfortunately, Thomas Barclay only managed to travel in November, but only went as far as Gibraltar, having to return to Lisbon where he died in 1793 (Ribeiro, 1997, pp. 709-711).

After Barclay’s death, Humphreys being one of the two people who, in Europe, knew about the contents of the dispatches, he decided to take the matter into his own hands. The other person who had full knowledge of the matter was Thomas Pinckney, at that time American representative in Great-Britain and later also Envoy Extraordinary to Spain. Although David Humphreys was in possession of all the dispatches, he was not able to find the whereabouts of the presents the United States government had sent to be given to the Emperor of Morocco. He even went to Gibraltar, from where he reported the Moroccan political situation to the Secretary of State and all the efforts he had made to free the captives held in Algiers. As he was also annoyed with the way the Algerian affairs were being conducted, he offered to conduct negotiations in that capacity. In fact, he was chosen to negotiate with Algiers and Morocco at the same time as Captain Nathaniel Cutting was appointed as his Secretary. As soon as he arrived in Lisbon in late August 1793, Humphreys decided to travel to Gibraltar, where he hoped to reach the Spanish city of Alicante so that he could travel to Algiers. The mission was however aborted as the Dey did not allow him to sail to his capital city. This setback changed Humphrey’s view on how to deal with this problem, making him support the creation of a naval force and to awaken the Americans to this outrage (Ribeiro, 1997, pp. 711-713).

In 1793, Portugal’s Royal Court was caught by surprise when it was informed that the English Consul, contrary to Lisbon’s wishes and without its previous knowledge, had concluded a one-year truce with Algiers. Minister Sousa Coutinho also guaranteed that nothing would be paid in cash or in the form of presents. Besides, if the truce was ever to be signed, Portuguese officials would not allow Algerian ships to enter the Atlantic for a period of three months. After this interview,

David Humphreys was almost sure these conditions would be rejected by the Dey (Ribeiro, 1997, pp. 717-719, 725).

This peace agreement seriously impacted on the security in the Atlantic. In fact, as soon as the truce between Portugal and Algiers was concluded on the night of 5 to 6 October 1793 «four Frigates, three Xebecks and a Brig of 20 guns have passed the streights into the Atlantic». Having received this information from David Humphreys, Consul Edward Church, after warning all the American captains in Lisbon, had an interview with Luís Pinto de Sousa Coutinho, who once again reaffirmed that the Portuguese Court was not happy with this arrangement, much less with the fact that Portugal had to pay «the Dey one third as much as he [received] annually from the court of Spain». At the same time, Portuguese authorities had increased the number of armed vessels «on the Mediterranean station» and also because they had no faith or great expectations in the ceasefire. This was also the opinion Edward Church conveyed in a dispatch to Thomas Jefferson on 30 October 1793. At the same time, Church had received intelligence from a «staunch friend of America» that there was «an infernal combination in Europe» against the United States, being France the only country not involved in it (Swanson, 1939, vol. I, pp. 46-49; Ribeiro, 2001, pp. 338-341). In spite of these dangers, the craving for profit, as well as the misleading publicity made by British merchants in United States newspapers, many Americans continued to trade in the Mediterranean, even if they could now be captured in Portuguese waters (Ribeiro, 2001, pp. 341-342).

Before all these difficulties, both David Humphreys and Captain O'Brien wrote letters to President George Washington and to Vice-President Thomas Jefferson advising them that the United States needed a navy to protect American merchantmen, to allow the country to trade. Consul Edward Church also expressed the same opinion to Thomas Jefferson. In view of this, the Congress voted for the establishment of a naval force to protect American ships from the Algerians. The decisions issued by both Houses of Congress are very important, as they mark the beginning of the United States navy, leading to what it is today (Allen, 1905, pp. 47-50; Chidsey, 1971, p. 25; Garrity, 2008, p. 401; Ribeiro, 2001, p. 342).

The American press such as the *Baltimore Daily Intelligencer* and two Boston newspapers, the *Independent Chronicle* as well as the *Universal Advertiser*, openly accused Great-Britain of being behind this affair. The *Baltimore Daily Intelligencer* went as far as to also implicate Spain. When Thomas Pinckney asked the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs for an explanation, Lord Grenville started by saying that London had intervened in response to a request from the Court of Lisbon and ended up confessing that this truce was highly advantageous to Britain, as the country needed the cooperation of the Portuguese Navy (Ribeiro, 1997, p. 720). Humphries was also sure of Portugal's good faith as in letter written to the Secretary of State Edmund Randolph he clearly states:

Mr. Logie himself acknowledged to me, that rather he or anyone else was ever authorised on the part of Portugal to promise one single farthing of money for a peace with Algiers. And I only ask you,

in the name of common sense, whether Mr. Logie, or anyone else, could seriously expect or design to make that peace, without giving any money? (Ribeiro, 1997, p. 730)<sup>4</sup>.

We agree with Gardner Allen (1905) when he says that «both Colonel Humphreys and Edward Church were of the opinion that this truce was made through the influence of the British consul at Algiers and without the authority of the Portuguese government». The Secretary for Foreign Affairs assured them that although Portugal was eager for peace, he wanted to allow time to warn their friends

but the British Court, zealous overmuch for the happiness of the two nations, Portugal and Algiers, in order to precipitate this important business very officiously authorized Charles Logie, the British consul-general and agent at Algiers, not only to treat, but to conclude, for and in behalf of this Court, not only without authority, but even without consulting it (p. 47).

Portuguese officials, however, had not thought convenient to reject the cease-fire, but «they wou'd not be displeased if a plausible pretence shou'd offer to break it». In fact, now that Great-Britain did not need a powerful force this served both British and Spanish interests (Swanson, 1939, vol. I, p. 52; Ribeiro, 2001, p. 338)<sup>5</sup>. Consul Edward Church is harsher in his comments about this affair, as he wrote: «the conduct of the British in this business leaves no room to doubt or mistake their object, which was evidently aimed at us» (Allen, 105, p. 47).

Humphreys gave the British the benefit of the doubt saying that Consul Logie acted «on his own responsibility» and the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Lord Grenville, assured Charles Pinckney that the British government did not want to harm the Americans. It had simply done what had been asked «by their friend and ally the Court of Portugal» to achieve peace with Algiers. Following this request, Consul Logie was entrusted to do all he could to achieve this goal. As a peace treaty could not be signed immediately, he was able to negotiate a truce.

As we can see, there are two contradictory versions, the Portuguese one and the British one. The Americans were sure that this agreement had been concluded without Portugal's knowledge and that the real aim was to damage American trade.

After the truce was concluded, Edward Church tried to warn American shipping about the danger they were incurring in and managed to get from the Portuguese authorities a convoy for several of these vessels. Of course these escorts depended on

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<sup>4</sup> N.A.R.A. General records of the Department of State, Central files, *Despatches from United States Ministers to Portugal*, vol. 4 (30 January – 29 November 1794) (National Archives microfilm publication, M43, roll 3). Letter from the minister resident Colonel David Humphreys to Captain Richard O'Brien, dated Lisbon, 3 March 1794, annexed to dispatch no. 113 from the minister resident, Colonel David Humphreys, to the Secretary of State, Edmund Randolph, dated Lisbon, 6 March 1794

<sup>5</sup> When we say that this served Spanish interests, we base ourselves on the following statement by Edward Church «Upon the presumption that such was the general opinion, and my knowledge that the Spanish Ambassador when at Court on the 15<sup>th</sup> Inst<sup>l</sup> had been treated rather roughly by all the Nobility present when he congratulated the Prince on the happy event of the Truce.» (Swanson, 1939, vol. I, p. 52).

“occasional arrangements” (Allen, 1905, pp. 47-48; Garrity, 2008, p. 401). Note should also be made that both the British and the Spanish Ambassadors were against the Portuguese granting them a convoy, but as Edward Church puts it, «the British have lost ground by this left-handed policy» and the Minister and Secretary of State for the Navy Martinho de Melo e Castro was in favour of giving protection to American ships. At the same time, Church stated that the general opinion was not very much in favour of the United Kingdom and that this was a good moment to suggest a new commercial treaty to Portugal. Finally, the Secretary of War and Foreign Affairs Luís Pinto de Sousa Coutinho allowed United States ships to be escorted by the Portuguese navy (Swanson, 1939, vol. I, p. 53; Ribeiro, 2001, p. 338).

Although tired of this endless affair, David Humphreys was worried about the fate of the captives in Algiers and the security of the American merchantmen in the Mediterranean. He therefore continued to advise US officials on how to raise money to pay the ransoms, asking the European consuls in this Regency for help, and Minister Sousa Coutinho for the protection of the Portuguese squadron in the Strait of Gibraltar. It seems that Lisbon received this request favourably, which led President George Washington to mention this in the address he made to the Congress on 28 February 1795.

The information received from Algiers urged the United States to sign a peace treaty with the Dey. Besides the poor conditions under which the American captives were being held, there was always the possibility that both Spanish and British could make the negotiations more difficult, as these countries feared American competition and, moreover, it was not possible to trust either the French or the Swedish.

Needing money to negotiate with Algiers, which he could not obtain in Europe, and dreading a war between Portugal and France or a peace agreement between the Portuguese Court and the Dey, David Humphreys decided to travel to the United States with the intention of diverting the attention of those who did not want Americans to obtain peace, and to be able to talk directly with President George Washington about this sensible subject. Although his attitude was criticised, it was decided that the United States should use France’s good offices. Joseph Donaldson, consul in Tunis and Tripoli, settled peace with Algiers and a treaty was finally signed in September 1795, although all the problems with this Regency were only completely solved when the treaty was ratified in 1796 (Ribeiro, 1997, pp. 737-749).

We must also take in consideration that for North African powers privateering had at the same time a religious and a political dimension, but, of course, as Daniel Panzac (2005, p. 101) writes, «its primary purpose was obviously an economic one». When chased by corsairs, the American ships, which already had to avoid the British Navy in the Atlantic, in the Mediterranean they had to seek shelter in Italian ports for the first 40 years after the Declaration of Independence, the United States were involved in numerous negotiations, as well as with wars with North African Regencies (Wright & Macleod, 1845, pp. 16, 18).

James Simpson, American consul in Gibraltar, tried to renovate the treaty with Morocco, but as a war was going on between two brothers, pretenders to the

throne, this proved to be a difficult mission, especially for a country like the United States, which did not have a strong navy in the region. Nevertheless, in 1795 he managed to sign an agreement with this power (Ribeiro, 1997, p. 745). By 1796, before the real possibility of a war between Portugal and Spain, the Portuguese squadron had to stop patrolling the Strait of Gibraltar, making it possible for the Algerians to enter the Atlantic (Ribeiro, 1997, pp. 749-750).

Allan Gardner (1905) alleged that England did this on purpose to allow «the Algerines to cruise against Americans» (p.15). Allan Garrity, (2008) quoting Ray Irwin, is of the opinion that this mischievous intentional attitude caused great harm to American trade, as the corsairs captured 11 ships and 100 seamen, while the rates of maritime insurance increased three times (p. 401).

At this stage, we should point out that although the laws passed in the Congress, they met with a lot of internal opposition, even if they paid off, as in 1795 a treaty with Algiers was signed, according to which the United States had to pay a yearly tribute of \$642 000 and send naval stores worth \$21 600, as well as “providing” a frigate and other “presents”. In this way they managed to buy the Dey’s good offices in making deals with the other Barbary powers, which, in fact, allowed treaties to be signed with Tunis and Tripoli. In a letter dated 9 January 1799, Colonel David Humphreys also credits the good offices of the Portuguese Consul in Tripoli, D. Bernardo de Sousa, for the achievement of this peace. This is especially important for the United States as the truce between Portugal and Algiers had ended in April 1794, allowing American hopes of obtaining a peace agreement with that Regency to be revived (Ribeiro, 1997, pp. 744, 835).

Patrick Garrity (2008) stated that by 1797 the United States had established several treaties with the North African powers, which seemed to make it safe for Americans in the Mediterranean. However, the bases of this structure were not very strong and it quickly collapsed. To begin with, there was a great disparity between the terms of the agreements between Algiers and the other powers, which obviously made it particularly difficult. The United States were very slow in sending the presents and tributes they had agreed to pay, some of them arriving «months and years late» and many times were «unsatisfactory and incomplete».

In fact, when the US frigate *George Washington* arrived in Algiers in September 1800 with a long-delayed tribute, it triggered a series of demands from the three Regencies, but as they were not fulfilled by the Americans the United States Consul James Leander Cathcart warned his government and his compatriots «that hostilities were now likely» to restart (pp. 402-404).

In view of these circumstances, the consuls in North Africa advised to Washington on how to successfully handle this threat to American ships in the Mediterranean, recommending, at the same time, that the United States should review their relationship with the Regencies, all having come to the conclusion that the use of force would be a long lasting solution. This was also the opinion of David Humphreys, resident minister in Lisbon, while John Quincy Adams, American minister in Prussia,

according to a Swedish proposal, advocated a naval cooperation, in order to protect commercial shipping in the Mediterranean (Garrity, 2008, pp. 404-406).

On 15 July 1799, William Eaton, US consul in Tunis, reported that on 29 June the Portuguese and Sicilian Ambassadors had left for their countries and that Portugal had «concluded a peace agreement with this regency, for three years». For him, this was cause for alarm, as there was no one «to block the corsairs within the straits» and so, with a certain amount of exaggeration he wrote that no one could or would prevent them «from cruising from the cape of Good Hope to the Orkney Islands» (Swanson, 1939, vol. I, p. 332). This, together with the fact that Sweden had also signed an agreement with Tripoli, made the Secretary of State Timothy Pickering believe that the only way to handle Barbary powers was through force. But in fact, neither the United States nor the Barbary Regencies were pleased with the «existing relationship» (Garrity, 2008, pp. 406-407).

It is quite interesting to note the perception that Consul Eaton had of the Portuguese naval power in the Mediterranean in 1799, which in our opinion does not fit the facts. In fact, he wrote that «Portugal not only blocks them [the corsairs] within their seas, but dictates terms to them under their own walls» (Wright and Macleod, 1945, p. 48).

In October 1801, Eaton was worried because Tunis «had broken» a truce with Portugal and had consequently sent 6 vessels against Portuguese ships. In view of these circumstances, he feared that American ships would be the next prey. The goods American had promised to send to Tunis arrived late, upsetting the Bey. Had the boat with the supplies, convoyed by the *George Washington*, not arrived, Eaton was almost sure that the expedition sent against Portuguese vessels would instead be used against Americans (Wright & Macleod, 1945, pp. 96).

In the same year, Thomas Jefferson, who had always been in favour of a firmer policy in respect of Mediterranean privateering, was inaugurated as the 3<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States, at a time when the Quasi-War with France had been resolved. Under these circumstances, as the American Navy was free from any duty, he was able to send to the Mediterranean «a squadron of three frigates and a schooner». The squadron commander's Richard Dale had instructions to prevent the Barbary powers to disregard the existing treaties and to protect American ships and trade. To achieve this, he had orders to use the most extreme means, like sinking, burning or destroying the ships of the North African powers who did not respect the agreements in force. As Tripoli was now the major enemy, Richard Dale had instructions that in case of war he was authorised to blockade the port of this Regency's capital city. At the same time messages were sent to Morocco, Algiers and Tunis assuring them those American vessels were not in the Mediterranean to threaten them. However, through some of Thomas Jefferson's letters written to members of Congress, Patrick Garrity lets us know that the President did not believe that sending the squadron to the Mediterranean would solve anything.

In fact, as soon as this naval force arrived in Gibraltar, Commander Dale learned of the declaration of war to the United States and that corsairs were chasing American ships. However, the arrival of this unexpected squadron caught them un-

awares. At first, the Americans managed to capture some Tripolitan vessels, convoy their own ships in the Mediterranean, and even put on a show of force before Tripoli, by blockading its port, while at the same time they were trying to negotiate with the Pasha. When winter came, Commander Dale had to return to the United States and the mission was considered a success, as his presence in Mediterranean waters plus the cash given had prevented Algiers and Tunis from attacking American ships (Garrity, 2008, pp. 407-410).

In spite of all this, American consuls in North Africa were not so enthusiastic about the success of this display of force against Tripoli, as the surprise factor had not been well exploited. Even the Danes were of the opinion that if Jefferson decided to reduce the Navy, Americans would have to accept all the Barbary Regencies' demands. Under these circumstances, the United States had only one option left: take military action.

Although Jefferson's administration had plans for another display of force, the fact is that by 1802-1803, as Patrick Garrity wrote, «the American strategic position in the Mediterranean, apparently so promising in 1801, deteriorated rapidly». At the same time, Sweden and France were making peace with the Pashaw, by paying tributes in money and ships. The commander of the American squadron, Richard Morris, then in the Mediterranean, seemed not to be acting properly or according to orders received. On another hand, the blockade of Tripoli caused friction with Algiers and with Tunis, and lead Morocco to declare war on the United States. Pressed by the Louisiana question, as Napoleonic France had taken possession of this territory from Spain, which was seen by the American administration as a danger much closer to home, as well as the Treaty of Amiens, Jefferson decided on a combined solution: to negotiate with Tripoli and have a more forceful position in the Mediterranean (Garrity, 2008, pp. 407-416).

In 1803, the Americans sent another squadron to the Mediterranean under the command of Commodore Edward Preble, with the purpose of putting more pressure on Tripoli. However, as soon as he arrived he had to deal with Morocco, as the corsairs of this country had, without any declaration of war by the Emperor, captured American ships and imprisoned the US consul. Finally, when these matters were settled, any hopes of reaching an agreement with Tripoli were almost ruined.

In the meantime, the Tripolitans captured the U.S. frigate *Philadelphia* and the Pasha demanded a huge ransom to free both ship and crew, leading to a long period of negotiations. The Americans, however, had in the meantime scored a huge triumph, as they managed to burn the *Philadelphia* down right in the middle of Tripoli's harbour. Without the help of any of the European consuls in Tripoli, except for the Danish representative, Commodore Preble undertook a campaign against this Regency, by starting to bombard the capital on 3 August 1804, which was followed by other attacks over the next few weeks, at the same time as the negotiations were taking place.

After the replacement of Commodore Preble by Commodore Barron, who was in command of a mightier force, Americans interfered in the domestic affairs of



Tripoli by supporting the Pasha's brother's pretensions to the throne and opened a second front by launching a land attack. Finally, negotiations conducted by the American Consul-General Tobias Lear led to the signing of a peace treaty with Tripoli. The United States deployment of force before Tunis also led to successful negotiations with this Regency, allowing them to maintain a deterrent force in the Mediterranean (Garrity, 2008, pp. 416-426).

Once the war was over and peace had been established with the North African powers, Jefferson's administration attracted a lot of criticism at home. In reality, the costs of war were so high that the president had decided «to reduce the American profile in the region». Under these circumstances, Tobias Lear had to search for a not so costly settlement. The problems with Algiers persisted, but the United States were only in a position to solve this after the end of the 1812-1814 War (Garrity, 2008, pp. 426-430).

Before this conflict began, as matters were getting worse the United States had to withdraw part of their war ships from the Mediterranean, leaving the American ships unprotected from the corsairs' attacks. During the conflict, the United States ships almost disappeared from the Mediterranean, the Congress declared war on Algiers, and President Madison sent two squadrons to the Mediterranean to impose a treaty to the Bey of Tunis and the Pasha of Tripoli (Wright & Macleod, 1945, pp. 202-206).

It should be noted that due to the waging war between the two major naval powers, France and England, from 1805 to 1814, ships flying the flags of the North African Regencies were considered neutral and were thus «allowed to navigate freely». However, especially after 1808, with the occupation of Spain by the Napoleonic armies, many of these war vessels were boarded and «their papers inspected by the English» (Panzac, 2005, p. 218).

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the commercial fleets of Maghrebian countries grew rapidly, with the particularity that the ships used were built in Europe, the majority of their crew members, mainly serving as supervisors, were Christians, and that they also used European-based contractual methods. This was especially true of Tunisians, who competed directly with Christians in maritime shipping. After the French Revolution, the reorganization in the Mediterranean trade gave prominence to Europe in the Regencies' international trade. By signing and «setting up transactions and contracts», not only with Europeans, but also with their Muslim partners, they made an attempt to become integrated in the Western and international trade. As Daniel Panzac puts it, between 1806 and 1812 this policy «began to bear fruits», but by 1813 this procedure started to fail (Panzac, 2005, pp. 254-255).

As this reorganisation failed, the North Africans returned to their privateering activities, which they in fact had never abandoned, albeit reduced in the previous six years and reaching its peak in 1815. The situation had now become more dangerous for ships of all nationalities (Panzac, 2005, pp. 267-268).

With the end of this war, the Algerians decided to attack some American ships that sailed the Mediterranean. In February 1815, the Congress declared war on Algiers, only to discover that the Algerian ships were near the coast of Spain. The

Americans tracked them down and engaged in a fierce battle, which they won as their weapons were far superior to those of the Algerians. The Americans then landed in Algiers and forced the authorities to sign a treaty which abolished the payment of any tribute, and took measures for the exchange of prisoners (Panzac 270-271). Actually, the Dey signed a treaty at the end of 1816, nine months before being murdered, and the Algerian corsairs never again posed a threat to the United States ships and trade (Wright & Macleod, 1945, pp. 206). After this, the commander of this squadron, Commodore Decatur, travelled to Tunis and Tripoli to re-sume relations with these powers (Panzac, 2008, pp. 270-271).

Following all this activity, heightened by the anger at the increase in corsair activities, the Congress of Vienna condemned Barbary slavery (Panzac, 2008, pp. 272-273). After this decision, as Daniel Panzac (2008) wrote, «England, the only true naval power in the Mediterranean, should take the responsibility for applying that resolution». As a consequence thereof, the British fleet in the Mediterranean was given orders to visit Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli to notify these regencies of the Congress's decisions and to negotiate the release of the captives, but was not successful (p. 274). This resulted in an attack against the capital of Algiers by an Anglo-Dutch fleet in August 1816 that almost destroyed the city and its defences. Faced with no alternatives, the Algerians signed a treaty, released all the European captives without any ransom, abolished slavery, and even paid the British war reparations. At the same time, the Bey of Tunis and the Pasha of Tripoli were informed of this operation and summoned to release any captives still in their custody.

According to Daniel Panzac, this event marked the end of corsair activities and left bitter feelings in Algiers. Moreover, in 1818 the participants at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle had discussed this issue and in this international meeting England and France were entrusted with the mission of informing all the three regencies «that they had to cease all corsair activities or face reprisals from a “European League” and assigned to punish them». There was another conflict with England in 1824, but this time the mission of the British vessels was unsuccessful (Panzac, 2008, pp. 275-291).

By the end of the 1820s, for a number of reasons the regencies depended economically and politically more and more on Europe. The Americans kept only a few vessels in the region for patrolling purposes until 1830, when France occupied Algiers (Wright & Macleod, 1945, pp. 202-206). In fact, the 1830s saw the signing of the first asymmetric treaties, which addressed the issue of European powers to be imposed in Africa and Asia over the next decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Panzac, 2008, pp. 332, 334).

It is extraordinary, however, that as late as 1825 Portugal, Sweden, Denmark and Naples were still paying tribute to what we now know was a weakened Algiers (Allen, 1905, p. 12).

## Conclusion

After the independence, the Americans were on their own in the Mediterranean. They could no longer count on the protection of the Royal Navy against the attacks of the North African corsairs and had to compete in terms of trade with the far more experienced European powers, who, in turn, were also very wary about the presence of another competitor's merchantmen in these waters. These were difficult times, as the corsair activity that had diminished soon increased again in part due to the war waging in Europe after 1793, and the negotiations with the Barbary Regencies were very tough.

We must bear in mind that in 1793 the beginning of war between France, Great-Britain and other European countries «upset the maritime equilibrium in the Mediterranean». It lasted a decade and involved a great number of “naval battles” and “sieges of ports”. With the conquest of Egypt by Napoleon, the two centuries and a half of good relations between France and the Ottoman Empire came to an end. This state of things made the Sultan force the North African powers to wage war against France, allowing them to capture French ships, as well as those belonging to the annexed countries or to France's allies. The corsair activity reached its peak in 1798, then decreased from 1806 to 1813 and was not able to ramp-up their campaigns between 1814-1815 and virtually came to an end in 1816. Sometimes, this “state of war” led to several armed conflicts. (Panzac, 2005, pp. 73-76, 152).

As a young nation, the United States did not have a strong navy, as for many American politicians this was not seen as a priority. At odds with this difficult situation, the US sometimes were able to count on the help of Europeans, as was the case of Portugal until 1807, when the country was invaded by Napoleon's armies. The United States officials eventually realised that a display of force was the best way to bring these acts of piracy to an end, so they began to build their own fleet, sent warships to the Mediterranean, and waged a war on Tripoli in 1801 and on Algiers in 1815. After 1816, the corsairs ceased to be a threat to US ships, and only a few ships were stationed in the area for patrolling purposes until 1830.

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