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Jeffersonianism and 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Maritime Defense  
Policy

A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History  
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In partial fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in History

By  
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## ABSTRACT

### Jeffersonianism and 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Maritime Defense Policy

By  
Christopher T. Ziegler

This paper analyzes the fundamental maritime defense mentality that permeated America throughout the early part of the Republic. For fear of economic debt and foreign wars, Thomas Jefferson and his Republican party opposed the construction of a formidable blue water naval force. Instead, they argued for a small naval force capable of engaging the Barbary pirates and other small similar forces. For protection of the nation and commerce, they wanted a strictly defensive strategy developed around coastal gunboats and harbor fortifications. This research will analyze the naval aspect of this defense mentality from its creation in 1794 through the War of 1812. The coastal defense analysis will begin at the same time and conclude with the end of the American Civil War.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Modern military thinkers have long criticized the defensive stance the early American Republic adopted against European hostilities. The purpose of this research is to investigate and analyze the failure of the American strategic maritime policy during the early years of the republic. Maritime defense has many accepted principles, most of which were neglected for various reasons during this time. As a result, America was ill equipped for war throughout much of the nineteenth century. The lack of an effective naval force yet presence of a strong, thriving, and vital commercial maritime trade set the stage for a great deal of international tension and unique political ideologies.

To a certain degree this lack of preparedness is explained by the financial weakness and small population of the fledgling nation. As significant as the limited resources, were the beliefs and political rhetoric of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson's policies contained two distinctive flaws. First, he believed a large naval contingent was not beneficial because of the friction its existence would incur from European powers. He feared this friction would only

help in establishing a reason for Europe to expand its belligerency into American matters. Jefferson's strict reliance upon a primarily defensive maritime military posture ultimately failed in preventing war with Europe. His second miscalculation was his theory that America's commercial power could provide an effective influence over warring nations. Jefferson argued that if the U.S. could not afford to protect the commercial fleets, then they should be recalled to American ports in time of war. Nations requiring American goods would have to come to the U.S. and accept the responsibility of transport aboard their own vessels. This strategic use of commercial control also proved ineffective.

We will analyze this information in four chapters. The first chapter will deal with Thomas Jefferson and his political and ideological thoughts. This will include biographical information about Jefferson and the education that would form this revolutionary's mind. His ideology will be scrutinized to explain how it influenced American defense policy and its specific application to the United States Navy and coastal defense construction programs. The second chapter will explain accepted strategic naval and maritime policy, illustrating flaws in Jefferson's perceptions of defense and war. Chapter three will discuss naval development during Jefferson's presidency. A brief

examination of the origins of the navy under the Federalist administration will be provided for the sake of comparison. This period of study will end with the conclusion of the War of 1812. The fourth chapter centers upon the numerous construction programs involving fortifications and coastal defense along the American seaboard. Under Jeffersonian policy these purely defensive measures were the ideal system for the fledgling nation. Combining defense with low maintenance cost, they could be manned by small inexpensive garrisons. In time of war Jefferson's coveted militia could man them. They would serve as the most significant arm in Jefferson's strictly defensive policy when coupled with the small gunboat fleets. This study will begin in 1794 and conclude with the American Civil War.

It is hoped that by the end of this work the reader will have an understanding of the various elements that influenced the early American political, commercial, and military experience. Hopefully, a clear distinction will be made between the pragmatic limitations and ideological principles that shaped the early American defense policy.

## CHAPTER 2

### THOMAS JEFFERSON AND ENLIGHTENED DEFENSE

Thomas Jefferson was born on April 13, 1743, in what is now Albemarle County, Virginia.<sup>1</sup> Except for occasions when he was away on state business, he spent his entire life on the plantation of his birth until his death on July 4, 1826.<sup>2</sup> By birthright, Jefferson was a Virginia aristocrat in taste, education, and upbringing. It was his involvement in politics and his study of the European Enlightenment that shaped his ideological principles. Jefferson was a man of many talents. Both a politician and philosopher, he was also fascinated with science and was an avid inventor, architect, educator, geographer, ethnologist, and agriculturist.

It was his role in the winning of American independence and the formation of its government for which he is so widely known. To understand the motives for the actions that led to this fame, many aspects of Jefferson's complicated and tumultuous life must be understood. Given the scope of the research of this paper, the facets of Jefferson's life examined will of necessity be limited to four basic areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Jefferson, Thomas. *Complete Anas of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: De Capo Press, 1970. p. 15

<sup>2</sup> IBID

First, an analysis of his enlightened upbringing will be addressed to provide background into the shaping of his mentality. Second, his views that an ideal republican society should be agrarian based. Third, his hatred of national debt and his belief that the "earth belongs to the living". Fourth, the synthesis of these various factors and how they came to shape his desire for a defensive military.

#### Education and Formative Years

The first seven years of Jefferson's life was spent on the James River a few miles north of Richmond, Virginia. It was here that Jefferson began his education at the "English School".<sup>3</sup> At the age of nine he began to undertake the study of Greek and Latin under the direction of Reverend William Douglas. After the death of his father on August 17, 1757, Jefferson began to receive instruction from Reverend James Maury, for whom he had a great admiration.<sup>4</sup> He developed a mastery of classical languages and found great delight in the study of ancient Greek and Roman works of literature. In March 1760 he began his education at the College of William and Mary from which he graduated two years later. In Williamsburg he received his first experience observing government in action. With his study of the classics and

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<sup>3</sup> Peterson, Merrill ed., *Thomas Jefferson: A Reference Biography*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986. p. 2

legal history, he was well prepared for an occupation in the interpretation of law when in 1767 he was admitted to the bar.<sup>5</sup> He maintained the career despite his relative dislike of court practice until the eve of the revolution when he abandoned it.

In 1770 Jefferson was appointed county lieutenant of Albemarle. The previous year he had become a member of the House of Burgess and remained in that capacity until its demise in 1775.<sup>6</sup> Jefferson, a poor public speaker, found it better to put his talents to use as a literary draftsman and did great services in legislative bodies and on committees. In this capacity Jefferson proved instrumental in aiding the formation of the Virginia Committee of Correspondence and was selected to be a member of that eleven-man committee. His actions in the pre-revolutionary movement progressed steadily and culminated in the writing of *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*. Besides the *Declaration of Independence* this is considered by many to be Jefferson's most important Revolutionary work. Its purpose was to present to the world community an apology for the actions taken by the American colonies against Great Britain.

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<sup>4</sup> Randall, Willard. *Thomas Jefferson: A Life*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993 p 16 & 21

<sup>5</sup> Colbourn, H. "Thomas Jefferson's use of the Past." William and Mary Quarterly. 15 (1958): p 59.

<sup>6</sup> Jefferson, *Complete Anas*, p 17

In *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, Jefferson argues the combined grievances set forth by the colonies. As he put it "humbly to hope that this their joint address, penned in the language of truth, and divested of those expressions of servility which would persuade his Majesty that we were asking favours, and not rights, shall obtain from his Majesty a more respectful acceptance."<sup>7</sup> Until this point, each respective colony had its own agenda for splitting with England. This work created a unified justification for why the colonies had the right to revolt and listed what crimes parliament and the King had committed against them. Throughout it, Jefferson made use of the rhetoric of John Locke, arguing that the once free colonists were being ruled and governed by England in a manner to which they did not consent and which thereby violated their natural rights as prescribed by nature. Jefferson made great use of the argument that the legislative assemblies tasked by law with governing the colonies could not be superceded by Parliament, the specific example being the suspension of the New York state Legislature. As Jefferson explained, "One free and independent legislature herby takes upon itself to suspend the powers of another, free and

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<sup>7</sup> Jefferson, Thomas. *A Summary view of the Rights of British America*. reprinted from the original edition. New York: B. Franklin, 1971. p 13

independent as itself; this exhibiting a phenomenon unknown in nature."<sup>8</sup> He argued that the crown should use its veto power to prevent the passage of laws by one legislature within the empire that might in anyway disrupt the rights and interests of another. Throughout this pivotal early work, Jefferson also made ironic use of the rights of free trade and commerce. He argues, "That the exercise of a free trade with all the parts of the world, possessed by the American colonists, as of natural right, and which no law of their own had taken away or abridged, was next the object of unjust encroachment."<sup>9</sup> This exhibits one of the earliest public references Jefferson made in defense of American commerce. This early trend favoring the protection of American commerce foreshadows his later policy of using America's commerce instead of war as a lever to sway European policy. Jefferson would, throughout his career, work to improve and expand American trade. He always feared the possibility of this trade inducing international disorder and conflict for the new nation.

In 1779, Jefferson was elected wartime governor of Virginia. Four years later he was elected to Congress and remained there until assuming the role of Ambassador to

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<sup>8</sup> IBID p 20

<sup>9</sup> IBID p 16

France in 1785.<sup>10</sup> The next four years in France he established a fondness for that country that would, in many ways, influence his political and diplomatic views. Upon his return to America, he assumed the position of Secretary of State under President George Washington. He would resign this position within three years, only to be elected Vice President of the United States under John Adams. Public support for Jefferson's liberal democratic sentiments won him the Presidency of the United States in 1801, which he repeated in 1805. His second term ended on March 4, 1809, and he never again journeyed outside of his native state. He chose to continue to influence and disseminate his ideas through the medium of letter writing.<sup>11</sup>

Jefferson's political experience and academic upbringing was shaped by the teachings and philosophy of the European enlightenment, with its roots imbedded in the classical political and philosophic notions of the Greeks and Romans.<sup>12</sup> These factors propelled Jefferson toward republicanism. Jefferson's personal tendencies outside the world of academics also influenced his policies. This led to

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<sup>10</sup> Banning, Lance. *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978. p. 215

<sup>11</sup> Spivak, Burton. *Jefferson's English Crisis: Commerce Embargo and the Republican Revolution*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979. p. 3 & 199

<sup>12</sup> Shalhope, Robert. "Thomas Jefferson's Republicanism and Antebellum Southern Thought." The Journal of Southern History. 42 (1976): p 531.

a fear of military engagements and centralized power in general.<sup>13</sup>

Jefferson throughout his life was a disciple of the eighteenth century notion of warfare. In essence, war was an act between two governments and not their inhabitants. According to Jefferson, war was a limited rational instrument of policy to be used expressly for limited objectives after all other options had been exhausted.<sup>14</sup> At the same time this followed the optimistic view of the enlightenment that all aspects of human actions can be controlled by rationality, even war. Once declared, Jefferson argued that war must at all costs be conducted in a civilized manner. Although he recognized the occasional need for war, he viewed it as a measure of last resort because of the extreme long-term economic consequences it could have on the citizenry. Many of his ideological views were tempered by his practical experience in the political arena in his formative years. Many of the ideals fostered by enlightened thought were quickly dispelled by his experience

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<sup>13</sup> Peterson, Merrill ed., *The Political Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. Annapolis: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1993. **Note:** Many examples of Jefferson's inherent distrust of centralized governments and federal authority can be seen throughout his letters and speeches. Of particular example here see the following letters. The page numbers the letters occupy in this collection, as well as their titles and the addressee will be provided. "The Earth Belongs to the Living", to James Madison, September 6, 1789, p 100; "More on a Bill of Rights", to James Madison, March 15, 1789, p 90-91; "Strengthening the State Governments", to Archibald Stuart, December 23, 1791, p 105.

in politics. In particular was the view that through rationality all humans and their endeavors will progress to a level of perfection found in nature.<sup>15</sup>

### Jefferson's Republic

The ideal form of government envisioned by Jefferson was the republic. As he explained in a letter to Pierre-Samuel Du Pont de Nemours on July 14, 1807, "What is practicable must often control what is pure theory: and the habits of the governed determine in a great degree what is practicable."<sup>16</sup> Because the citizens of a true republic are indeed the masters of their own lives, they should be trustworthy, educated, and above all socially evolved enough to handle governing responsibilities. The citizens Jefferson refers to here are expected to be small landowning farmers. In a true enlightened fashion, born of agrarian ideals, Jefferson wrote that only the simplistic and productive occupation of farming or planting was righteous enough to be suitable for a citizen in the republic. Echoed since the times of Aristotle, town dwellers and those engaged primarily in industry and commerce have been seen as morally inferior to farmers. This philosophy is based upon the

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<sup>14</sup> IBID "Your Prophecy and Mine", To John Adams, January 11, 1816, p 181

<sup>15</sup> IBID " Limits of the Practicable", To P. S. Dupont de Nemours, January 18, 1802, p 145

<sup>16</sup> Appleby, Joyce, "What is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?" William and Mary Quarterly. 39 (1982): p 294

notion that the simple lifestyle, with its lack of self-motivated competition, is more pure and thus closer to the natural world as explained by John Locke and prescribed to by Thomas Jefferson. In Locke's explanation of nature, "To understand political power aright, and derive it from its original, we must consider what estate all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man."<sup>17</sup> Jefferson equated simple farming to being as close as possible in the current state of man, to being one with the natural world, far from the corruption and greed that grows and feeds in cities and urban populations.

Jefferson focuses his general attitudes about government and the military in a letter to Elbridge Gerry on January 26, 1799. Entitled A Profession of Political Faith, Jefferson explains:

"... I am for a government rigorously frugal & simple, applying all the possible savings of the public venue to the discharge of the national debt; and not for a multiplication of officers & salaries merely to make partisans, & for increasing, by every device, the public debt, on the principle of it's being a public blessing. I am

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<sup>17</sup>Locke, John. *Locke on Politics, Religion, and Education*. New York: Collier Books, 1965. p. 20

for relying, for internal defense, on our militia solely, till actual invasion, and for such a naval force only as may protect our coasts and harbors from such depredations as we have experienced; and not for a standing army in time of peace, which may overawe the public sentiment; nor for a navy, which by it's own expenses and the eternal wars in which it will implicate us, will grind us with public burdens, & sink us under them. I am for free commerce with all nations; political connections with none; & little or no diplomatic establishment."<sup>18</sup>

Immediately following the American Revolution, Jefferson sought to create his ideal agrarian republic in his home state of Virginia. It was widely believed that only strong centralized governments could effectively administer large areas. In essence, Jefferson did not yield to the notion that the United States was a Republic, but rather an alliance of thirteen smaller republics. The grand republican experiment would unfold in each of the colonies and Jefferson was of course focused on that evolution in his home state. A key factor in the establishment of a new republic was the abolition of the monarchy and all its tendencies. What Jefferson feared above all else was governmental control. In keeping with the ideals of the revolution, he firmly believed that revolution was a good

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 26 January 1779, *Letters*. Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826. Charlottesville:(University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.) 1993.

and necessary thing. If the power of the government was indeed derived from the consent of the people being governed, then if the populous decided that the government was no longer working for them and protecting their rights, then they were entitled and even required to revolt.

### The Earth Belongs to the Living

Another key building block of Jefferson's outlook that would shape his military and maritime doctrine was his disapproval of a national debt. Throughout a significant portion of his life, Jefferson was plagued with a never-ending debt that deeply troubled him. In a letter to Nicholas Lewis in 1787, Jefferson wrote, "The torment of mind I endure till the moment shall arrive when I shall not owe a shilling on earth is such really as to render life of little value."<sup>19</sup> Jefferson began to argue vehemently that Americans should eliminate the debt incurred in previous wars prior to engaging in another. Elected to the Presidency in 1800, Jefferson continued to dwell on the abolition of the increasing American debt left over from the four years of government spending at the hands of the Federalist under John Adams. His stringent economic plans, created by Albert Gallatin, were designed to radically reduce government

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<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/Jefferson> (hereafter cited as *Letters*, followed by the section number,) 1056-57.

spending and lower the debt. At the heart of this decrease in government spending was the downsizing of the fledgling American military. In his first inaugural address delivered on March 4, 1801, Jefferson alludes to the impending change when he remarks,

“the vital principle of republics, from which is no appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism; a well-disciplined militia, our best reliance in peace and for the first moments of war till the regulars may relieve them; the supremacy of the civil over the military authority; economy in the public expense that labor maybe lightly burthened; the honest payment of our debts and sacred preservation of the public faith; encouragement of agriculture, and of commerce as its handmaiden...”<sup>20</sup>

If this was indeed a hint of things to come, then Jefferson’s First Annual Message delivered on December 8, 1801, was the explanation to the public of just how much he was going to dismember the military. With respect to the army, Jefferson envisioned almost totally disbanding the professional regular army and relying on well-organized militia to repel or halt invaders long enough to allow regular troops to be mustered, trained, and dispatched to permanently repel the enemy. As he explained, “For defense

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<sup>19</sup> Stuart, Reginald. *The Half-way Pacifist: Thomas Jefferson’s View of War*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978. p. 13

<sup>20</sup> First Innaugural Address, 4 March, 1801. *Addresses, Messages and Replies*. Jefferson, Thomas 1743-1826. Charlottesville: )University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.)

against invasion, their number is as nothing; nor is it conceived needful or safe that a standing army should be kept up in time of peace for that purpose."<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Jefferson expressed the need for continued training and development of the militia system and the procurement and storage of the weapons and military goods needed should war erupt.

Even more a budgetary target than the army, the navy was to suffer the greatest program cuts and redesign under the new administration. Under the Federalist's influence, the navy had begun to grow with the construction of several new warships and the approval of funds for a number of 74-gun ships-of-the-line. Under the direction of the Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert, construction of these ship designs and the locations for construction had begun to progress to the point of commencement. Jefferson was critical of these ships and the expense they incurred. As he put it, "Whatever annual sum beyond that you may think proper to appropriate to naval perpetrations, would perhaps be better employed in providing those articles which may be kept without waste or consumption, and be in readiness when

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1993. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/Jefferson> (hereafter cited as *Addresses, Messages and Replies*, followed by section number), 495

<sup>21</sup> IBID

any exigence calls them into use."<sup>22</sup> He immediately set about decreasing or suspending all together the funding of such programs. The only naval expenditure Jefferson was in favor of was the maintenance of a small fleet with which to keep a presence in the Mediterranean. Here, the United States had a long and constant antagonism with the Barbary States of North Africa.

The only building program actively encouraged by Jefferson was the construction of the "Gunboat Fleet". These small open vessels armed with only one or maybe two cannon would be useful only for harbor defense in conjuncture with land-based coastal fortifications. These small strictly defensive vessels were well suited to the Jeffersonian mentality of maintaining a strictly defensive military arm. Jefferson argued that these vessels could be cheaply maintained and stored ashore and manned by a maritime style militia until war was imminent. It was his opinion that there was no way this type of naval arm could in any way take actions abroad that could drag the United States into a global maritime conflict.<sup>23</sup> Further discussion about the

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<sup>22</sup> First Annual Message, December 8, 1801. *Addresses, Messages and Replies*. 506

<sup>23</sup> Special Message on Gun-Boats, To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, February 10, 1807. *Addresses, Messages, and Replies*, 541-542

gunboats and their effectiveness will be addressed in a later chapter.

The largest military expenditure favored by Jefferson was the construction of defensive coastal works at strategic points around important harbors and ports. In Jefferson's eyes they represented the epitome of strictly defensive military policies. They can in no way project military force or policy upon another nation. Once constructed, they would cost only a bare minimum to maintain with volunteer garrisons. Yet at the same time, should war ever necessitate their activation, they would offer the greatest and most direct protection of home and hearth. In this manner, they were the apex of the virtuous military expenditure; works of defense constructed in the direct presence of the population and manned by that populace when their sovereignty was threatened by unwarranted hostility.

The fear of debt that resulted in these military cuts was a personal lifestyle dilemma faced by Jefferson. Being the intellectual that Jefferson was, he had to find some way to formulate this issue into an ideological stance that could be applied to the natural rights of the citizenry. This idea was a by-product of Jefferson alone and was constructed from his background in logical and enlightened thinking. He became convinced that the generations of

mankind were discrete, and that the form and conduct of public policy should be shaped with this in mind. This notion of the "Discrete Generation", or that the earth was owned by the living, was the cornerstone of Jefferson's philosophy regarding a political justification for limiting the creation of a massive national debt.<sup>24</sup> As he put it in a letter to John Taylor in May, 1816, "by the laws of the Creator of the world, to the free possession of the earth he made for the sustenance, unencumbered by their predecessors, who, like them, were but tenants for life."<sup>25</sup> Jefferson argued that no generation had the right to create a debt by which the benefits of that debt were received by that generation whilst its payment was incurred upon another. In essence, no generation had the right to create a debt larger than what it was capable of paying off itself, thus relegating another to the servitude of the debt created by its predecessor. In Jefferson's own words, it would

"... exclude at the threshold of our new government the contagious and ruinous errors of this quarter of the globe, which have armed despots with means, not sanctioned by nature, for binding in chains their fellow men. We have already given in example one effectual check to the Dog of War by transferring the power of letting him

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, Daniel. "Population and Political Ethics: Thomas Jefferson's Demography of Generations." *William and Mary Quarterly*. 56 (1999): p 601.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Taylor, 28 May, 1816. *Letters*. 1392

loose from the Executive to the Legislative body, from those who are to spend to those who are to pay."<sup>26</sup>

### War and Strategy

As demonstrated thus far, Jefferson was a man governed by rationality and principle. The foundation for this thought process lies within the doctrines prescribed by the Enlightenment. Jefferson was an optimist with regard to the supremacy and potential of rationality. He believed early on, that all aspects of social existence could be governed by the confines of rationality and logic. This notion included war, which Jefferson was a proponent of, given a suitable situation. The Barbary States of North Africa serve as an excellent example. Jefferson argued for war with the states as opposed to payment of tribute for safe passage of American shipping. In a letter to John Adams in 1786 he explains:

"... if it is decided that we shall buy peace, I know no reason for delaying the operation, but should rather think it ought to be hastened. But I should prefer the obtaining it by war. 1. Justice is in favor of this opinion. 2. Honor favors it. 3. It will procure us respect in Europe, and respect is a safe guard to our interests. 4. It will arm the federal head with the safest of all instruments of coercion over their delinquent members and prevent them from using what would be less safe..."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 6 September 1789. *Letters*. 1034

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 11 July 1786. *Letters*. 855

Jefferson viewed war as an extension of public policy, a tool for the populous and thus the government. Much of his early ideology can be seen in the Declaration of Independence. In it he stated that because Britain's legislature had attempted to establish absolute rule by force of arms, an appropriately reciprocal response was justified and needed. This work came as a result of the clash between British troops and colonial militia at Lexington on April 19, 1775.<sup>28</sup> He argued that the colonies were not engaging in hostilities for aggression or conquest, but rather as a response of hostilities enforced upon them. This provided the justification for armed resistance by arguing it was simply an action taken to preserve the colonies' prescribed rights.

This psychological need for the war to appear just and merely defensive stems a great deal from western Christian doctrine. As St Augustine explained:

"...a good ruler will wage wars only if they are just. But surely, if he will only remember that he is a man, he will begin by bewailing the necessity he is under of waging even just wars. A good man would be under compulsion to wage no wars at all, if there were not such things as just wars. A just war, moreover, is justified only by the injustice of an aggressor; and that injustice

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<sup>28</sup> Weigley, Russell F. *The American Way of War: A History of the United States Military Strategy and Policy*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana

ought to be a source of grief to any good man, because it is human injustice. It would be deplorable itself, apart from being a source of conflict."<sup>29</sup>

Religious motivation notwithstanding, Jefferson's motive for subscribing to this concern was two fold. First by applying traditional Christian doctrine and teachings to the American situation he appealed to a mentality and way of thinking engrained in the moral and subconscious character of the vast population, both in America and Europe. This provided a common thread to link many different groups of people behind a common understanding and interpretation of the events transpiring in the American colonies. Second, it provided a supplementary basis for the notion voiced by Jefferson that fighting a strictly defensive campaign was just and rational. Not only was this type of conflict more pure and exalted, but it also represented the bare minimum, militarily, needed to preserve the natural order and rights of an oppressed citizenry. Jefferson placed a great deal of emphasis on national pride and honor. This type of military operation provided a noble and just non-aggressive aspect of armed resistance. For as Augustine explained, "... victory can be mortally poisoned by pride," and, if the outcome of the

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University Press, 1973. p 7

war is to provide peace, then it has accomplished the sole positive outcome war can achieve.<sup>30</sup>

Overall, Jefferson saw war as a limited instrument to achieve specific ends. He recognized that it was an extension of human nature and if that were the case, it too could be placed under control with reason and logic. In this manner he was willing to argue that wars were necessary, lawful, just, and even useful in the scheme of nature. Given the rhetoric necessary to incite the colonies into armed rebellion against England, it was required that a conscious and morale approval mechanism for war be disseminated through the revolutionary propaganda. This philosophy seemed to foretell the military philosophies later argued by strategic thinkers Carl von Clausewitz and Baron Henri de Jomini. Having themselves come from the same Enlightened education as Jefferson, they developed similar ideas about the nature of warfare. Jomini, like Jefferson, argued that war was an integral part of civilization. Being a true disciple of the 18<sup>th</sup> century notion of warfare, he believed that through laws and reason, the destruction that resulted from war could be kept at a bare minimum. By restricting the aims of war to the destruction of the enemy force at the

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<sup>29</sup> Saint Augustine. *The City of God*. reprinted from the original, condensed and edited by Vernon Bourke. New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1958. p. 447

coveted decisive battle, damage inflicted upon the infrastructure and populous was kept at a minimum.

Clausewitz was of similar opinions but his concept and notion of warfare transcended many of the eighteenth century limitations. In a way, Clausewitz presents himself as being much more pragmatic than either Jomini or Jefferson.

Clausewitz argues that "War is a mere continuation of policy by other means," and that "All wars may be regarded as political acts."<sup>31</sup> In doing this he does not limit the scope of war to limited fashion seeking only the decisive victory, or to strategically defensive combat seeking only to preserve the status quo. Rather, Clausewitz argues that there is a realm in which the notion of total warfare is needed. This principle of waging unrestricted warfare upon the citizenry of a nation itself was in stark contrast to Jefferson and Jomini. This "diversity in the nature of wars" expressed by Clausewitz argues that "the greater and more powerful the motives of war, the more they affect the whole existence of the nations involved."<sup>32</sup> In essence the more a warring faction has to gain or lose as a result of combat will dictate the level and scope to which they will wage war on an enemy. If the aims of warfare are limited and

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<sup>30</sup> IBID p 327

<sup>31</sup> Clausewitz, Karl Von. *On War*. Reprinted from the original. New York: Random House Inc., 1943. p. 16-17

specific, as Jefferson tended to argue, then so will the level and intensity of the combat. However, if the goal is for the preservation of the state or the complete destruction of an enemy state, then the realm of combat must permeate through all levels of that society. By presenting arguments for both styles of warfare, Clausewitz and his doctrines have superceded those of Jomini and Jefferson, and are still studied to this day.<sup>33</sup>

#### Commerce

Jefferson wished to place an ideological check on the reliance of war to solve all political disputes. He argued that although war had its purpose, and was useful, it was the measure of last resort. As explained earlier, the ideal government Jefferson envisioned was the agrarian based republic. He envisioned no large industrial urban populations, which would represent an immoral and self-absorbed corruption in the ideal society. As such, Jefferson was adamantly opposed to production except to the level of providing the new nation with required manufactured goods. Jefferson felt that the only other acceptable alternative to farming as a profession was that of an occupation on the

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<sup>32</sup> IBID p 67

<sup>33</sup> The fact Clausewitz's text is still militarily viable is illustrated by its required reading at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland.

ocean. This idea he did not come at alone but rather from his responsibility to reflect and honor the wishes of the people.

He wrote to John Jay in August 1785,

"... We now have lands enough to employ an infinite number of people in their cultivation. Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, & they are tied to their country & wedded to it's liberty & interests by the most lasting bonds. As long therefore as they can find employment in this line, I would not convert them into mariners, artisans, or anything else. But our citizens will find employment in this line till their numbers, & of course their productions, become too great for the demand, both internal and foreign. This is not the case as of yet, & probably will not be for a considerable time. As soon as it is, the surplus of hands must be turned to something else. I should then perhaps wish to turn them to the sea in preference to manufactures, because comparing the characters of the two classes I find the former the more valuable citizens. I consider the class of artificers as the panders of vice & the instruments by which the liberties of a country are generally overturned. However we are not free to decide this question on principles of theory only. Our people are decided in the opinion that it is necessary for us to take a share in the occupation of the ocean, & their established habits induce them to require that the sea be kept open to them, and that that line of policy be pursued which will render the use of that element as

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<http://prodevweb.prodev.usna/SeaNav/ns310/ns310%20reading%20Assign.pdf>

great as possible to them I think it a duty in those entrusted with the administration of their affairs to conform themselves to the decided choice of their constituents and therefore we should in every instance preserve an equality of right to them in the transportation of commodities, in the right of fishing, & in the other uses of the sea."<sup>34</sup>

This being the case, Jefferson hoped that the United States might serve primarily as a supply of natural resources for the industrialized nations of Europe. This followed the mercantile style economy that had existed in the colonies while under British control. Under this system Jefferson argued for no more a sea borne military than would be required to protect American shipping from pirates, in particular those along then Barbary Coast of Africa. A few naval vessels would be kept at sea to act as a deterrent to would be violators of American commerce and pride, while the rest would be maintained in ordinary, reducing cost, until they were needed by imminent war. Trade, Jefferson argued, should be free with all nations and not be obstructed by the politics or wars of belligerent nations. He hoped that the ever-present hostility between the European nations would provide vast markets for American goods, yet he hoped those

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accessed 4/7/03

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 23 August 1785. *Letters*. 818

nations' sea going forces would not interfere with American neutrality and commerce.<sup>35</sup>

Jefferson hoped this dependency on American commerce would provide the fledgling nation with an ideal weapon with which to exert policy upon European nations. He argued that if properly managed, the regulation or suspension of American trade to any major nation would be detrimental enough to that country's economy to compel them to yield to American interest. With this weapon, only a sizable enough force with which to prevent limited acts of aggression on American shipping would be required. As he explained in a letter to John Jay, "...I think it to our interest to punish the first insult, because an insult unpunished is the parent of many others."<sup>36</sup> Essentially Jefferson hoped a small capable naval force would be adequate to deter or address any limited attacks upon American sovereignty upon the sea. Should this not be possible, and war erupt, he contemplated that it would be with one of the larger European nations, in particular England. He hoped that the commerce control mechanism, would serve as great a force in that country's economy as a naval defeat would serve on the sea. At the same time, the lack of a large naval force would be less

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<sup>35</sup> Peterson. "Report on the Privileges and Restrictions on the Commerce of the United States in Foreign Countries", December 16, 1793, p 116

<sup>36</sup> IBID 819

likely to cause tension that could inadvertently lead to war.

In summation Jefferson created and maintained a trinity between commerce, war, and debt. He did not fear or dislike war so long as it was on a limited scale and fought in a civilized eighteenth century manner. What he did oppose was national debt, which was the by-product of any war, especially with the creation and maintenance of a professional standing military complex. Of these, the navy represented the least cost effective and most likely to involve the United States in a foreign war. As he described in a letter to John Jay, August 23, 1785, "... (The navy) being the only weapon with which we can reach an enemy."<sup>37</sup> He was arguing in this letter, for the creation of a small naval force with which to defend national pride and honor, in direct response to attacks made upon American shipping by pirates. At the same time, it demonstrates his opinion that the navy is the only means with which to engage in an offensive posture with a nation. He feared that if the navy was constructed too large, that besides being too costly, it would present Europe with an excuse to engage in hostilities with America.

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<sup>37</sup> IBID

He labored extensively to prevent the burden of debt he saw the British taxpayer encumbered for, for the sake of maintaining her massive fleet. In doing so he developed the theory that through restricted commerce, not naval armament, peace could be maintained and enforced. This commerce should be tasked with moving primarily agricultural surplus, upon which he hoped other nations would depend. This would keep America morally superior by being agrarian based while at the same time he hoped an economic equilibrium would develop where, as dependant on foreign manufactured goods as the U.S. would be, so would they be to American agriculture. Jefferson hoped this would result in America and Europe policing their own home waters respectively. To explain this theory ideologically, Jefferson created the "Discrete Generation" theory, which essentially argued that one governing generation does not have the authority to incur debt, or laws, which will impact its posterity. This theory gave his fear of debt, and the resulting reduced military expenditures, philosophical and political legitimacy.

## CHAPTER 3

### MARITIME AND NAVAL STRATEGY

Before a discussion can take place on what an effective maritime strategy is, it must first be defined.<sup>38</sup> Maritime goes beyond naval strategy in that the latter primarily focuses on issues dealing with preservation of the battle fleet, its logistics for operation, and strategy for success. The end to all of this is what is principally the militant side of maritime strategy. Beyond the navy is the regulation and preservation of commerce, lines of communication other than strictly military, the protection of the population, the protection and maintenance of the interior lines of communication, and trade with which imported and exported goods are transported.<sup>39</sup>

Alfred Thayer Mahan was a Captain in the United States Navy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1890 he published *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783*. This work, along with others he published, became regarded as the definitive works in the arena of naval

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<sup>38</sup> At the heart of this research is essentially naval strategy. For the purposes of comparison, the majority of strategic doctrine voiced here will be that of Alfred Thayer Mahan. Some excerpts will be taken from other reputable individuals, but overall, Mahan will be the base source of naval strategy.

<sup>39</sup> Corbett, Julian S. *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911. p 13-14

warfare and strategy. His thesis that an effective navy was the cornerstone for every major world power was received greatly by naval proponents all over the world. In America, his work helped change the traditional stigma of anti-naval sentiment so prevalent in the American military mentality. As Mahan explained there are two principle reasons why a nation would wish to pursue a navy. "The necessity of a navy, in the restricted sense of the word, springs, therefore, from the from the existence of a peaceful shipping, and disappears with it, except in the case of a nation which has aggressive tendencies and keeps up a navy merely as a branch of the military establishment."<sup>40</sup> First and foremost a naval arm's primary purpose is to protect the sea borne commerce of a nation state. The sea serves as a vast open highway through which materials, either raw or processed, may be transported in the most efficient manner. Its relative lack of natural obstacles to limit travel hinders the ability to strategically mass forces with which to protect commerce.<sup>41</sup> As a result, in order for a state to protect its interests abroad, a mobile and effectual force

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<sup>40</sup> Mahan, Alfred. *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783*, reproduction of 1894 edition. New York: Dover Publications Inc., p 26

<sup>41</sup> Brodie, Bernard. *A Layman's Guide to Naval Strategy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943. p 16 Notable exceptions of where maritime bottlenecks do occur are: Panama Canal, Straights of Gibraltar, etc.

must be maintained with which to travel and respond to incidences of violence committed against commerce.

Second, a navy may be created and maintained for the principle use as a weapon of conquest if the intentions of that state warrant it.<sup>42</sup> Few examples can be provided of this sentiment in the strictest use of the definition. Most nations capable of mounting a fleet for this purpose also have commercial fleets they wish to see protected. The most direct examples are states with a primarily piratical sense to their foreign policy. Examples of this sort are numerous, the most well known to American historians being the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean. Their principle use of naval force was for the purpose of harassing merchant ships and making profit from tribute paid to them by nations for not committing acts of piracy. In essence instead of having a navy to protect their commerce, they generated revenue by being paid by other nations not to attack shipping. Paying this tribute, many nations argued, was cheaper than arming and dispatching naval forces to deal with the acts of piracy being committed.

For obvious reasons, the first scenario for the justification and need and establishment of a naval arm will be the one discussed and used here. For the early part of

American history, it was a matter of national mentality that a Republic would not wish to conquer. Incidentally, the means to do it were not present at such an infantile technological and logistical level of maturity. This being in mind, the next concept to be reviewed will be the forms of naval and maritime implementation. In essence there are two aspects that manifest maritime defense; ships and defended harbors. Each of these topics will be addressed in its respective chapter, but the underlying strategic nature of the two will be discussed here.

First, ships are the direct tactical force-projecting implements of naval power. They constitute that aspect of naval strategy that is designed to project forward from protected bases and inflict damage upon an opponent.<sup>43</sup> Although apparently an offensive weapon, in that they are designed to go forward from a nation over distances and take the war to the enemy, this is only a limited description of what their larger scope and purpose is. Fleets serve strategically as a defensive weapon in that they are designed to go forward and protect commercial shipping and homeports for the continued operation of the fleets. In this sense no matter how tactically offensive the actions may be,

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<sup>42</sup> Mahan p 26

<sup>43</sup> Brodie p 8

they are still strategically defensive in that they serve as the first layer of defense for the national, commercial, and economic security of a state. So long as the purpose of the navy is to engage an opposing naval force or commerce then that role is defensive. As soon as that fleet is tasked with the responsibility of attacking and invading an enemy's country its role changes to essentially an offensive role. In this scenario the fleet becomes the engineering platform of the construction and utilization of new bases of operations, and the general disruption of the infrastructure of another nation.

Second, adequate harbors and their fortifications although defensive in nature, in reality serve the opposite role. For all practical purposes they serve as the strategic offensive weapon for the nation, for without secured home bases, navies cannot function. Mahan states that the most important strategic goal of a naval force is to ensure the protection and preservation of commerce, but also lines of communication. If it were not for adequate harbors, interior lines of communication, and transportation necessary for the continued movement of goods and information throughout the interior of a country, then a naval force would not be warranted. The defense of harbors by the force-projecting navy, in conjuncture with coastal and harbor defenses,

serves as a defensive measure for the strategically offensive goal of maintaining commerce and communication. As Mahan explained:

"The offensive strength of a seaport, considered independently of its strategic situation and of its natural and acquired resources, consist in its capacity:

1. To assemble and hold a large military force, of both ships of war and transports.
2. To launch such force safely and easily into the deep.
3. To follow it with a continued support until the campaign is ended."<sup>44</sup>

If these represent the fundamental elements and initiative for a naval arm, it must also be explained what principle factors affect the sea power of a nation. Mahan's doctrine promotes six key factors that play a pivotal role in the creation of an effective militant maritime force. These factors are categorized as: I. Geographical Position. II. Physical Conformation, including, as connected therewith, natural productions and climate. III. Extent of Territory. IV. Number of Population. V. Character of the People. VI. Character of Government.<sup>45</sup> The first three criteria are elements of physical characteristics of a

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<sup>44</sup> Mahan, A.T. *Naval Strategy Compared and Contrasted with the Principles and Practice of Military Operations on Land*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1911; reprint Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975 p 153

<sup>45</sup> Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*. P 29

state, whereas the latter three reflect the nature of the people that collectively form the nation state.

Physical characteristics and geography of a state furnish the foundation for which a people will either be inclined or hindered from pursuing a naval arm. The actual geographic position plays the largest role of these aspects for various reasons. First, if a state is situated so that it is not threatened by invasion from land, or is pressed to invade by land, or is any other way compelled to maintain a large standing army, then it possesses a possible naval advantage over an adversary that must contend with these issues. The necessity for a state to divert funds and resources to many different facets of warfare limit the overall potential of each branch. Few nations have the resources and manpower to adequately maintain both armies and navies of dominating power. Second, the position of a state may be such that it allows for the concentration or dispersion of forces. Either of these elements could be either advantageous or detrimental. France for example has access to both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, which would at first glance provide a strategic advantage of placement. Upon closer review however, her two separate fleets can rarely operate in joint operations due to their required transit through the Straights of Gibraltar, a

strategic bottleneck controlled by enemy forces. For the U.S. in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the large commercial activities conducted in both the north and south required lines of infrastructure on the scale of many two shored European nations. Strategically, it could have been disastrous if it were not for the abundant resources in the country and an effective infrastructure. America's great distance from major military forces provides a natural protection for its infrastructure. Third, the proximity of an enemy with which to launch raids against her commerce. Commerce raiding by nature defuses naval forces thereby requiring closer bases of operations for logistical purposes. By having ports in close proximity to an enemy, rapid and disastrous assaults upon an enemy's commerce can be conducted with a limited amount of exposure for retaliation.<sup>46</sup>

The second condition conducive to the establishment of a naval force is physical conformation. These are the characteristics of the shoreline. First, if a country has an extensive shoreline but no adequate harbors, being deep and well protected, then extensive commerce and a navy are not likely. Also, if a nation has sufficient resources to supply

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<sup>46</sup> IBID p 29-35

the population, then they are less inclined to take to the sea to acquire more.<sup>47</sup>

The third physical condition is the extent of territory upon which a nation is placed. The factor significant here is not so much the square miles encompassed within national boundaries but rather the length of its coastline and the character of its harbors. A long seacoast can be a strength or weakness depending upon the size of the population encompassed within it. Viewed in this light, a country resembles a fortress in that its garrison must be adequately proportional to the area being defended.<sup>48</sup>

The next set of criteria deal with the social aspect of maritime defense. The first of these, population, has already been eluded to in discussion of extent of territory. Here though, another step is taken in evaluation beyond merely an adequate number residing in the state. Beyond population is the percentage that takes to the sea. At the minimum, what must be considered is the number of those who are at least readily available for deployment upon the sea and for the manufacture of material needed for naval use.<sup>49</sup>

Second, the national character and desire of a nation to engage in maritime trade are a pragmatic necessity with

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<sup>47</sup> IBID p 35-37

<sup>48</sup> IBID p 42-45

<sup>49</sup> IBID p 44-45

regards to the establishment of a maritime force. If we accept Mahan's thesis to be true, that sea power is based upon peaceful and extensive commerce, then the character of a nation to be actively involved and prosperous in this endeavor is paramount. If the primary avenue for the acquisition of wealth is through commerce, as opposed to other means, then the nation demonstrating that characteristic will have an advantage. To illustrate this in a real world sense Mahan used England, France, and Spain as examples. France he argued relied more on thrift and hoarding of wealth to secure it, whereas Spain sought her riches from exploiting the gold and silver mines discovered in the new world. England on the other hand sought her fortune as shopkeepers making profits strictly through trade and commerce, which resulted in a dependency on an efficient naval and commercial structure far surpassing the other nations.<sup>50</sup>

The final aspect that serves as a key to naval development is the character of the government. Particular forms of government are more supportive of the development of maritime authority. Given the republican form of government practiced in the United States, if it is the will of the people to have maritime commerce, then it is the

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<sup>50</sup> IBID p 50-58

responsibility of the representative government to act upon these wishes. In a letter already quoted in this work, Jefferson argues that if it were his decision, he would not have the people of the new republic pursue the occupation of seafarers, but he said it was not his decision to make because it was his responsibility to reflect the desires of his constituency. Essentially, governmental influence acts in two ways, the first of which is during peacetime. Policy can promote the expansion of peacetime commerce and trade thereby increasing the attachment of the people and the economy to the sea, or it can attempt to promote industries that inhibit this expansion. The windfall of this either creates a need for a navy or reduces it. Ironically this is was not the situation the United States found itself in during the War of 1812. Commerce had developed by natural means, but the navy had been hampered by actions of governmental policy. The result being the United States was ill prepared for a naval war.<sup>51</sup>

This leads to the second influence the government may have over the navy, during times of war. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that in the event of war, provisions, men, and armament are of sufficient quantity to provide protection for the merchant fleet. As

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<sup>51</sup> IBID p 58

mentioned earlier, this is the role in which American failed prior to the War of 1812.<sup>52</sup> Beyond the measures taken at home to prepare a navy for war, it is also necessary for naval stations abroad to be prepared for forward deployment of fleets. As such, three vital links have been established through which a government can promote maritime endeavors: promotion of an active peacetime commercial trade, creation and maintenance of a sufficient naval force and arms as to protect the merchant fleet in times of war, and the creation of forward bases for the distribution of the fleet beyond the range supported by only domestic ports. As shall be demonstrated, the maritime defense policy adopted by Jefferson and the Republicans supported only one of these three links. This set precedence for maritime inadequacy for most of the first half of the nineteenth century.

As an addition to this cursory evaluation of maritime strategy, the infancy of the American government should be evaluated. To provide a contrast, the study of maritime policy in antiquity illuminates the limits of what role naval power can develop at the level of political and economic maturity analogous to the situation facing America at its inception. As Chester Starr points out, "...the

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<sup>52</sup> Mahan, Alfred. *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*. Vol. 1. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903; reprint New York: Greenwood Press, 1968. p 289

deliberate exercise of sea power depended upon the rise of firm political units with sufficient resources to support navies."<sup>53</sup> Thus, a "thalassocracy" requires political and economic systems that can consciously aim at naval control of sea lanes for the transport of useful supplies and also of armies toward that end."<sup>54</sup> Neither of which the U.S. possessed at its inception.

Mahan's doctrine argues what measures should be taken by a nation in order to secure dominance both politically and militarily, upon the sea. Its primary purpose is to argue the strategic need and impact of an effective naval force for victorious nations throughout history. The guidelines he argues are vital and have been proven correct in many ways by the study of historical events. Mahan's thesis is nonetheless directed at political entities with much more maturity than the U.S. had at the time being evaluated here. What Mahan's doctrine does provide is an explanation as to why the U.S. suffered such defeats politically and militarily in the early republic. This in turn explains a great deal about the political and social actions taken by the government during these years.

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<sup>53</sup> Starr, Chester G. *The Influence of Sea Power on Ancient History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. p 5

<sup>54</sup> IBID

This is not to serve as a defense or apology for the policy that was pursued by Jefferson but rather a side note to aid in explaining the complex situation through which he developed his policies. Two principle notions are now at the heart of this evaluation: 1. The U.S. did not have the means to secure a naval supremacy on the high seas, or even the capability with which to fight on equal terms her European adversaries with any hope of success. 2. The U.S., by following the Jeffersonian maritime defense policy, severely limited and crippled what resistance it could have fronted against foreign threats. The consideration of what Mahan argues and what was actually possible requires a balance of moderation, which seems to be the key.<sup>55</sup>

#### Jefferson's Strategy

As has been explained already, Jefferson's economic plans for the country all but excluded any significant military, especially a navy. Although there is little doubt that the nation did not have the resources to create and maintain and large naval force, the strategy and design of the naval forces possible were inefficient at best. What is argued here is that the resources available were not adequately harnessed and developed by the government under

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<sup>55</sup> Jimmy Buffett, *Barometer Soup*, Jimmy Buffett and the Coral Reefer Band, MCA 91608

Jeffersonian policy. The question here is not whether the perfect and adequate naval force could be created to rival the insults delivered by the Royal Navy, but whether the best possible, given the means available, could have been adopted to better prepare the U.S. for the defense of such a large commercial force.

In the event of war, Jefferson favored a strictly defensive campaign. In a letter to John Jay on August 23, 1785 Jefferson states, "If a war with England should take place, it seems to me that the first thing necessary would be a resolution to abandon the carrying trade because we can not protect it. Foreign nations must in that case be invited to bring us what we want & to take our productions in their own bottoms."<sup>56</sup> This illustrated clearly Jefferson's intent upon using the refusal of trade with nations as a weapon of coercion, as opposed to combat. Yet in the same letter he explains, "Indeed I look forward to the very possible case of war with an European power, & I think there is no protection against them but from the possession of some force on the sea."<sup>57</sup> What can be derived here is that Jefferson recognized the need for some naval force with

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 23 August 1785, *Letters*. Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826. Charlottesville:(University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.) <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/jefferson/> 1993. (hereafter cited as *Letters*, followed by the section number,)819

which to secure a defensive measure against possible European belligerents.

In this sense, Jefferson envisioned a purely coastal defensive naval arm with which to defend the nation. American commerce he intended to defend by halting and allowing transport of goods only upon vessels belonging to nations seeking trade.<sup>58</sup> This he felt would protect American merchant men from attack and impressment while at the same time protect the American taxpayer by having the burden of defense for shipping paid by whatever nationality chose to export American products upon their own vessels. The Republicans simply tried to build their strategy around what they considered the most effective use of national resources, without the dangers of violating their principles regarding the expansion of the national debt. It is very possible that Jefferson adopted this rather uniquely defensive naval mindset from the French, for whom he had affection. They developed a strictly frugal and defense oriented strategy governing the deployment of their fleet, in stark contrast to Great Britain.<sup>59</sup>

The test bed for my hypothesis, that the Jeffersonian maritime defense policy was a failure, will be the tension

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<sup>57</sup> IBID 820

<sup>58</sup> IBID 819

<sup>59</sup> Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, p 6

that existed between England and the U.S. during Jefferson's administration. My hypothesis is two fold: First, his reliance on economic persuasion to prevent war failed; second, with the onset of war with the Madison administration, the American navy proved ineffectual. Basic naval strategy having already been summarized, I will now lie out the general strategic policies of Jefferson citing examples. This analysis will come in two parts, first the use of economic measures and second the designed use of Jefferson's navy.

The strategic maritime offensive weapon under Republican ideology, i.e. one that is designed to sway the opinion and actions of belligerent European nations, was the regulation of the American commercial force. This maritime policy had two modes of implementation. First, the use of economic coercion in the form of a temporary embargo on American export that served as a defensive precautionary policy.<sup>60</sup> It was designed to withhold American ships, sailors, and mercantile property from the world's oceans in an attempt to keep them out of harm's way.<sup>61</sup> Second, a total embargo of all exports and imports served as the offensive

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<sup>60</sup> Spivak, Burton. *Jefferson's English Crisis: Commerce Embargo and the Republican Revolution*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979. P 105

<sup>61</sup> IBID

tool of economic persuasion.<sup>62</sup> This effectively banned the importation of foreign goods by congressional law, and the exportation of all American goods on any vessels, not just those flying the Stars and Stripes. Essentially these two systems were designed to influence foreign attitudes toward American sentiment prior to the last option of war being used; with a limited embargo preventing the export of American goods on American vessels, and a total embargo reflecting a policy of non-intercourse with the intent to starve into submission a political adversary.

From its beginning, the United States experienced antagonism upon the high sea from various European belligerents and the Barbary pirates in North Africa. The Republican doctrine of free commerce upon the sea set the stage for a fleet of unprotected wealth laden ships, ripe for the picking. The instability in Europe that had begun with the wars of the French Revolution escalated into the Napoleonic wars. When neither England nor France could achieve decisive victories, they turned to the sea and began attacks upon the commerce of noncombatant nations with the hope of hindering trade, and thus the war effort of each other.

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<sup>62</sup> IBID p 103-4

Elected in 1801, Jefferson's first term as President was focused on the elimination of the national debt, restoration of republican principles, and the purchase and exploration of the Louisiana territory. However, the issues brought on by the wars in Europe dominated his second term as well as the presidency of his successor. The intensity of the war in Europe began to escalate after 1805. This led to a change in priorities in the American government. The British escalated the practice of impressment of American sailors to supply their manpower needs in the expanding wartime navy. It had grown from roughly 36,000 men in 1792 to over 120,000 in 1805. It was estimated that the British between 1803 and 1806 had impressed 2,798 men.<sup>63</sup> The response from Jefferson and the Republicans was the experimental use of commercial coercion on a much greater scale than had ever been attempted. Many variations were tried including the Non-Importation Act of 1806.<sup>64</sup>

Many factors combined to create the tense political atmosphere, which led to the embargo. In particular was the *Leopard/Chesapeake* affair. On June 22, 1807 the United States frigate U.S.S. *Chesapeake* set sail for a cruise to the Mediterranean. Waiting off of Norfolk was the British

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<sup>63</sup> Zimmerman, James. *Impressment of American Seamen*. Port Washington: Kennikat Press Inc., 1966. p 263

frigate, HMS *Leopard*, with orders to seek out the American frigate and search her for British deserters. When the two ships made contact, the *Chesapeake* heaved to and took on a lieutenant from the British ship. With him was a copy of the orders to search for deserters and a note from the captain of the *Leopard* expressing his desire for peace to be maintained. After a period of debate in Commodore Barron's cabin aboard the *Chesapeake*, the British officer returned to his ship with word that the Americans would not cooperate. After an exchange of words through the hailing trumpets, the *Leopard* fired a warning shot across the bow of the *Chesapeake* with no effect. The *Leopard* then moved into position and proceeded to bombard the American frigate with broadsides for about ten minutes. Barron surrendered and a second boarding party was sent aboard the *Chesapeake*, where the crew was mustered and four members were taken off and placed upon the *Leopard*.<sup>65</sup>

The response in America was swift and unified, the public demanded satisfaction. All throughout Virginia, patrols of militia kept a watchful eye on the British squadron and prevented the ships from getting supplies. All over the nation acts of retribution were enacted wherever

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<sup>64</sup> Perkins, Bradford. *Prologue to War: England and the United States 1805-1812*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1963. P 113

<sup>65</sup> Mahan, *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*. p 155-6

possible. In New York an English ship had its rudder and rigging removed by an angry mob, and all over the country public meetings denounced the act against the *Chesapeake*. The cry for war against Britain rang loud throughout the nation. Initially Jefferson tried to damper this emotion and keep it short of open flame. He hoped the outcry of protest from the citizens would be enough to compel England to settle the whole affair and perhaps even compel them to cease impressments.

Jefferson immediately set about writing the governor of Virginia urging restraint of actions that may limit the options available to the Congress by the time of their next session. Jefferson also issued a proclamation closing off all American ports to British warships. This satisfied the need for some type of action while at the same time limiting the amount of contact between the populous and the British. Jefferson wished to avert any serious action until the Congress could meet, thus giving time for tempers to settle and most importantly allowing time for American merchantmen to return to their home ports with little fear of being captured by British warships.

As time progressed, and Jefferson continued to receive reports regarding the actions of the British squadron stationed off of Hampton Roads, his demeanor became more

agitated. The news he received from England was less than optimistic and soon he and his cabinet were discussing possible modes of war and an invasion of Canada. Diplomatic missions to London were unsuccessful and by October, Jefferson knew that public demand would not be enough to sway England from her policy of impressment.<sup>66</sup>

As he explained in his Eighth Annual Message on November 8, 1808:

"The Communication made to Congress at their last session explained the posture in which the close of the discussion relating to the attack by a British ship of war on the frigate *Chesapeake* left a subject on which the nation had manifested so honorably and sensibly. Every view of what had passed authorized a belief that immediate steps would be taken by the British government for redressing a wrong, which, the more it was investigated, appeared the more clearly to require what had not been provided for in the special mission. It is found that no steps have been taken for that purpose. On the contrary, it will be seen, in the documents laid before you, that the inadmissible preliminary which obstructed the adjustment is still adhered to; and, moreover, that it is now brought into connection with the distinct and irrelevant case of the orders in council."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Perkins, p 145

<sup>67</sup> <sup>67</sup>Eighth Annual Message, 8 November 1808. *Addresses, Messages and Replies*. Jefferson, Thomas 1743-1826. Charlottesville: (University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.) 1993. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/Jefferson> (hereafter cited as *Addresses, Messages and Replies*, followed by section number), 545

Congress, in return, allowed the Non-Importation Act to go into effect and supported the President's decision to close off American ports to many British goods and her warships. Reaction from the leadership in Britain and France with regard to actions taken by both sides on the high seas was so dismal that a response to a letter James Monroe sent to Jefferson regarding the dispatch of another special session in 1809, earned this reply:

"The idea of sending a special mission to France or England is not entertained at all here. After so little attention to us from the former, and so insulting and answer from Canning, such a mark of respect as an extraordinary mission, would be a degradation against which all minds revolt here."<sup>68</sup>

At this point Jefferson was merely trying to delay hostilities with England until America could prepare and her merchant fleet could be recalled. Jefferson was horrified at the abandonment of limited warfare in favor of the large-scale battle fought by Napoleon leading to the slaughter of so many Frenchman. Jefferson feared that any public mention of war or preparation for it might insight England to wage war upon America before she could prepare. In the end, this ambitious adventure failed to solve America's commercial

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 28 January 1809, *Letters*, 1198-1199

problems and she was forced to adopt more dramatic measure as the only way to achieve her political goals.<sup>69</sup>

It was the Embargo of 1807 that so drastically proved the futility of a coercive commercial plan. Not only was it unsuccessful, it effectively served to prevent the growth of a capable American naval arm and all but ruined the country's economy. Jefferson hoped that with the prevention of importation of English goods, American industry would be strengthened through self-reliance. He also hoped that the lack of the American commercial fleet would stagnate the English economy. In actuality the total embargo resulted in decreased American production and with the absence of American commerce, all but created a monopoly of shipping for the English merchant fleet.

On December 22, 1807, Jefferson signed the Embargo Act into law.<sup>70</sup> The chief aims of the embargo were precautionary and coercive. Jefferson figured that the embargo coupled with the Non-Importation act would all but result in British imperial starvation. Critics claimed that the same could be said for an American starvation as a result of the new embargo. Key to the success of the embargo was the almost unanimous support of it by the people, both to enforce self-

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<sup>69</sup> McCoy, Dew. *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*. Williamsburg: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980. p 210

denial and to make it clear to the British the U.S. would carry out the embargo as long as was necessary.

The public sentiment soon began to reveal chinks in the armor of the great economic experiment. Jefferson had effectually waited too long after the *Chesapeake* to enact the embargo. British hatred and resounding patriotism had begun to diminish. Violations were rampant and the government could not enforce the law in all ports simultaneously. Many loopholes in the law were used to allow shipping, a by-product of its broad definition when signed into law.

By the fall of 1808, the failure of the embargo was obvious. Its purpose as a coercive tool had failed due to bad timing and poor implementation. Had the government been able to hold on, the embargo may have proven of limited success, for early in 1809 England appeared to be reconsidering the importance of trade with America. Jefferson and the Republicans had drastically over estimated the reliance of Great Britain upon American goods as well. In 1808, only 12 million pounds of cotton reached England from America, which was a drastic drop from the 44 million pounds, imported the year before. Other foreign markets quickly stepped up to fill the demand and imported over 30

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<sup>70</sup> Perkins, p 156

million pounds that same year.<sup>71</sup> Poor regulation, lack of popular support, and an expanding international market that could fill the void left by American withdrawal undermined the pressure that could have been exerted by this form of economic control.

The results of the embargo were varied. On the domestic front, economic stagnation was rampant. Sailors seeking employment left for service on British ships, ironic considering the role involuntary impressments played in the coming about of the embargo. Industry, projected to increase production with a reduction in imported processed goods, saw a decrease in production. National unity was damaged as a result of political questions that arose from the embargo. Sectionalism between North and South increased as economic issues and political ideologies continued to butt heads. Most importantly however, it provided an excuse for the continued neglect of the American military system. With the failure of peaceful economic coercion, it left only military options as a way to sway English policy.

#### Strategic Analysis

Throughout the course of this chapter accepted naval strategy and purpose has been outlined, as has Jefferson's strategic policy involving maritime use. His inability to

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<sup>71</sup> IBID p 168

abandon eighteenth century notions of warfare, long after the rest of the world had done so, led to his adoption of a devastatingly ineffective policy. Two very distinctive flaws in his strategy have been demonstrated here.

First, Jefferson hoped to use peaceful economic means as his principle way of exerting influence on belligerent nations. As Mahan explains on the first page of *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, "The history of Sea Power is largely, though by no means solely, a narrative of contests between nations, of mutual rivalries, of violence frequently culminating in war."<sup>72</sup> In the course of human actions, the exertion of force and policy becomes a necessity in a social environment. Extend this to include groups and societies, and the guidelines remain relatively the same. When dialogue and incentives are not enough to convince another to act in accordance with our wishes, it is left to physical means to serve as the medium of influence. The ultimate human activity analogous to this is warfare. War is the implementation of politics by other means.<sup>73</sup> To rely on any other measure of influence is not necessarily foolish, for no other means may be available. With this understood, victory should not be expected. Although

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<sup>72</sup> Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, p 1

<sup>73</sup> Clausewitz, Karl Von. *On War*. Reprinted from the original. New York: Random House Inc., 1943. p 16

Jefferson understood the merits of war in a limited sense, his reliance upon non-military means as the strategic way in which to exert will, negated the basic and proven mode of enforcement, war.

Second, Jefferson had two principle policies governing the navy that proved ineffectual. He hoped to maintain only an adequate enough naval force to provide limited capabilities on the high seas to defend honor. Essentially he argued for a limited notion of maritime warfare, and should this prove unsuitable against some adversaries, he could rely on commercial control to influence the will of an opponent without violent means. The reliance upon gunboats and the strategic use of the navy being purely defensive was in direct opposition to Mahan's strategic doctrine. This doctrine states that the use of a navy to serve expressly as a passive defensive force rules out its principle aspect, its mobility to attack and defend far from the shores that it is defending.<sup>74</sup> This doctrine manifested itself in his reliance upon small gunboats for an inexpensive naval force relegated to defense. This aspect will be analyzed greater in the following chapter.

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<sup>74</sup> Mahan, *Naval Strategy*, p 152

## CHAPTER 4

### THE NAVY AND JEFFERSON

Naval forces constitute one leg of the military aspect of maritime strategy. This aspect of maritime policy was most impacted by Jefferson's policy. Under the Republican ideology that dominated American politics after the 1801 election, the navy was the most drastically reduced military establishment. The defensive coastal gunboat navy adopted by Jefferson severely crippled the nation's ability to protect its investments upon the high sea and led to a naval inferiority to other maritime nations.

#### The Creation of the Navy Under the Federalists

Under Federalist control, the American government took great strides in the creation of an active naval arm. Between 1792 and 1801 the U.S. created a naval force, the bureaucracy to govern it, and actively participated in two naval deployments. First was the Quasi-War with France. America sought to stop, by force, French vessels that were attacking and harassing American shipping. This conflict saw the rapid mobilization of American naval power. Second, was the series of campaigns against the Barbary pirates.

With the end of the American Revolution, the remnants of the Continental Navy were either scrapped or sold at

auction. Given the authority granted the Federal Government under the Articles of Confederation, finances for establishing any form of combat arm were unattainable. In 1789, the United States Constitution went into effect creating a new federal government with broader powers. Many of these new powers dealt specifically with the creation and preservation of a national naval force. Since gaining its independence from Great Britain, American merchant ships, no longer protected by the British navy, were raided by corsairs in North Africa. The new Constitution was written with these issues in mind. Article I, Section eight, number ten of the Constitution tasks the government with the responsibility to maintain a navy; Article II, Section two decrees that the President shall serve as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the provision in the Constitution, the nation did not have a navy because the means to create one were not readily available. By 1790 the situation in the Mediterranean had escalated. Secretary of War Henry Knox began to research the cost of creating and maintaining an adequate force to deal with the Barbary problem.<sup>76</sup> His report

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<sup>75</sup> United States Constitution, art. 1, sec. 4, 10; art. II, sec. 2

<sup>76</sup> U.S. Senate Journal. 1<sup>st</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, 8 December 1791, (Vol. I, Sec. 2, #36) p 353 Ironically, it was in this same year that the forerunner to the United States Coast Guard was created by Congress, allocating funds for the construction and manning of ten revenue cutters.

to Congress in 1791 argued for ships of 44-guns, which constituted a balance to the largest known ships in possession of the corsairs at the time.<sup>77</sup> The Congress however was of the opinion that a naval militia was adequate and actively endorsed the shipbuilding trade of the merchant and fishing fleets. It was widely believed that in the event of belligerency these vessels could be fitted out for privateering, saving the money needed to construct a navy. Privateering and commerce raiding, it was felt, would destroy enough commerce to cause an opponent to yield to American interests.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the coast of North Africa was controlled by series of military dictatorships located in Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. These regions were agriculturally inefficient and had no significant commerce. The leaders relied upon piracy to supply the national treasuries, which supported their lavish individual lifestyles. Exacting tribute from nations in an agreement not to assault their shipping was a common practice, as was kidnapping and kidnapping fraud.<sup>78</sup> Algiers

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The precipitous being the need for enforcement of trade laws dealing with smuggling in coastal waters..

<sup>77</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1, p 38. 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1798. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 4/3/03

<sup>78</sup> Smelser, Marshall, *The Congress Founds the Navy, 1787-1798*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959. p 35

was the dominant of the corsairs. Using techniques reminiscent of the Romans in the First Punic War. The pirates would come along side an enemy ship and drop great planks over an enemy's rail. Attached to the end of these planks were massive iron spikes that would embed themselves in the victims' deck. This would effectively secure the two vessels together. They would then use these massive secured planks as bridges to ferry men across and commandeer their prey.<sup>79</sup>

Thomas Jefferson, while serving as Ambassador to France and later as Secretary of State, was of the opinion that war should be waged against the corsairs. He felt that national honor demanded a response and by paying tribute in return for "protection" from piracy showed a sign of weakness that would later cause the nation more trouble with nations abroad. From the beginning he argued for a naval force with which to defend national honor. Jefferson wrote vehemently to Congress supporting the establishment of a naval arm that he argued would be no more costly to construct and maintain than it would be to buy peace from the Algerines.<sup>80</sup> Despite

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<sup>79</sup> Starr, Chester. *The Influence of Sea Power Upon the Ancient World* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. p 56

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 11 July 1786, *Letters*. Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826. Charlottesville:(University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.) <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/jefferson/> 1993. (hereafter cited as *Letters*, followed by the section number,)

these pleas, Congress would take no drastic action in creating a navy in 1790-91.

#### The Naval Act of 1794

Late in 1793, President Washington brought to Congress a report from the Secretary of State on the measures taken to secure peace and ransom of Americans being held captive by the corsairs. The matter came up as a result of increased hostility from the Dey of Algiers. The result of the President's report and Congress's ensuing discussion was the passage of the Naval Act of 1794. This act created the United States Navy and was signed into law by Washington on March 27, 1794. It appropriated the funds necessary for the creation of a naval force. Its purpose as written in its preamble was to protect American commerce from the depredations of the Algerine corsairs.<sup>81</sup>

The act was composed of nine sections that laid out the mechanism and composition of the new force. It was to be composed of six vessels, four to carry forty-four guns each, and two to carry thirty-six guns each. The number and types of officers to be employed on the vessels was laid out, as was the number of sailors required for each vessel. Pay and food rations for the officers and men were included along

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<sup>81</sup> *An Act to Provide for Naval Armament. Statutes at Large.* 1794. Vol. 1, ch. 12, 350. Accessed online at National Archives <http://memory.loc.gov/11/3/02>

with the provision allowing the President to purchase ships so long as the number of vessels did not exceed the six provided for. Of great importance was the final section, which stated; "*Provided always, and be it further enacted, That if a peace shall take place between the United States and the Regency of Algiers, that no farther proceeding be had under this act.*"<sup>82</sup> This last provision echoed the opinion of the Congress that the navy should be only a temporary institution designed to respond to specific threats. The navy created under this act was expressly that a small force designed and constructed with a specific mission in mind.

The law having been passed meant the Secretary of War had to find some way to build a fleet for which no practical experience in the new country had yet been achieved. Knox set out to gather shipwrights who may be able to design the new vessels. Eventually, Joshua Humphreys and a young English designer by the name of Josiah Fox were tasked with the responsibility of designing the new American warships.<sup>83</sup> They decided upon frigates as the type of vessel to be constructed. It was decided that four 44-gun ships would be constructed at yards in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and

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<sup>82</sup> IBID

<sup>83</sup> Chappelle, Howard I. *The History of the American Sailing Navy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1949. p 126 These vessels followed more closely with British design characteristics with the exception of their dimensions to firepower.

Norfolk. The two 36-gun ships would be constructed at Portsmouth, New Hampshire and Baltimore.<sup>84</sup> In addition to the location, size and number of vessels to be built, so to were their names decided; *Constitution, United States, President, Constellation, Congress, and Chesapeake*.

Eighteenth century naval warfare revolved around the wind powered sailing ships-of-the-line. Ship-of-the-line was the classification given to warships that were of sufficient size to be included in the standard naval battle formation of the period, the battle line. They were constructed of wood, preferably oak, and were classified as "Rates".<sup>85</sup> Oak was very strong and resilient, and when properly dried before use, would serve a long time before beginning to rot. The Rate classification had six levels, only the first three were considered suitable to serve in the line. A "first rate" ship of the line was armed with up to one hundred guns and a "second rate" ship was armed with ninety to ninety-eight guns. These were the super heavies of naval warfare, and though few in number they generally served as the flagships and demonstrated more than any other symbol the power of a nation. The standard class of fighting ship was those of the "third rate". These ships were armed with

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<sup>84</sup> Hough, Richard. *Fighting Ships*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969. p 170

sixty-four to eighty-four guns. These ships had two gun decks and were much more maneuverable and cost effective than the larger warships. "Fourth rate" ships were armed with fifty to sixty guns and "fifth rate" ships were armed with 30 to forty-four guns. Normally in between the "fifth rate" and the "sixth rate" classes were the frigates.

Frigates mounted between twenty-eight and forty guns mounted on one gun deck. They were small fast and maneuverable. They were the most glamorous warships of the time and were relatively powerful for their size. The smaller ships of the "sixth rate" mounted between twenty and twenty-eight guns.<sup>86</sup>

The American frigates took the shape of a single decked warship and exhibited excellent sailing characteristics. They were armed more heavily than regular frigates, and by all measures were regarded as super-frigates when compared to those maintained by other nations. They were as long as vessels intended to mount seventy-four guns and they were designed to carry 24-pound long guns instead of 18-pound long guns.<sup>87</sup> The reasoning behind their

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<sup>85</sup> Chappelle, Howard. *The History of American Sailing Ships*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1935. p 51

<sup>86</sup> Batchelor, John, David Lyon, and Antony Preston. "Navies of the American Revolution". Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc, 1975. p. 8-65

<sup>87</sup> Coletta, Paolo E. *The American Naval Heritage in Brief*. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1980. p 15 **Note:** It is of interest to note that many of the ships were rearmed with carronades by their captains. All too often, American vessels were overloaded beyond their design limit, which created structural fatigue and hindered sailing qualities. The quintessential example of this being the *USS Essex* which

design stemmed from the vast numerical superiority that almost every other nation had over the U.S. in any possible naval engagement. American ships were designed to be more than a match for any ship of comparable size. They were designed to be able to stay at sea for long periods of time and perform well in naval slugging matches. They had good sailing characteristics and speed so they might control the time of engagement to when it best suited them. The ability to fight or flight in combat is a formidable advantage and a necessary survival skill. For this reason they were designed to outrun anything they could not outfight.

When compared to vessels in other navies, what the American lacked in numbers they made up with in quality. British frigates of the 1790s were mostly twenty-eight and thirty-two gun ships displacing roughly six hundred to one thousand tons. The larger British frigates that faced the American's in the War of 1812 were significantly weaker as well. The American frigates were the strongest fifth-rates on the seas. The forty-fours displaced over 1,576 tons and were armed with thirty 24-pounder long guns on the deck and twenty-two 42-pounder carronades on the quarterdeck and forecastle. The thirty-sixes displaced 1,287 tons and were

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was lost during the War of 1812 because all but two of her long guns had been removed in favor of short range carronades.

designed to carry twenty-eight 18-pounders on the gundeck and twenty 32-pounder carronades on the quarterdeck and forecastle. This increase in firepower was the result of two factors. First, the increased length of the ship allowed more gunports to be mounted. Second, they were designed with a wider and stronger spar deck that was able to act as a secondary gundeck. Normally the gangways on either side of the ship that allow transit above the crowded gundeck would not have supported the weight of additional guns. The frigates also possessed great defensive strength in the live oak wood construction that was far superior to the wood used in English vessels.<sup>88</sup>

Before these design characteristics could be put to use and tested, the Dey of Algiers signed a peace treaty on September 5, 1795. According to the Naval Act of 1794 work upon the ships was to have stopped with peace having been secured. Washington, being a supporter of naval expansion, fashioned a compromise that in the name of public interest work on the three ships most advanced toward completion would not be stopped. The three ships completed were the *Constitution* at Boston, *United States* at Philadelphia, and the 36-gun *Constellation* at Baltimore. The first of these,

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<sup>88</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1, p 38. 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1798. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 9/2/02

the *United States* slid down the ways on May 10, 1797, the *Constellation* on September 7, and the *Constitution* on October 12.<sup>89</sup>

### The Quasi-War with France

The catalyst that prompted Washington and the Federalists to act for preservation of the fleet and gave their argument enough legitimacy to warrant the Republican compromise was the growing hostility faced by neutral nations upon the seas. As a result of the French wars of revolution and the resulting Napoleonic wars, Europe was embroiled in war from 1793 until 1816. This warfare spread from the battlefields and battle fleets to the realm of commerce. England and France both attempted to disrupt the commerce in and out of each other's ports. Neutral states, like the U.S., bore the brunt of this aggression upon the high seas. The signing of Jay's Treaty between America and Great Britain in 1794 was viewed by France as a violation of the treaties America had signed with her.

It was under these circumstances that John Adams was elected to the presidency in 1796. On March 2, 1797, the French directory renounced the principle of "free ships make

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<sup>89</sup> Paulin, Charles O. *Paulin's History of Naval Administration 1775-1911*. Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1968. p 97 **Note:** The *Constellation* constructed in 1797 was broken up in 1852 at Norfolk Navy yard. The *Constellation* preserved today is the second ship to bear the name and was

free goods".<sup>90</sup> In this renouncement, French privateers and men-of-war had the right to pursue and board American vessels and require a roster of all men and their nationalities on board. The French ship could then legally capture American vessels failing to have such a list.

Having never enforced this rule, most ships failed to have it, nor were they given time to get it. The act took effect immediately, essentially declaring all American shipping not in homeports to be fair game for French attack. Seeking a diplomatic solution, President Adams dispatched John Marshall, Elbridge Gerry, and Charles Pickney on October 4, 1797, to secure a peaceful solution. The resulting X.Y.Z. Affair aided in creating the additional political atmosphere necessary to propagate pro-naval sentiment in the nation.<sup>91</sup>

America responded with the Naval Act of July 1, 1797, which enabled the President to complete and man the three frigates nearing completion.<sup>92</sup> Of the over 5,000 American commercial vessels at sea in 1797, three hundred were lost

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constructed in 1853 and is a corvette as opposed to a frigate. She was the last all sail vessel commissioned by the United States Navy.

<sup>90</sup> Palmer, Micheal A. *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations During the Quasi-War with France 1798-1801*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987. p 4

<sup>91</sup> Chambers, John, ed. *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. p 280

<sup>92</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1, p 32. 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1798. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 9/2/02

to French activities. U.S. imports fell from \$81,000,000 to \$75,000,000; exports from \$67,000,000 to \$51,000,000.<sup>93</sup> Such losses were threatening an economic downturn in the U.S. On May 28, 1798, Adams signed a bill entitled "An Act more Effectually to Protect the Commerce and Coasts of the United States." It extended a limited amount of war powers to the Presidency. Adams used it to order American warships to recover captured American vessels and to engage French ships which had committed acts of depredations, or intended to.<sup>94</sup> By the end of June 1798, the three American frigates were almost completely fitted for sea. They were supplemented by an assortment of converted merchantmen, making the American Navy set to clear the costal waters and begin actions abroad.<sup>95</sup>

The strategy America employed against France changed over time as the navy developed and grew. Initially, the navy was a purely defensive force. American warships were restricted to the waters close to American ports, tasked primarily with patrolling for French privateers and

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<sup>93</sup> Palmer. p 6

<sup>94</sup> *An Act More Effectually to Protect the Commerce and Coasts of the United States. Statutes at Large.* 1798. Vol. 1, Ch. 48, 561 Accessed online at National Archives <http://memory.loc.gov/> 10/2/02

<sup>95</sup> Accessed online at Yale University <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/statutes/qw04.htm> 5/7/03. "On 9 July Congress authorized U.S. naval vessels to capture armed French vessels anywhere on the high seas, not just off the coast of the United States. This act also sanctioned the issuance of priva-teering commissions."

warships. Convoy duty for American merchant ships traveling up and down the American seaboard was also common practice. During this critical time, American crews and captains were able to get acquainted with their new vessels and establish daily shipboard routines in relatively safe waters.

#### The Navy Department and an Offensive Force

In response to the increasing naval situation and the likelihood that the size and complexity of management of naval affairs would soon become too large for the Secretary of War to maintain, the new cabinet position of Secretary of the Navy was created. The first man to actively discharge this position was Benjamin Stoddert who would hold the position from June 18, 1798, until April 1, 1801.<sup>96</sup> Under his direction the navy would finally have an administrator whose sole task was the improvement and establishment of an effective naval arm. He sought to create a navy that would be able to securely defend American commercial interests abroad as well as deter belligerents from assaulting America itself.

Stoddert and the rest of the Federalists worked to increase the size of the navy as quickly as possible. On May 28, 1798, Congress instructed American warships to attack

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online at Naval Historical Center

<http://www.history.navy.mil/biblio/biblio4/biblio4a.htm> 4/9/03

<sup>96</sup> IBID p 17 & 232

any French vessel near American waters that was suspected of having intent to harass American commerce. This act formally instigated the Quasi-War with France. The conflict's conclusion saw the new American Navy grow to include fifty-four ships of various sizes. Realizing the time needed for construction of new ships was too great, Congress set about purchasing vessels and converting them into warships as a stopgap navy to supplement the frigates. In fact the first American warship to set sail was the *Ganges* on 24 May 1798. She was a former merchantman purchased by the government for \$58,000 and armed with twenty-four cannon.<sup>97</sup> Within a short period, the government purchased eight merchantmen to supplement the frigates coming into service. They mounted anywhere from eighteen guns to twenty-four. When compared to the later frigates constructed and commissioned in 1799, such as the *John Adams* 28 and *Essex* 32, it can be seen how comparatively large these vessels were and how vital their introduction was.<sup>98</sup> Of the twenty-two ships in service with the United States Navy in 1798, eight were former merchantmen, eleven were small revenue cutters pressed into service, and of course the three frigates.<sup>99</sup> Frigates may

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<sup>97</sup>Palmer. p 20 The second American warship to set sail was the 36-gun *Constellation* commanded by Captain Thomas Truxtun.

<sup>98</sup> Chappelle, *Navy*, p 165-167

<sup>99</sup> Palmer, 24

have served as the backbone of the navy, but it was the smaller vessels that served as the muscle.

The increasing demand for patrolling cruisers and escort vessels for American convoys spurred new construction programs. Despite the length of the hostilities, practically all new construction of ships was done between 1798 and 1799. During this time the construction and purchase of new vessels was of the utmost importance to the Navy Department. At the end of 1797, three ships were in service with the navy. On July 16, 1798, Congress approved the completion of the last three frigates originally provided for in the Naval Act of 1794.<sup>100</sup> The *Congress*, 36 was launched at Portsmouth on August 15, 1799, the *Chesapeake*, 36 at Norfolk on December 2, 1799, and the *President*, 44 at New York on April 1, 1800.<sup>101</sup> By the end of 1798 the navy had grown to twenty ships, and by the end of 1799 thirty-three. Of these, five were 44's, four were 36's, seven were 32's, three were 24's, seven were 20's, four were 18's, and three were 14's. Nine galleys and eight revenue cutters supplemented these blue water vessels. Also constructed were two 28-gun frigates and three smaller ships of twenty to twenty-four guns. For

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<sup>100</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1, p 68. 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, 1799. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 9/3/02

coastal and harbor defense, two schooners and seven galleys were also built.<sup>102</sup>

In addition to these vessels, the merchants of some major ports constructed five new frigates. Though most were completed too late to be of any use in the Quasi-War, they would prove to be useful in later naval activities. The frigates commissioned as a result of this effort were: the *Philadelphia*, *New York*, *Essex*, *Boston*, and *John Adams*. The *Philadelphia* was a thirty-six constructed at New York and was the largest of the frigates constructed by private subscription. Her action and destruction at Tripoli account for some of the most daring exploits in naval history. The *New York* was the second largest frigate constructed in this manner, also at New York. Also rated as a 36-gun ship, she was slightly shorter than the *Philadelphia*. She spent much of her life laid up in ordinary at Washington Navy Yard and was scuttled when the British attacked the city in 1814. Third, was the famous *Essex*. A large 32-gun frigate, she was constructed at Salem, Massachusetts from funds collected in Essex County. She would go on to glory in the War of 1812 as

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<sup>101</sup> Sweetman, Jack. *American Naval History: An Illustrated Chronology of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps 1775-Present*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984. p 18-19

<sup>102</sup> The coastal galleys proved to be the forerunner of the Jeffersonian Gunboats in the Federalist navy. They were generally around fifty feet in length and were armed with a single 24-pounder cannon forward and up to six small swivel mounted howitzers.

a commerce raider in the Pacific. She was ultimately captured by the British frigate *Phoebe*, 36, and the sloop *Cherub*, 18. The *Boston* was a smaller 28-gun frigate constructed at Boston and was responsible for the capture of the French frigate *Berceau* on October 12, 1800.<sup>103</sup> After this episode she was placed in ordinary at the Washington Naval Yard and allowed to rot until she was burned in 1814. The smallest frigate built by subscription and presented to the Navy was the *John Adams*, constructed in Charleston, South Carolina. The small 28-gun frigate saw very little active life and remained in ordinary, allowed to rot until her break up at Norfolk in 1829.<sup>104</sup>

The hostilities with France provided America with the first victories and defeats for her navy. Three French warships were captured during the war, the schooner *Bon Pere*, the 36-gun frigate *L'Insurgent*, and another small frigate the *Berceau*. The latter of these vessels was returned to the French but the former two were pressed into American service under the names *Bee* and *Insurgent* respectively.

Between 1799 and 1800, American activity against the French saw its climax. During these years the United States

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<sup>103</sup> *Naval Documents related to the Quasi-War between the United States and France Vol. 4*. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1935. p 456

conducted extensive operations in the Caribbean. Stoddert dispatched what forces he could to the Caribbean for the winter months. This prevented the ships from being bottled up by ice and harsh weather off of America's north Atlantic coast. An American force that averaged no more than fifteen ships captured eighty-six French privateers.<sup>105</sup> American vessels operating out of these foreign ports in the area achieved most of these victories. Only one American warship, the *Retaliation*, was lost due to enemy actions.<sup>106</sup>

The Quasi-War with France was a success for the United States as well as the navy. Stoddert had proven his worth as an administrator and leader. With minimal staff he had managed to fight political pressure and the national fear of a military long enough to win significant clout for the United States and her new Navy. He had created a small but reputable force that proved its capabilities against the most formidable of European belligerents. In keeping with his character, Stoddert formulated a proposal to Congress that included an expansion plan for the navy he felt would provide security from any aggressor. On February 25, 1799, Congress passed a Federalist bill of great importance for the navy. It had three significant measures. First, funds

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<sup>104</sup> Chapelle, *Navy*, p 359-360

<sup>105</sup> Palmer p 235

<sup>106</sup> Chapelle, *Navy*, p 174

were appropriated for the construction of six 74-gun ships. These vessels would have been America's first heavy enough to be considered ships-of-line. Second, \$50,000 was allocated for the construction of two naval docks for repairing naval vessels. Third, it appropriated \$200,000 for the purchase of timber or land upon which timber was growing.<sup>107</sup> Stoddert argued for forces that could compete in large naval engagements with European forces. However, his advocacy for the selling of smaller vessels in order to prevent the diverting of funds from his impending battleship fleet was shortsighted. Numerous times during the Quasi-War smaller vessels of the schooner size were of shallow enough draft to pursue lesser warships close to shore for capture. Frigates and vessels of larger size were suited for blue water operations and patrolling but not for pursuit of vessels into coastal waters. A balance of small coastal ships and large blue water vessels was necessary to provide an effective naval arm capable of handling any maritime threat.

On February 3, 1801, hostilities with France ceased with the signing of treaty. Naval expenditures were no longer at the forefront of American concerns. One of the

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<sup>107</sup> U.S. Senate Journal. 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, 25 February 1799, Vol. II, Sec. 2, p 594.

last measures of the Federalist government was the "Peace Establishment Act" on March 3, 1801.<sup>108</sup> In order to save as much of the enlarged navy as possible, the fleet was voluntarily cut down from thirty-three vessels to thirteen. Stoddert pressed for these thirteen to be the frigates and recommended the selling of the smaller vessels.

### Jefferson and the Mediterranean Squadrons

Thomas Jefferson assumed the office of President on March 4, 1801.<sup>109</sup> He brought with him a new administration and a new economic policy for the nation. His primary mission was to end large government expenditures and decrease the national debt. One of the first targets for restructure and downsizing was the navy. The success and national pride the navy had obtained during the limited war with France had helped give itself definition. The navy would not be eliminated as it had after the Revolution. Due to pragmatic needs of the navy when dealing with the Barbary Pirates, several new vessels were constructed while Jefferson was president. As Jefferson was being sworn in, threats in the Mediterranean were once again rising. The

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<sup>108</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1, p 74. 6<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1801. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov>

<sup>109</sup> First Innaugural Address, 4 March, 1801. *Addresses, Messages and Replies*. Jefferson, Thomas 1743-1826. Charlottesville: )University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.) 1993. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/Jefferson> (hereafter cited as *Addresses, Messages and Replies*, followed by section number), 495

navy would be reduced but it would still be expected to serve the new administration's policies as well as it had the predecessor's.

Fearing that ocean-going warships may engage the young republic in another war with a European power, Jefferson opposed the creation of more vessels with those credentials. By the end of 1801 the new construction facilities began by the Federalists were either liquidated or made inoperative. Preparation for construction of the 74-gun ships was halted and all materials collected for them were ordered into storage. The proposed sites for new naval yards served as the storage houses for these provisions. Many of these naval stores were not properly attended to and eventually succumbed to rot and disrepair. Under the "Peace Establishment Act" the President was allowed to sell all vessels in the navy with the exception of the thirteen frigates. Seven of these were scheduled for ordinary while six were to be kept on active duty but with reduced crews. Jefferson's primary goal was to establish a frugal and efficient government. He decreased the over three million dollar 1800 Federalist naval budget to just under one million dollars in 1801.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Howarth, Stephen. *To Shining Sea: A History of the United States Navy, 1775-1998*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. p 67-68

Besides selling vessels and discontinuing construction and personnel, Jefferson also devised ways to save money maintaining the fleet he was forced to endure. One of his most ambitious programs was the creation of a massive dry dock. He planned an enormous covered dry dock with the sole purpose of providing a location for frigates to be stored out of the water and protected from the elements. This he envisioned would allow vessels to be placed in storage with no crew yet be immediately called in to service in a perfect state of readiness. He felt this system would save money in both repairs and personnel.<sup>111</sup> Plans were drawn up and locations selected but Congress did not approve and it was never constructed.

On May 17, 1801 the Pasha of Tripoli, Yusuf Karamanli declared war on the United States. He felt the amount of tribute being paid was insufficient. Six days later the first American squadron was dispatched by Jefferson to the Mediterranean. The United States had not yet received the declaration of war but reports of the Pasha's actions had already incited much displeasure within the U.S. During the Quasi-War, the United States frigate *George Washington* had the less honorable task of transporting tribute to the Dey of Algiers. While in port offloading his cargo the Dey

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<sup>111</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Latrobe, 2 November 1802. *Letters*. 1108-9

requested that the vessel be used to transport an ambassador and gifts to the sultan of Constantinople. After much debate the American captain agreed to serve as a courier service given the fact that his ship was alone, without support, and under the guns of the harbor. The mission was made all the more distasteful given the amount of luggage, human cargo, and animals required given the diplomatic nature of the mission.<sup>112</sup> Needless to say this was not the appropriate assignment for an American man-of-war. Upon return to America, the story presented angered most and helped spur Jefferson into action.

On May 20, 1801, Jefferson dispatched a squadron that was far more formidable than what the Barbary corsairs were accustomed to. Instead of a small lone frigate, Jefferson dispatched the *President* 44, *Philadelphia* 36, *Essex* 32, and the schooner *Enterprise* 12. With the exception of the *Enterprise*, the ships of the squadron were too large to affect a successful blockade. Their large size and deep drafts prevented them from getting close enough to shore to prevent small vessels from entering. The *Enterprise* was the

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<sup>112</sup> Irwin, Ray, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Pirates, 1776-1816*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1970 p 94-95

only vessel to make a capture during this first deployment, capturing a Tripolitan 14-gun ship.<sup>113</sup>

This squadron was relieved by a second, which sailed on March 10, 1802. Being the only small daft vessel to escape the auction block, the *Enterprise* was again assigned along with the *Constellation* 36, *New York* 36, *Adams* 28, and the *John Adams* 28. Once again this force was not suited for operations against small fast vessels in shallow water. While capturing and destroying a few vessels, the blockade was still largely ineffective.<sup>114</sup>

Observing the lack of success, it was decided that changes were in order. On February 28, 1803, Congress passed an "Act Pertaining to the Navy" which authorized the construction or purchase of four smaller vessels not to exceed sixteen guns.<sup>115</sup> It was decided that two brigs and two schooners would be added to the fleet. The 16-gun brigs were to be constructed at Philadelphia and Boston and the two schooners at Baltimore. Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith directed three naval officers to oversee construction of the

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<sup>113</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1. p 82-83. 7<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1802. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 4/9/03

<sup>114</sup> As a matter of record, the majority of the American ships were frequently not at Tripoli at all but at Gibraltar, an act which caused many complaints with the way in which the campaign against the belligerent port was being administered. Irwin, p 116-117

<sup>115</sup> *An Act to Provide for Naval Armament, Statutes at Large*. 1803. Vol. 2, Ch. 11, 206. Accessed online at National Archives <http://memory.loc.gov/> 10/2/02

vessels and to construct them for suitable service in the Mediterranean. The two brigs were named the *Argus*, 16 and the *Siren*, 16 and were both completed and sent to the Mediterranean in late 1803. Of the two schooners, one was constructed and one was purchased due to time constraints. The schooner constructed was named *Vixen*, 12 and was commissioned on June 25, 1803. The purchase schooner was renamed *Nautilus*, 12 and sent to the Mediterranean in 1803.<sup>116</sup>

These four new ships were assigned to a new squadron under the command of Edward Preble. Preble in command of the *Constitution*, 44 had with him the *Philadelphia*, 36 as well as the new vessels and the *Enterprise*, 12. It was this mission that reached the Mediterranean on September 13, 1803, that would prove to be the most successful, glamorous, and costly. On October 31, 1803, Captain Bainbridge of the *Philadelphia* sighted a ship trying to slip into the harbor at Tripoli. Having just dispatched the *Vixen* he alone was in position to act. He gave pursuit and his frigate ran hard aground on an uncharted reef. All attempts to lighten the vessel enough to float off the reef failed, and after attack by Tripolitan gunboats and unable to return fire, Bainbridge surrendered in order to save lives. The three hundred-seven-

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<sup>116</sup> Chapelle, *Navy*, p 181-188

man crew was captured and imprisoned. Unfortunately a few days later a storm freed the *Philadelphia* and she was captured and brought into the harbor at Tripoli.<sup>117</sup>

Preble, shocked by the events, developed a bold plan to destroy the frigate and prevent her use by the corsairs. Using a captured Tripolitan vessel, re-christened *Intrepid*, Lieutenant Stephen Decatur along with 80 volunteers, infiltrated the harbor and set fire to the *Philadelphia* on February 16, 1804. Decatur and his men escaped with only one injury and succeeded in destroying the *Philadelphia* and providing the navy with a new hero. As a result of his actions, Decatur was promoted to the rank of Captain at the age of twenty-five.<sup>118</sup>

After this incident, American actions toward Tripoli increased in intensity. From the Kingdom of Naples, Preble received six gunboats and two bomb ketches, as reinforcements after the loss of the *Philadelphia*. With this increase in numbers, attempts were made to bombard the city into submission with little effect. Five separate times American naval forces bombard the city with little response. Finally on March 8, 1805, four hundred Arabs and seven U.S. Marines made a land assault on the city of Derna and

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<sup>117</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1 p 123-124 8<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1803. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 3/3/03

captured it.<sup>119</sup> As a result of the pressure from land as well as sea and the increasing effect of the American blockade, Pasha Yusuf Karamanli signed a peace treaty with the U.S. on June 3, 1805.<sup>120</sup>

### Jefferson and the Gunboat Navy

The largest naval increases made by Jefferson were for the construction of small gunboats. Jefferson hoped that a large force of small coastal gunboats stationed at American harbors would be sufficient to defend American soil when properly coordinated with coastal defenses. This idea, much like the "dry dock", was designed to provide security at a minimal cost. These small vessels could be stored on land under cover, protected from the elements and maintained in perfect state of preservation until they were needed.<sup>121</sup>

Under the Federalist navy, seven small galleys were constructed for harbor defense. The navy manned and put the boats to sea but they proved to be of little value and were removed from naval service in 1801-2.

In 1800, Secretary of the Navy Stoddert wrote that in his opinion one 12-gun schooner on the naval establishment was worth a thousand galleys for naval service under the Act

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<sup>118</sup> Sweetman, p 22

<sup>119</sup> IBID p 24

<sup>120</sup> IBID

of May 4, 1798.<sup>122</sup> Despite their military record in the service of the United States navy, Thomas Jefferson envisioned these small relatively inexpensive vessels as the backbone of the American coastal defense navy and the salvation of the American military debt expenditures.<sup>123</sup>

Citing opinions from General Horatio Gates, Commodore Thomas Tingy, and Commodore Samuel Baron, Jefferson provided supporting evidence for this type of vessel.<sup>124</sup> Under the same act that led to the creation of the *Argus*, *Siren*, *Vixen*, and *Nautilus*, fifteen gunboats were created for harbor defense. Congress allocated funds for the construction of twenty-five in 1805, fifty in 1806, and one hundred eighty-eight in 1807.<sup>125</sup> In 1807, Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith estimated that it would require two hundred fifty-seven gunboats to protect American ports along the Atlantic and in New Orleans.<sup>126</sup> Of this number, only one hundred seventy-six were ever constructed. They proved to be

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<sup>121</sup> Special Message on Gun-Boats, To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, February 10, 1807. *Addresses, Messages, and Replies*, 541

<sup>122</sup> Chappelle, *Navy*, p 153.

<sup>123</sup> Special Message on Gunboats, *Addresses Messages and Replies*, 539 & 541

<sup>124</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1, p 163-164. 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1807. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 11/5/02

<sup>125</sup> Multiple Acts providing funding for gunboat construction. *Statutes at Large*. 1803, 1805, 1806, & 1807. Vol. 2, Ch. 11, 29, 47, 9; 206, 330, 402, 451. Accessed online at National Archives <http://memory.loc.gov/> 4/5/03

<sup>126</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1, p 194-200. 11<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1807. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 2/8/03

rather expensive to maintain and many were constructed of green wood and were prone to rot quickly.

The gunboats themselves varied in style from place to place. Having no single designer placed the style of the vessels in the hands of the local shipwright. Most were around sixty feet long and armed with one or two large guns, 24-pounders or 36-pounders. Secondary armament usually consisted of small swivel guns. Some had a single gun mounted forward and some had one mounted fore and aft. A few designs even show double mounted cannon on a rotating platform in the center of the craft.<sup>127</sup>

#### The War of 1812

With the assumption to the office of the Presidency by James Madison on March 4, 1809, little changed with regards to the navy. A follower of Jefferson, Madison was not inclined to alter much from the previous executive's naval agenda. Given the increased hostility demonstrated toward American shipping and the impressments of sailors by the British during his administration, it is curious to note that naval expansion was not actively pursued in the U.S. at this time. The U.S. had fought an economic war against the British since the *Chesapeake/Leopard* Affair of June 22, 1807. As the War of 1812 approached the gunboat program

began to lose its momentum with its largest supporter no longer in office. By 1811 the only vessels under construction were those gunboats that had been ordered at an earlier date but were not yet completed. Many of the once proud ships in ordinary had been allowed to rot and most still in service were in need of extensive refit and repair. The navy yards that were maintained had become little more than storage facilities for rotting naval stores. For a nation whose economic policy had been designed to be defensive and based upon regulatory measures to combat the largest naval force in the world, the lack of preparation of naval arms was not surprising.<sup>128</sup>

The only active vessels at sea in 1812 were the sloop of war *Wasp* and the small brigs *Enterprise*, *Vixen*, *Syren*, and *Viper*. In New York a fully-manned and ready squadron comprised of the *President*, *United States*, *Congress*, *Hornet*, and *Argus* was waiting. America had seventeen seaworthy ships: nine frigates and eight smaller vessels. This is in contrast to the 1,048 in the Royal Navy of which one hundred twenty were ships-of-the-line and one hundred sixteen were frigates.<sup>129</sup> In the war plans developed, the navy was not to

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<sup>127</sup> Chappelle, *Navy*, p 198-200

<sup>128</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, Vol. 1 p 229-230. 11<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, 1810. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov>. 3/7/03

<sup>129</sup> Sweetman p 28

put to sea. It was to be totally a land campaign against Canada from which Great Britain was procuring the majority of raw supplies needed to support her navy.<sup>130</sup> However, the disarray of the army and the time required to organize and train the militia allowed the navy enough time to prepare a few vessels for war.

The best strategy to employ the forces was debated. Some argued for large squadrons patrolling the seas in force, while others argued for lone cruisers acting independently in search of British ships. Between June 21 and August 29, the New York squadron under the command of Commodore John Rodgers patrolled for British shipping in the North Atlantic with little result. After this attempt it was decided to abandon the strategy of squadron operations in favor of single cruises or occasionally in groups of two or three.<sup>131</sup>

For the first year of the war, American victories at sea were impressive. Practically all of the ship-on-ship duels fought between the American vessels and British ended in

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<sup>130</sup> This fact is obvious when one takes into consideration that all preliminary planning of the war was centered around a three pronged assault upon Canada, with scant mention of American Naval activity. Baxter, Collin F. and John Carroll. *The American Military Tradition*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1993. p 43-44

<sup>131</sup> Proof of this is evident when an examination of naval actions of the war is conducted. The only official squadron to sail was Rodger's from New York the first year of the war. Roosevelt, Theodore. *The Naval War of 1812*. Reprinted from the 1882 original. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988. p 87-88

American victories, in particular were three frigate-to-frigate engagements. This was due in large part to the needs of the British navy to keep close to home for defense against Napoleon or kept at sea protecting more vital commerce in its far-flung empire. When the Royal navy began to seriously invest in the American conflict, the heyday of the American Navy quickly came to a close. Much of the navy became bottled up in port unable to leave. Only a few vessels were actively engaging the British at sea after 1813. The most notable of these was the pacific cruise of USS *Essex*.

She escaped into the Pacific and single handedly destroyed the British whaling industry there. The economic injury inflicted upon the British trade throughout the first ten months of the war quickly dwindled as well. Once the British navy became organized and redistributed its forces to the American conflict, the American navy proved ineffectual at best.<sup>132</sup>

Beginning in 1813 the blockade of the American coastline became more organized and effective. The Royal Navy began to raid along the coast in an attempt to further disrupt American commerce and trade. This type of warfare was exactly what the gunboats were designed to defend

against. When confronted with the large men-of-war that accompanied the British forces, the small craft were forced to retire to escape destruction.<sup>133</sup>

The War of 1812 resulted in a rude awakening for American political thinkers regarding national defense and a navy. First, the organized British convoy system that developed after 1812 put an end to the belief that cruiser and privateers alone could inflict enough commercial damage to prevent an effective naval operation of an enemy. Second, the reliance upon a defensive-based maritime strategy was inadequate to protect American interests. The war demonstrated the inadequacy of gunboats to prevent attacks on the American coast. At the same time, reliance upon these craft took away resources and attention from construction of vessels that may have been able to put to sea and prevent a British blockade. The blockade paralyzed the American economy and the American military machine. Had enough small ocean going vessels been available to harass merchant shipping and thereby force more British warships into convoy duty, then possibly the U.S. could have adopted a naval building campaign that could have produced ships of

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<sup>132</sup> IBID p 36-37

<sup>133</sup> Weigley, p 51.

significant size and number to counter the available British forces dispatched to contend with them.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE MYTH OF COASTAL FORTIFICATIONS

The second leg of armed maritime defense is embodied in coastal and harbor emplacements. Since the inception of the United States Government, the threat of a hostile invasion by foreign powers was at the forefront of military concerns. From the beginning of the use of gunpowder, artillery, and cannon, few military principles were as monolithic as the superiority of guns ashore over that of guns afloat. The reliance upon wind for propulsion in the large warships of the period severely limited maneuverability, placing them at a great disadvantage when engaging fortified stationary shore positions. This principle was adopted whole-heartedly by Thomas Jefferson as the most logical and economical defense option. It became widely accepted that a system of defensive fortifications at each of the important harbors would be the cheapest and most pragmatic way to defend the new nation and her commerce from overseas threats.<sup>134</sup>

The persistent fascination with coastal fortifications stems from many factors. First was the financial status of the fledgling American nation. The mythos of the American

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<sup>134</sup> Bergh, Albert E. ed. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* vol. 3-4. *Fifth Annual Message, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1805*. Washington D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1907. p. 389

anti-military sentiment is rooted in pragmatic issues as well as idealism. Many of the founding fathers did fear the threat of a professional military force because it was through military force that strong centralized governments in Europe had been able to maintain control over their populous. A more practical explanation was the financial requirements of a military force in the emerging national economy. As idealistically perfect as a citizen army may sound to some, its significantly reduced price tag was appealing to even more.

It was under this opinion that Jefferson and the Republicans worked in opposition to a navy. As expensive as an army is to maintain, a navy is a much greater drain on resources. The Naval Act of 1794 proposed navy of four ships of 44-guns each and two ships of 36-guns each, but by April 30, 1798, only three of the frigates were completed at the extravagant cost \$305,420.<sup>135</sup> Armies are much easier to maintain because they can more easily support themselves off the land and require less pay. They are easy to disband and reform as threat requires, so that during peacetime budgetary expenditures can be greatly reduced. According to the militia mentality, a very cheap and small professional army could be maintained that in the event of invasion could

work in conjuncture with the militia and act as a delaying force until a temporary army could be raised to force out the invaders. This theory relied very heavily on the vast distance between the U.S. and European belligerents as a deterrence and time saving weapon in the grand American defense policy.

A navy on the other hand required large expenditures of money even during peacetime. Crews had to be continuously maintained and trained to keep themselves and their ships in fighting trim. Ships themselves were a terrible economical burden to maintain because they were so susceptible to the harsh corrosive environment of the sea. Also, the possession of a small conventional land force is much less threatening to an overseas empire than a force projecting naval arm. Jefferson hoped that by maintaining no more of a militant maritime force than required for defense, i.e. coastal fortifications and a shallow water gunboat fleet, that no military threat could be accidentally perceived.<sup>136</sup> This it was hoped would eliminate one more reason for a European belligerent to open hostilities against the US.

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<sup>135</sup> Paulin, p 97

<sup>136</sup> *Special Message on Gun-Boats, February 10, 1807, To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States.* Collection of writings by Thomas Jefferson. Published by Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. in New York, 1984. p 539-542.

The policy of American fortification construction and design will be analyzed in this paper at a greater length than the Navy simply because this facet of Jefferson's defense policy was embraced for a longer time than was his naval policy. Whereas the in-depth study of the navy ended with the War of 1812, the issue of fortification will be carried out through the Civil War. It was this conflict that proved to be the death null of the Jeffersonian notion of coastal defense.

#### Background

The general rule in colonial America was defensive works were small, primitive, irregularly garrisoned open earthen works mounting a few small cannon. These generalizations held true for defenses on the interior frontier as well as the seaward facing forts. The imperialist European powers saw no need to construct large permanent fortifications in frontier territories because their primary goal was to protect colonists from attacks of Indians. The only times large permanent fortifications were constructed along the same lines and quality as those found in Europe was when they were to protect areas from attacks by other European colonies that had the skill and ability to wage a European style war or siege. The notable examples of this rule were Castle Williams constructed in Boston harbor

and the formidable Castillo de San Marcos constructed by the Spanish in St. Augustine, Florida.<sup>137</sup>

Castle William was named for William III of England. It was a massive structure constructed of brick cemented with a mortar made from burnt oyster shells. Originally began in 1689 with funds from England, it was modernized in 1740 and twenty 42-pound guns were installed on its walls. Its construction coupled with its armament of over a hundred guns easily made it the most powerful defensive structure in the English colonies. Its location was strategic in that its field of fire controlled the vital harbor at Boston. Castle Williams was captured by Americans in 1776 and occupied until its destruction in 1801 to make way for the construction of the new Fort Independence on the same island in Boston harbor.<sup>138</sup>

The Castillo de San Marcos is the oldest standing permanent European fortification in the United States. It stands today on the spot where several wooden forts had previously been erected. The location was chosen because of the natural harbor adequate for ships of the time and its proximity to the French Huguenots' establishment at Ft.

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<sup>137</sup>Lewis, Emanuel E. *Seacoast Fortifications of the United States*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993. p 15

<sup>138</sup> Grant, Bruce. *American Forts Yesterday and Today*. New York: E.P. Dutton & CO., 1965. p 33

Caroline, in what is now Jacksonville, Florida.<sup>139</sup> It was Spanish policy that all land in the new world was property of Spain given to her by Papal decree. This encroachment by French Protestants was intolerable and demanded military action to remove them from sovereign Spanish soil, hence the origin of fortifications in St. Augustine.<sup>140</sup>

The fort as seen today is a masterpiece of 17th century defensive works. It is constructed of a material known as coquina, which is shell rock quarried from nearby Anastasia Island. The unique consistency of this substance and its elasticity proved very resilient to solid shot fired from ships. The British discovered this in 1702 when an expedition from Charles Towne failed to breach the walls of the fort after a lengthy siege.<sup>141</sup>

Both forts epitomized the linear progression of European fortress design. Fortifications like the Castillo de San Marcos are the by-products of middle ages' castle design and the lessons learned from the effect of siege weapons on the high walls of castles. Fortresses inshore were at the mercy of siege weapons. These pieces were very

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<sup>139</sup> Manucy, Albert. *The Building of the Castillo de San Marcos*. National Park Service Interpretive Series, History Number 1. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1961. p 67

<sup>140</sup> Coker, P.C. *Charleston's Maritime Heritage 1670-1865*. Charleston: CokerCraft Press, 1987. p 3

large and could be brought into close range of a fortress's walls. With enough proximity, even the inaccurate smoothbore cannon of the time could accurately target the same spot on the walls of a castle to affect a breach. For this reason fortress design began to change by lowering walls and placement of them behind earthen mounds to protect against direct fire.<sup>142</sup> The necessity of keeping the walls of fortifications low limited the amount of firepower the fortress could bring to bear on any one target. The guns of a fortress now could only be mounted on the top of the exterior walls. Therefore, the number of guns was limited on any side by the fact that they had to be placed side by side on a single level of fire. The only way to increase this number was to extend the length of the walls, but even this had its limitation. As the walls grew longer, the angle of fire required for the gun to traverse for targeting increased to the point that not all of the guns could be brought to bear. This in addition to the required cost and engineering difficulty of constructing longer walls of defense meant that for the foreseeable future defensive works would remain relatively small.

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<sup>141</sup> Arnade, Charles W. *The Siege of St. Augustine in 1702*. (St. Augustine Historical Society and University of Florida Press, Gainesville) 1959. p 6

<sup>142</sup> Duffy, Christopher. *Siege Warfare: The Fortress in the Early Modern World 1494-1660*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979. p 2

Armament of the time also had severe drawbacks for defensive works. During the colonial era cannon were generally of small size. By far the majority of artillery pieces in the colonies were of light size, generally 24-pounders or smaller. A few larger pieces could be found in places like Castle William and the Castillo de San Marcos, but they were never larger than a 42-pounder.<sup>143</sup> The size and range of artillery over the next century would require a great number of fortified locations and guns to adequately defend a strategic location.

Fortifications in the colonial era were mostly temporary earthen structures designed to be manned for short duration to respond to specific threats. The two notable examples that were permanent and well defensible were quickly allowed to fall into disrepair as the politics of Europe began to change and economic and military interests were directed more toward Europe itself. The armament and technology needed to improve the overall effectiveness of harbor fortifications would be increased greatly as a result of Jeffersonian ideals but not before a period of experimentation and national maturing would take place.

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<sup>143</sup> Pepper, Simon and Nicholas Adams. *Firearms and Fortifications*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. p 12

In the early 19th century the U.S. managed to fortify thirty-five separate coastal locations from Canada to Georgia. By 1850 that number had decreased to twenty, by 1900 it was down to sixteen, and by 1940 there were only ten permanent fortifications on the American Eastern seaboard between Maine and Savannah, Georgia.<sup>144</sup> The decline in the number of coastal defenses in the late 19th and 20th centuries was as a result of fewer, yet more powerful guns that could cover a wider area with more accuracy. By 1900, only one heavy gun was needed roughly for every five emplaced in 1865.<sup>145</sup> Also, the number of vital harbors diminished. As ships got larger, the number of ports in use for major maritime traffic declined because they were no longer adequate. The diminishing number of guns needed to defend a given area and the fewer number of vital strategic navigable waterways account for the decline of harbor defenses.

#### Construction Programs

The fortification policy of the early Republic took shape in three basic forms as determined by the construction method and design characteristics of the fortifications.

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<sup>144</sup> Evidence of this downsizing is found when reviewing addresses to Congress regarding harbor defenses and their costs, the initial one here took place in 1811. *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, Vol. 1 p 308-311 12<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1811. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 4/3/03. See also Lewis, p 9

Although there were three distinct building programs, many projects overlapped and many were completed during later construction periods. The first two construction periods were direct results of threats upon the U.S. by European powers. As such they were more hastily constructed with less planning and effort placed into their construction. So long as hostility was not perceived to be imminent, defensive and military concerns were not at the forefront of political concerns. The result was a limited appreciation for the future repercussions of a decaying military force for the immediate and shortsighted needs of the economy. Peacetime military expenditures and mentality were ill prepared to cope with the larger concern of long-term economic and national security. This trend of disregarding the military in peacetime for short-term economic improvement was, and is, typical.

The first construction period lasted from 1794 to 1807. It was divided into three different periods. The first occurred in 1794 as the threat of open European interference with American commerce increased. The second phase occurred in 1798 with the Quasi-War with France, and the third occurred in 1801 as a result of a resurgence of British antagonism on the high seas.

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<sup>145</sup> IBID

In 1807 the second fortification policy was drafted as a result of increased tension between the U.S. and Great Britain and in particular the *Chesapeake* incident of June 1807.<sup>146</sup> Few examples remain of these first two periods because the materials of which they were constructed. Many were constructed on good ground and were later destroyed to make way for newer defensive works. The third and final coastal defense policy that will be studied in this research was begun in 1817 and was unique in that it was the lone example that was undertaken under relatively peaceful circumstances with no imminent threat apparent.

The political climate in Europe deteriorated rapidly after the conclusion of the American Revolution. Most notably on July 14, 1789, the French Revolution began that had unprecedented repercussions throughout Europe and the world.<sup>147</sup> For purposes of consideration here, the relative turmoil in Europe in the 1790s prompted the House of Representatives in 1794 to convene a special committee to address the issue of locations and defenses that should be erected to provide for a defense of the U.S. On February 28, 1794, the committee report on the expense required to place

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<sup>146</sup> Fowler, William M. Jr. *Jack Tars and Commodores: The American Navy, 1783-1815*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1984. p 153-155

<sup>147</sup> Mahan, Alfred T. *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*. Vol. 1. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903; reprint New York: Greenwood Press, 1968. p 85

the principle seaports and harbors of the United States was read by Mr. Thomas Fitzsimons a Representative from Pennsylvania in the House of Representatives.<sup>148</sup> It was estimated that it would cost \$76,053.25 to erect the defensive works and another \$96,645 to cast and construct the cannon and carriages needed to arm the forts. This included a list of the recommended defended seaports which were listed as follows: Portland, Maine; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Cape Ann, Salem, Marblehead, and Boston all in Massachusetts; Newport Rhode, Island; New London, Connecticut; New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Norfolk, Wilmington, North Carolina; Ocracock Inlet; Charleston, South Carolina; and Savannah, Georgia.<sup>149</sup> Within three weeks, on March 20, 1794, the first Federal authorization was passed for the construction of defenses on the U.S. coast.<sup>150</sup>

Due to the haste and need for the defenses, the Secretary of War issued only general design characteristics for the forts. For the most part, specific plans and logistics were handled by the local engineer. This trend of

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<sup>148</sup> Biographical Directory of the United States Congress.  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=F000178>.  
accessed 11/12/02

<sup>149</sup> *Annals of Congress, House of Representatives 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session p 479-480.* A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875. Accessed from the Library of Congress online at [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov) 10/23/02

<sup>150</sup> *An Act to Provide for the Defense of Certain Ports and Harbors in the United States U.S., Statutes at Large.* 1794. Vol. 1, Ch. 9, 345 Accessed online at National Archives <http://memory.loc.gov/> 1/5/03

leaving the majority of control and leadership of fort construction to the local state and municipality would be visible in the lack of defensive and architectural consistency in the individual forts. The result was little more than the rehashing of colonial era wilderness fortification. Most forts of the first series were open works with earthen parapets. Depending on the size and importance of the harbor, some defenses were armed with eight to ten guns up to several dozen. The bulk of armament lay on the vital seaward side, with only a few light cannon protecting the landward approaches, supplemented by a few defensives redoubts or blockhouses. With only a few exceptions, most were constructed simply of loose earth and covered with grass to prevent erosion. In areas where the soil lacked the cohesion necessary to support itself, timber and occasionally stone facing was used to front the walls.

French engineers drew up the design of most of the early forts. However, given that the land where they were constructed belonged to the individual states, all design proposals had to be approved by the local governors. The influence of these individuals and their subordinates led to many alterations from the original plans created. In addition to this, funds were sporadic and amounts varied from year to year.

With the deterioration of relations with France the government decided to allocate more funds in 1798, \$300,000 was allocated for defensive protection of the frontiers and \$292,678 was allocated for maintenance and preservation of the Army.<sup>151</sup> What works had been originally completed in the 1794 program had quickly succumbed to the elements and were in dire need of repair. Of the first permanent fortification built under the United States Government, only two survive in a relatively unaltered state, these are Ft. Mifflin near Philadelphia and Ft. McHenry in Baltimore. Ft. Mifflin demonstrates the lack of cohesive design construction in that it features a star shaped wall system and incorporated into this a modified bastion design.<sup>152</sup> In contrast to this, Ft. McHenry is a typical pentagonal shaped walled structure with an overly prominent bastion located at each of the points.<sup>153</sup> The large bastions are characteristics of earlier single-tiered fortresses and would later be replaced with smaller multi-leveled bastions demonstrated in the second and largely third series of American defensive works.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> *Annals of Congress, House of Representatives 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session p 789-790. A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875. Accessed from the Library of Congress online at [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov) 11/12/02*

<sup>152</sup> Brindley, William. "Magnificent Mud," in *Field Artillery Journal*, 39:124-125 (May-June, 1949). P. 8

<sup>153</sup> Walsh, Richard. "Ft. McHenry, 1814: The Star Shaped Fort," in *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 54:296-309 (September, 1959). P 12

<sup>154</sup> Pepper, p 6

Between 1800 and 1807, the issue of coastal defenses once again fell to the wayside of public concern and sentiment. Compounding this issue was the economic policy of the new President, Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson's economic policy was focused on eliminating the national debt and decreasing national expenditures.<sup>155</sup> During this time, no appreciable amount was allocated for the maintenance of existing structures or the construction of new ones. It was not until the *Chesapeake* incident on June 22, 1807, that Jefferson became significantly concerned with national defense to alter his opinion on funding for national defense.<sup>156</sup> On July 2, President Jefferson proclaimed that all armed vessels of His Majesty's Navy "now within in the harbors or waters of the United States, immediately and without delay to depart from the same."<sup>157</sup> Harbors were sealed off to British warships in American waters and those already in port could not receive servicing. The main irritation occurred around the lower Chesapeake Bay and the harbor at Norfolk, Virginia and Hampton Roads.

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<sup>155</sup> *First Annual Message to Congress, December 8, 1801*. Collection of writings by Thomas Jefferson. Published by Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., New York, 1984. p 494

<sup>156</sup> Peterson, Norma Lois, Ed. *The Defense of Norfolk in 1807 as told by William Tatham to Thomas Jefferson*. Chesapeake: Norfolk County Historical Society, 1970. p 15

<sup>157</sup> IBID p 17

The result of this event and the turning of Jefferson's military agenda was the appropriation of over three million dollars for coastal defense for the next several years. This was by far the largest amount yet made available for defense construction. The program went into application rather quickly and between 1807 and 1812 a number of significant works were constructed in time for the War of 1812. The works of what would become known as the Second system were as a general rule more elaborate than those of the First System yet still lacked coordinated design and planning. Still present was a high degree of variation and local influence on design characteristics. Despite this continuing problem, it is significant to note that unlike the preceding design series that was designed by French military planners, the Second system was designed by led by engineers of American birth and training.<sup>158</sup>

Whereas the first system was limited by funds to open earthen parapets, the second system was more varied given additional capital. Works in the second system were comprised of three general types: open batteries, masonry faced earthen forts, and most importantly all masonry

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<sup>158</sup> Legislation drafted and signed into law Jefferson in 1802 established the military academy at West Point. Its primary goal was to train engineers and artillerists for the U.S. to end its dependency upon foreigners in times of war. The first generation of graduates were tasked

forts.<sup>159</sup> The open batteries constructed in the second system were basically the same as those in the first with the exception that they were used primarily as supporting works for more significant defenses constructed using more formidable construction methods.

The masonry faced earthen forts were the more numerous of the Second system style. They resemble the last of the First system defenses constructed. These structures are sub-categorized into two architectural styles. The more common made extensive use of circular and elliptical lines in the construction of the external walls. Many of these forts had a regular pentagonal shaped system of exterior walls with circular shaped bastions utilized for defense. Few examples of these exist in their original state. Like most other forts of the first and second systems, they fell victim to major alterations or replacement by more significant works in the third system. The best surviving example of this style is Ft. Norfolk in Virginia, which was completed in 1809.<sup>160</sup> Its main armament was housed in a semi-elliptical battery and was constructed to replace a work constructed in the 1794 program.

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with designing the new American defensive works. Accessed online at the Military Academy web page: [www.usma.edu/bicentennial/history/](http://www.usma.edu/bicentennial/history/) 4/7/03.

<sup>159</sup> *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, Vol. 1, p 308-311 12<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1811. Accessed online at National Archives <http://lcweb2.loc.gov> 4/3/03

The other unique design style of the second system masonry faced earthen forts was a star shape. Many of these were updated first system works, which had their masonry fronts added later. Many of these were constructed with bastions, which were to provide overlapping arcs of fire to protect the exterior walls. A few were constructed without bastions relying on the angles created by the star shape to provide the same type of protective capability. The best example of this is Ft. Wood on Bedloe's Island in New York harbor. This unique eleven-pointed specimen now serves as the base for the Statue of Liberty.<sup>161</sup>

By far the most significant and far reaching influence of the second system was the all-masonry fort. These structures would go on to influence fortification design and construction for the next fifty years. Most influential in this design was the casemated gun emplacements possible with high walled stone fortifications. As explained earlier, the length of the walls limited the amount of firepower deliverable because cannon could only be mounted on one level. The new design using arches and multiple levels could facilitate several levels of cannon, effectively increasing firepower exponentially while at the same time decreasing

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<sup>160</sup> Lewis, p 28

<sup>161</sup> IBID, p 30

the overall perimeter area covered by defensive walls. This also enabled defenders in a fort to stay behind a more secure series of defenses, protecting them from enemy fire. The multiple tiers of cannon placement effectively stacked the firepower of a fort in a manner similar to that of warships of the time.<sup>162</sup>

Construction of forts in this manner had since the inception of gunpowder been a taboo. High walled castles of the Middle Ages proved very ineffective against large siege artillery. Their masonry walls proved susceptible to artillery fire for two reasons. First was the consistency of stonewalls. When shot impacted the walls, the lack of elasticity in stone resulted in large amounts of damage when struck at high velocity. With consistent accuracy and fire, walls could easily be breached with successive hits. Second, the by-product of these impacts was the eruption of vast amounts shrapnel provided by the material of the walls. This factor proved deadly to men inside the fort where little refuge could be found when the hail of small missiles erupted forth from the wall after being impacted by cannon fire. For this reason, European designers began to lower the walls of their defenses and place them behind mounds of

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<sup>162</sup> Accessed online at the Coastal Defense Study Group at [www.cdsg.org/home.htm](http://www.cdsg.org/home.htm) 11/4/02

earth. Earth was elastic enough to absorb the impact of the hit with no appreciable damage. In conjunction with this, these earthen defensive works were moved further away from the walls of the fort to deny the artillery the necessary proximity to exhibit direct fire on the walls to ensue a breach.<sup>163</sup>

So why is it that the Americans suddenly decided to abandon this accepted rule of strategic design? The answer is quite simple: the rules that applied to European fortresses were customized to defensive works on land protecting strategic land routes and population centers. The American emphasis was on seaward defense, not landward. The threat of siege artillery was not as great because ships as gun platforms were not accurate enough and could not get close enough to effect a typical artillery siege barrage. Time and improvements in rifled artillery would prove to be the death knell of this concept, but at the beginning of its theoretical development, the reliance on relatively small smoothbore cannon made its success a very real possibility.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Duffy p 2

<sup>164</sup> The primary example of this fact is the fall of the formidable Confederate held Ft. Pulaski in Savannah, GA during the Civil War in April, 1862. During this campaign the seven and one-half foot thick brick walls of the two tiered fortress were breached by rifled artillery shells fired from over a mile away. The twenty-four hour bombardment had accomplished in a day what would have taken smoothbore cannon much longer

It was under these conditions that the greatest peacetime U. S. defensive construction program of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was begun. This largest of programs was begun in a time of peace in 1817, when no threat, foreign or domestic, was perceived by the U.S. This is a unique circumstance in itself in that all previous military expenditures were as a result of a direct military threat. The fact that expediency was not required in this circumstance allowed emphasis to be placed on the creation of a truly permanent and integrated system of harbor defenses. Individual engineers who had worked independently of one another with very vague guidelines provided by the Secretary of War constructed the works of the first two systems. For the third system, a board was appointed to coordinate and supervise construction of all works in the new system and to ensure their characteristics and effectiveness. The board was organized in late 1816 and was placed under the control of Simon Bernard, a former brigadier general under Napoleon.<sup>165</sup> Upon being recommended by Lafayette he came to the United States where he was given a commission of the same grade. The

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to do, and at a much greater range, safe from returning fire from the fort. Manucy, Albert. *Artillery Through the Ages*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985. p 20 Ft Pulaski National Monument [www.nps.gov/fopu](http://www.nps.gov/fopu)

<sup>165</sup> Borresen, Thor. *Simon Bernard and America's Coastal Forts* *The, Regional Review*, Volume 2, Number 2, 1939, Yorktown: Colonial National Historic Park. Accessed online at

original purpose of the board was to evaluate not only defensive works but also interior lines of communications and transportation and all other aspects associated with a unified defensive plan.<sup>166</sup>

A key aspect of this was the navy. It is at this juncture that I will iterate in brief the gunboat navy developed in the early 1800s by the Jefferson administration. A southern and western administration with little direct ties in a maritime system, they were not at all motivated to put forth the funds needed for a large offensive blue-water navy. Instead the administration set itself upon a naval policy focusing on a strictly defensive coastal fleet comprised of small gunboats. The President sold this notion to the Congress by citing examples that all nations used a similar fleet of vessels and the Barbary pirates of North Africa had made particularly good use of them in combat. So beginning in 1805, instead of constructing larger warships of the line, like 74-gun ships, the Congress funded the construction of twenty-five small fifty to seventy-five foot single and double gunned boats

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[http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/regional\\_review/vol2-2b.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/regional_review/vol2-2b.htm)  
12/7/02

<sup>166</sup> *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, Vol. 2, p 305 16<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1821. Accessed online at National Archives  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov>. 4/6/03

for harbor defense.<sup>167</sup> This action was repeated over the next successive years, but given the unexpected rapid rate at which these small vessels decayed varying amounts had to be constructed every year in order to reach the recommended 257 needed for an "adequate" defense. By 1807, when the program was seriously cut back, there were over 176 in service.<sup>168</sup> These small gunboats were to be used in conjunction with defensive works to create a unified umbrella of defense for American harbors.

The Bernard Board explained the necessity of maintaining a significant and capable naval arm in order to accurately defend the American coast. In its first report issued in 1821, the board voiced what was an early form of naval strategy that would later be adopted and printed by Alfred Thayer Mahan. Essentially, the board began to evaluate what harbors and anchorages would be necessary to provide effective bases of operations for naval forces, and as a secondary thought planned the defensive works needed to defend these strategic ports. This view essentially voiced the notion that although defensive in a tactical sense, fortifications served an offensive role in the strategic sense. Forts defended principle ports from invasion in a

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<sup>167</sup> Chapelle, *Navy*, p 192-194

<sup>168</sup> Paulin, p 134

tactical sense but in the strategic sense the defense and preservation of one's base of supplies and maintenance acts in an offensive role, by protecting one's ability to fight and wage war.

Ironically the notion that these structures should be manned intermittently at best in times of peace and even then by local state troops would prove to be terrific blunder in the ensuing Civil War. It was because of this tradition that so many of Federal defenses fell into the hands of the Confederacy. With little or no federal garrisons to man them, when states seceded, state troops simply marched in and commandeered them with little or no resistance.<sup>169</sup>

In this report, the board barely made mention of the first and second defensive systems at all. What few were not destroyed for the construction of newer defenses were updated and integrated into larger scaled defense plans. Most works of the new system were straightforward and linear in their construction. Some of the most spectacular defensive works in history stem from this construction

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<sup>169</sup> This was demonstrated by the quick and usually bloodless seizure of Federal property, including fortifications, by the seceded states prior to the war. Examples- Ft. Moultrie and Castle Pickney, Charleston, SC December 1860; Ft. Pulaski, Savannah, GA January 1861; Ft. Morgan, Mobile, AL, January 1861; Ft. Barrancas and the Federal Navy yard, Pensacola, FL, January 1861; nineteen Federal army posts were surrendered by their commander in Texas in February 1861 prior to that state's

period. Sumter, Pulaski, Monroe, Pickens, and Jackson are just few of notoriety.

This period of construction also resulted in some of the largest defenses ever constructed. Ft. Monroe in Virginia was designed to command the approaches to Hampton Roads and was the first work of the third system designed from the ground up.<sup>170</sup> It was believed for many years to be the largest defensive work constructed that did not enclose a civilian population. The largest constructed at the time in regards to firepower was the formidable Ft. Jefferson constructed on Garden Key in the Dry Tortugas seventy miles west of Key West. It was constructed on a small atoll and cost over a dollar a brick just to have construction material shipped to the site for construction. Although never fully armed, it was designed to house over 450 guns and control the vital entrance to the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>171</sup>

Many of these forts would be constructed to house two or three tiers of cannon, most of which concentrated on the seaward side. Given that the bulk of fire would come from concealment behind walls, designers had to incorporate

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ordinance of session; etc. Randall, J.G. and David Donald. *The Civil War and Reconstruction*. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co. 1969. p 170

<sup>170</sup>Arthur, Robert. *History of Ft. Monroe*. Fort Monroe, Virginia. 1930. p 23

<sup>171</sup> Unites States Works Projects Administration, Florida. *History of the Fort Jefferson National Monument. Part One: The Fort at Garden Key, 1846-1860*. Key West, Florida, 1936. p 54

design innovations that would allow the movement of cannon behind the walls to track a moving target while at the same time provide for the smallest opening possible to protect gun crews from small arms fire. The result was that by the 1820s, gun tracking was maximized to 60° of horizontal movement. In return angles of intersection on exterior walls had to be of at least 120° in order to prevent blind spots from forming on the walls.<sup>172</sup> This geometric standard laid the groundwork for the construction of forts of this era to follow a similar style of hexagonal shape. Defenses such as these constructed in areas of relative natural defense from land assault i.e. marshes, salt lands, etc. were usually devoid of defensives bastions. Many also had their landward facing side truncated, as can be seen in the design characteristics of Ft. Sumter in South Carolina and Ft. Pulaski in Georgia.<sup>173</sup> Most of these forts were also constructed only a few feet above the water so as to deny approaching vessels the ability to sneak under their guns and also to aid gunners in "skipping" their cannonballs across the water to exact damage on an enemy ship. The forts being constructed of durable brick could be built this close

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<sup>172</sup> Lewis p 52

<sup>173</sup> Barnes, Frank. *Ft. Sumter National Monument, South Carolina*. National Park Service Historical Handbook Series No. 12. Washington, 1952. p 32

to the hostile environment of the sea with little concern for its corrosive nature.

### Armament

The downfall of this magnificent era of coastal defense architecture would be the rifled cannon. Whereas the military engineers in Europe learned of the devastation caused by direct fire from close smooth bore cannon, so too would American defenders learn the same results from long distance rifled cannon. Rifled cannon were able to fire their elongated projectile a much greater distance at high velocity and with more accuracy than had been imagined just a few years before. This quantum leap in coastal armament rehashed the weakness of high-walled defenses again and made them obsolete.

A textbook example of this comes from the fall of Ft. Pulaski in Savannah, Georgia. In March 1862 it became the first victim of long range rifled artillery of the American Civil War. Using ten rifles and twenty-six smoothbores, Union troops were able to breach the 7.5-foot thick walls in a little more than twenty-four hours. What is of significance to note is that the Union batteries were over a mile away, a feat rarely accomplished before.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Lattimore, Ralston. *Fort Pulaski National Monument, Georgia*. National Park Service Historical Handbook Series No. 18. Washington, 1954 p. 6

Much of the artillery available to defend U.S. harbors in the first and second system of forts were leftover European pieces from the colonial period. The size of these cannon was measured in the weight of the shot they fired. The largest in service around the time of the first system would have been a few 32-pounder and 42-pounder guns. Their weights and quality varied given their age and some were still cast from bronze. In 1794 the bill passed providing funding for the fortifications also provided for the founding of newer artillery.<sup>175</sup> These guns were all smoothbore firing round shot and had a relative range of under two thousand yards with a five degree elevation offered by the carriages they were mounted on. By the Second series of construction a few 50-pounder guns were being cast and placed in key defensive works. New pieces of artillery called Columbaids were developed around 1810 and could fire exploding shells as well as solid shot.<sup>176</sup> Exploding shells were normally reserved for smaller cannon or high angle weapons like mortars and howitzers. They were also capable of firing at almost any degree of inclination, not limited to five degrees of early cannon style. This effectively

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<sup>175</sup> *An Act to Provide for the Defense of Certain Ports and Harbors in the United States U.S., Statutes at Large*. 1794. Vol. 1, Ch. 10, 346 Accessed online at National Archives <http://memory.loc.gov/> 1/7/03

tripled the range of coastal artillery. These guns were revolutionary and were one of the first major American contributions to the world of artillery.

Cannon size remained relatively the same until the 1820s when cannon design began to change dramatically. The Bernard Board had originally called for cannon no larger than 24-pounders, but this notion was soon discarded. Studies in metallurgy and ballistics soon paved the way for advancements in artillery. Smoothbore technology reached its zenith in the 1840s with creations by Thomas Rodman and John Dahlgren.<sup>177</sup> By studying the design characteristics of cannon and how gasses expanded in the chamber when exploded, they were able to reinvent that art of cannon casting.

The most notable factor was the appearance of the new cannons. They were rather bulbous in the rear, smooth on the exterior, and tapered to the muzzle. This style was a reflection of the expansion characteristics of gas in the gun when fired. By following these lines and making the cannon take the shape of the explosion, the gasses could travel more freely with less pressure, thereby decreasing the chance of explosion. Another major change was the way in which the guns were cooled after forging. Standard practice

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<sup>176</sup> Lewis, Emanuel. *The Ambiguous Columbaids*, *Military Affairs* Vol. 28 issue 3, (Autumn, 1964) p 111-122. Accessed online at J Stor <http://links.jstor.org>

was to cool the outside of the gun first; this caused the breech to be of weaker construction than the outside wall. Rodman discovered that by cooling the inside of the barrel first, it became less stressed during the process, and the cooling of the bore first followed by the exterior served to compress and reinforce the structural integrity of the bore making it more resilient to pressure and stress.<sup>178</sup>

The result of these design changes were cannons much larger and safer than had ever been constructed. Rodman's 15-inch gun became the standard for seacoast defense artillery. It was easily the most powerful service cannon in the world at the time. Many remained in service from the Civil War up to the 1900s. It was after the adoption of these weapons that artillery became more commonly referred to in the inch size of the projectile they fired instead of the weight of their shot. As an example a 10-inch Rodman cannon fired a one hundred twenty-five pound shot and a 15-inch could fire a four hundred thirty-four pound shot.<sup>179</sup>

It was the production and use of rifled artillery that closed the chapter on the magnificent masonry forts. Most common of these were of the design by Robert Parrott. His cast iron guns were produced in numbers exceeding one

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<sup>177</sup> Lewis, *Seacoast Fortifications of the United States*, p 58

<sup>178</sup> Accessed online from the National Park Service  
[www.nps.gov/fowa/mammoth.htm](http://www.nps.gov/fowa/mammoth.htm) 4/13/03

thousand seven hundred during the Civil War.<sup>180</sup> They were found in many weights from 10 to 300-pounders. While the chamber pressures associated with both smoothbores and rifles were comparable, the elongated and aerodynamic shape of the rifles projectile ensured a much longer and flatter trajectory. The effective range of a 20-pound Parrott rifle was 4,400 yards at a 15° elevation, while a mammoth 100-pounder was effective to a distance of 7,180 yards with a 25° elevation.<sup>181</sup> These weapons and the type of projectiles they fired were able to accomplish quickly and easily what it had traditionally taken a long and tedious bombardment of smoothbore cannon to do. What was demonstrated very clearly is that if man can overcome natural barriers such as oceans and mountains, then stagnant defenses created by man himself will surely fall when left to defend themselves.

As significant as the development of these weapons were for the defenders of the forts, what is paramount in this research is what became instrumental in the destruction of the myth of reliance on fortifications as the defenders of American soil. Maritime strategy is the collective collaboration between three crucial elements:

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<sup>179</sup> Lewis, *Seacoast Fortifications*, p 142

<sup>180</sup> Manucy, p 16

<sup>181</sup> IBID p 52

1. An effective force projecting blue-water fleet that while acting in a offensive role tactically is in actuality a defensive arm strategically in that its actions are in defense of its home base and its state's political and economic interests abroad.
2. A series of defendable harbors and ports that can adequately supply and maintain the naval arm of the defense while at the same time aid in the deterrence of allowing an enemy the use of the same harbors for his own means. In this aspect the defenses of harbors serve as an offensive strategic weapon because they provide the means for the way in which the war is fought and won.
3. An acceptable infrastructure and interior lines of communications that can provide logistical support efficiently when needed and have easily defended strategic centers, which are supplemented by a mobile and effective response force.

With the reliance on isolated defensive posts and no buffering force projecting fleet, the maritime strategy centered on defensive works alone was doomed to fail. The advent of newer and more effective artillery simply reinforced this accepted fact. As time would show the U.S. did adjust its strategy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, almost to

the opposite extreme. The state of U.S. coastal defense during the Spanish American War could have had disastrous results had not the American Navy had such a vast naval superiority over the Spanish. Surely the stereotypical conservative mind of the military leadership feared moderation in that day as well as it always has. The net result was that the Jeffersonian notion of relying strictly on a defensive military capability for protection and a policy of using American commerce and trade as a weapon of policy control over Europe was flawed and ineffective at protecting American commercial interests. As was clearly demonstrated, balance and moderation in military capability was then, and is today, necessary in an effective defense policy.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The early maritime history of the United States is a unique paradox of extensive commercial efficiency and military ineptness. This research has illustrated the complexity of politics, economics, and the military in the early years of the republic. The maritime defense policy of the Jeffersonian persuasion failed but in an unexpected way. His ideals for defense succeeded militarily but failed politically.

As events proved, the Jeffersonian maritime initiative failed to provide protection to American maritime commercial interests. This assessment is based upon the Mahan's philosophy that the primary purpose of a navy and maritime defense is the protection of commerce upon the sea. In a view of war, more in line with Clausewitz's interpretation, Jefferson's maritime strategy did not fail. If Clausewitz is correct that war is the ultimate expression of will on another, and military forces, including naval, are the means by which arms are delivered, then the American navy proved reluctantly adequate in resisting armed aggression. The proof of this is echoed by the fact that America was not assimilated back into the British Empire, nor was she

controlled by any other nation. Jefferson's tactics and strategies may not have achieved many tactical victories, but strategic victory is often achieved through apparent tactical defeats.

My argument is analogous to Washington's strategy during the American Revolution. Time after time he was defeated on the battlefield by the British. Given the accepted principles of warfare at the time, his repeated loss of the battlefield meant defeat. Pragmatically, however, so long as his army was defeated, not destroyed, he was still victorious. Neither Washington, nor anyone else would argue that this would have been the ideal way to wage the war and win, but it did prove successful. Washington was forced to think outside of the box in order to best use his limited army in a manner that would preserve it. If the ultimate goal of war is to disarm an enemy, the failure to do so and achieve total control negates any tactical victory.

As explained in this research, Jeffersonian maritime defense relied upon two principles, the use of economic coercion as an offensive weapon and the use of the navy and harbor defenses in a strictly defensive nature. The motivating force behind these two principles was the elimination of the national debt and reduced federal

spending. Between 1801 and 1812, the Republicans reduced the national debt by \$38 million, or about 40%.<sup>182</sup> It has been clearly expressed how most of Jefferson's military ideas conflicted with accepted strategic doctrine. There is no doubt that had proper funds and support been directed toward the navy early in the republic, events would have unfolded very differently. It is unlikely given the population and industry available, that America could have constructed a fleet to rival Great Britain or France in standard naval combat. However, it might have been possible for the nation to develop a sizeable enough force to prove decisive in an active defense given factors such as distance an enemy fleet must travel from its bases to attack the U.S. coast, etc.

With this being said, the Jeffersonian defense oriented maritime strategy succeeded in preventing our assimilation by another national entity. The reason it succeeded was because it had elements of compromise from Federalist naval proponents at its disposal. Federalist spending was kept under control so as not to cause the new American debt to grow to rapidly; which could have caused a great deal of internal strife and resentment leading to factionalization and political and civic turmoil. Heavy taxation to

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<sup>182</sup> Perkins, Bradford. *Prologue to War: England and the United States 1805-1812*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1963. p 50

compensate for an accelerated debt could have led to another revolution in such a young republic.

The Federalists super-frigates constructed were essential in helping deter enemy aggression and forcing aggressor nations into investing so much cost and effort as to limit their window of operations. Because of their constant warfare, distance from the U.S., and the presence of a small yet effective military force, France and England simply could not divert the time and resources needed to effectively campaign against the American establishment long enough to win.

This moderation between Jeffersonian thrift and Federalist spending produced a sufficient enough force, albeit not ideal, to preserve American independence. But, it would not preserve Jefferson's political dreams for the country. Under the onslaught of industrial and commercial interests, Jefferson's defensive agenda proved too costly not for American independence but for American commerce. The economic damage done by his Non-Importation Act, embargos, and the inability of the defensive American Navy to break the British blockade of 1812 proved too much for the political motivated wealthy elite. After 1812, the Federal government decided not to allow American commerce to be bottled up again in time of war. A construction program was

begun to modernize and increase the navy. This was one of many first steps that led to the increase in the authority of the Federal government and American maritime force.

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