



U.S. Department of State

As part of the British empire before 1776, the North American colonies produced raw materials for the British Empire and provided a consumer market for British goods. When ships from these colonies sailed the Atlantic Ocean, they flew the British flag and benefited from the protection of the British Navy, the largest navy in the world. They also benefited from any treaties made by the British government. Great Britain regularly signed agreements with the Barbary States, for example, paying them tribute in exchange for leaving British ships alone. During the American Revolution, the colonies formed an alliance with France in 1778 which included protection of ships from capture by Barbary corsairs.

After gaining its independence from Britain in 1783, U.S. ships were suddenly vulnerable to Barbary corsairs. France no longer agreed to protect U.S. ships as it had during the war. In 1786, the United States and the Barbary State of Morocco signed the Moroccan–American Treaty of Friendship where Morocco agreed to not capture any U.S. ships in exchange for \$86,000. Finding money for these kinds of treaties was difficult. The first U.S. government, operating under the Articles of Confederation, had a limited ability to raise taxes and therefore very little money to spend on tribute. Congress also lacked the funds or authority to establish a permanent navy.

With the ratification of the Constitution in 1789, the United States was in a stronger position to either pay tribute to the Barbary States or build a stronger navy. Leaders like Vice President John Adams argued in favor of paying tribute because it would be less expensive than building a navy. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson argued for a stronger navy to protect ships and end the tribute cycle. Many citizens opposed paying tribute on principle, considering these captures illegal acts of piracy. They associated the tribute system with monarchies rather than their new republic.

In 1793, Algiers captured 11 U.S. ships and took their crews hostage. Citizens in the United States were outraged. Newspapers called on Congress and President Washington to act. In response, President Washington ordered his diplomats to begin negotiating a treaty with Algiers and the other Barbary States. Congress passed the U.S. Naval Armament Act that authorized construction of the first six ships of the U.S. Navy. The United States wanted to be recognized as an independent and important country in its own right. The United States could accomplish this goal by building a stronger military and by negotiating favorable treaties. How can you help the United States in this crisis?

Opening Position:

- Return of hostages held by Algiers.
- Engage in trade in the Atlantic World and Mediterranean.
- Prevent ships and crew from being captured by corsairs from any Barbary State in the future.
- Build strategic alliances with European and North African powers.

- Project an image of strength to European powers.

Questions to Consider:

- Does the United States want to participate in the tribute system or does it see it as wrong on principle?
- Would it be better in the short term to pay tribute or use that money to build ships for a navy? What about the long term?
- Which other possible allies might help the U.S. achieve its goals?

What can the United States negotiate with?

Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.

- Trade naval supplies: 70,000 pounds of nails, 2,000 bomb shells, 34 cables (720 feet long), 12 coils of rope, 1,500 oars, 100,000 pounds of gunpowder, 2,000 wood planks, 2,000 pipe staves, 100 bales of canvas.
- Trade goods: wheat, flour, cochineal, and indigo.
- Money for tribute: President Washington has allowed State Department negotiators to offer up to \$60,000 in a one time payment or \$20,000 a year to each Barbary State in tribute.
- The threat of future military action.