



National Museum  
of American Diplomacy

# THE BARBARY PIRATE HOSTAGE CRISIS

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Negotiating Tribute and Trade



The **National Museum of American Diplomacy** (NMAD) offers educators immersive programs that explore the goals and practice of diplomacy, teach diplomatic skills, build global competence, and illustrate how the critical work of American diplomats impacts people's everyday lives. Lesson plans emphasize 21st century skills: creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem solving; and communication and collaboration. These skills are keys to success for the next generation of global citizens.

The **Diplomacy Simulation Program** is the museum's premier educational program. In a collaborative learning environment, students step into the shoes of real-life diplomats. The diplomacy simulations are designed for 15-30 participants, plus a teacher/moderator. Students receive a scenario related to a global issue, which could be real-world or hypothetical, current, or historic. Within each simulation, there are five to six stakeholder groups (e.g., foreign ministries, NGOs, and international organizations), each with different perspectives and priorities. Students role-play these stakeholders in small teams of three to five. Under set time constraints, the groups are challenged to negotiate a peaceful solution to the crisis in the scenario. Students use the information provided in the simulation packet to develop their group's policy positions and defend or modify their choices in real time.

The diplomacy simulations help audiences to understand that many of the opportunities and challenges before us as a nation are global in source, scope, and solution. In these efforts, NMAD has created the **Historical Diplomacy Simulation Program** to provide educators with the opportunity to bring diplomacy and the work of U.S. diplomats into the classroom.

The goal of NMAD's Historical Diplomacy Simulation Program is to engage participants in the art and practice of diplomacy, while introducing them to the contributions of the State Department and U.S. diplomats in the context of an historical event addressed in the teaching of U.S. history. Funded by the Uma Chapman Cox Foundation, and developed along with partners National History Day and George Mason University's Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, the Historical Diplomacy Simulation Program offers three simulations:

- **The Barbary Pirates Hostage Crisis: Negotiating Tribute and Trade**
- **The Spanish and American Conflict of 1898: Treaties and Self-Determination**
- **The Suez Canal Crisis: National Sovereignty versus International Access to Waterways**

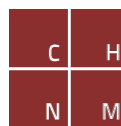
To access the complete Diplomacy Simulation Program, including training and subject matter expert videos, please visit [diplomacy.state.gov](http://diplomacy.state.gov).



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**“Our trade to Portugal, Spain, and the Mediterranean is annihilated unless we do something decisive. Tribute or war is the usual alternative of these pirates.”**

**Thomas Jefferson** to Horatio Gates,  
*December 13, 1784*

For almost 300 years, from the early 1500s to the early 1800s, the Barbary States (Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, and Morocco) sponsored ship captains and their crews to capture foreign ships in the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli were provinces of the Ottoman Empire but acted with significant independence. Morocco was an independent kingdom. These sailors who captured foreign ships were known as “corsairs.” The states made money by taking other nations’ ships and cargo and either ransoming the ship’s crew or imprisoning the crew and forcing them to work. Unlike the enslavement of Black Africans in the Atlantic Slave Trade (which Americans and Europeans actively conducted in this period), captured Europeans and Americans could gain their freedom through ransom or conversion to Islam. Ransom was usually paid by the sailors’ friends or family. Some countries signed treaties with the Barbary States, permitting their merchant ships to travel freely in exchange for payments or trade goods. These payments were called tribute.

Wealthy European countries with strong navies, such as Great Britain, France, and Spain, paid Barbary States tribute in exchange for leaving their ships alone. Other countries provided naval support to their commercial ships. Portugal, Sweden, and Denmark, for example, usually operated this way. In general, the Barbary States required higher tribute from countries with less powerful navies.

Before the American Revolution, ships from the American colonies were protected because they flew the British flag and benefitted from protection of the British Navy. They also benefited from any treaties or agreements made by the British government, which were regularly signed with the Barbary States. During the war, U.S. ships were protected because of the 1778 alliance with France. Also during the war, the United States established good relations with one Barbary State, Morocco. In 1777, Morocco agreed to recognize the United States as an independent country, becoming the first in the world to do so.

Although Americans called the Barbary corsairs “pirates,” that label was not quite accurate. Pirates were criminals who followed few established rules, but the Barbary corsairs were agents of established governments recognized by the international community. This is also known as privateering. They operated within the rules of international law at that time and followed agreements and treaties made by their rulers. If they ignored these treaties, they risked not getting paid for the ship they captured and being forced to pay back the ship’s owner for any loss in trade. It is also important to note that privateering was a common activity at this time and it was undertaken by many different countries—not just the Barbary States. In fact, British and French ships captured far more of the United States’ ships than the Barbary States did. Every month, Britain and France captured 30 U.S. ships whereas only 30 U.S. ships total were ever captured by



the Barbary States.

By 1783, the United States won its independence and was grappling with the role and power of the government. The United States did not agree with the practice of privateering, considering it piracy and illegal under its stated principles of international free trade. Americans were outraged at the commercial losses and treatment of their fellow citizens to the Barbary States and demanded the government do something about it. In contrast, when the British or French captured a ship, the ship and the cargo were taken—the crew was often allowed to go free. The British Navy did occasionally “impress” U.S. sailors, forcing them to serve on British ships. The United States established treaties with Britain and France and therefore had an avenue to negotiate and address grievances. The United States had no such treaties with most of the Barbary States. Thus, when a Barbary corsair captured a ship, the crew would always be taken captive and held for ransom.

A treaty between a Barbary State and the United States could potentially help both sides, providing money or goods to one side and the ability to trade without interference to another. The United States signed such a treaty with Morocco in 1786. Morocco agreed to not capture U.S. ships in exchange for \$86,000. In 1793, Portugal signed a treaty with Algiers that allowed their ships, including corsairs, to pass through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Atlantic Ocean. This meant a much greater chance for corsairs to encounter U.S. ships. Corsairs from Algiers took full advantage and captured 11 U.S. ships in just a few months. The crews of these ships were held hostage. To make matters worse, a plague outbreak in Algiers made the prison where the crews were held an especially dangerous place.

### How can this crisis be resolved?

It is 1794, and corsairs from Algiers have captured 11 U.S. ships and hold around 100 U.S. citizens hostage. More U.S. ships are in danger of being captured by Barbary corsairs. President George Washington has sent U.S. State Department diplomats to negotiate with the Barbary States of Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis. Morocco, the Barbary State that already has a treaty with the U.S. will also be part of the negotiations. The President of the United States gave the diplomats permission to offer a small sum of money to the Barbary States in tribute and the ability to trade ships and other goods. Will Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis be willing to seek out treaties with the United States? Could one of these Barbary States negotiate a better deal than the others? Could Morocco use its relationship with the other Barbary States and the United States to help broker a treaty?

### Priorities to be considered by all stakeholder country groups:

- What would help your country: The ability to engage in trade? More ships? Arms? Necessary goods like wheat? Money?
- Which stakeholder(s) could help you improve your country's position?
- What are the costs or risks with each decision? Refusing to agree to any treaty could lead to a costly and destructive war.
- What are you willing to give to other countries in exchange for their help or cooperation?



## North Atlantic Ocean c. 1817

John Thomson, cartographer, *Chart of North Atlantic Ocean with Tracks of the Shipping to West Indies, North America &c*, 1817, 54 x 64 cm, in *A New General Atlas, Consisting of a Series of Geographical Designs, on Various Projections, Exhibiting the Form and Component Parts of the Globe* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817) 51-52.





## Barbary States c. 1814

John Pinkerton, cartographer, *Northern Africa*, 1815, 49 x 68 cm, in *A Modern Atlas, From The Latest And Best Authorities, Exhibiting The Various Divisions Of The World*, (London: Cadell & Davies, 1815), <https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/4793268>.



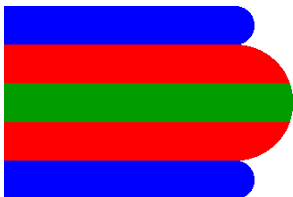
U.S. Department of State



Algiers



Morocco



Tunis



Tripoli

## Forming Your Strategy

This worksheet will guide you in developing your country's position and strategy. Use it to list your priorities, goals, allies, and negotiation strategies.

### Goals

*What do you want to accomplish in the negotiations? Who has similar goals to you?*

### Interests

*What are your country's interests moving into negotiations?*

### Obstacles

*Who or what might be standing in the way of your country's goals?*

### Resources

*Who can help you get what you want? What can you offer to motivate others? What negotiation strategies can you use to sway others in your direction?*

## Drafting Your Opening Statement

Your country stakeholder group will deliver a minute-long opening statement at the start of the negotiation. The statement should introduce your team to the others, outline your goals, and offer a sense of what you would like to accomplish in the negotiation.

You do not have to share everything you want, or how you would like to achieve it. It is fine to hold information back, and to keep secrets within your team.

Write the points you would like to make in your opening statement:



## Mid-Negotiation Strategy Worksheet

**1** What new information did you learn in the first round of negotiations?

**2** How does this new information change your group's interests and priorities?

**3** What are your re-established or new priorities?

**4** What do you need to accomplish in the next round to advance your interests?

1. What did you learn?
2. What skills did you use?
3. What did you learn about diplomacy?
4. What did you learn about the work of diplomats?
5. What was challenging about the negotiation?
6. What was challenging about working within your team?
7. Did the simulation end as you thought it would?
8. Once you learned about how the crisis ultimately resolved, how did that compare to how the group played the simulation?
9. What insights did this experience give you about how diplomacy has shaped history?
10. Would you consider becoming a diplomat after this experience?

Located at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., the National Museum of American Diplomacy is a public-private partnership between the State Department and the Diplomacy Center Foundation. NMAD's education program connects high school and college students with the world of American diplomacy, increasing their understanding of the skills, practices, and language of diplomats. Through simulations, online resources, and the museum's annual Educator's Workshop, NMAD inspires involvement in foreign affairs and citizen diplomacy.





## National Museum of American Diplomacy



The cover image is owned by the New York Public Library and was edited for use in this publication. Image illustrates U.S. Naval Officer Stephen Decatur discussing a treaty agreement with the Dey of Algiers.

This publication was designed by Tiina Ojala.

Diplomacy Simulations are developed and presented by NMAD as an integral component of the museum's education offerings. This document and all associated materials are intended exclusively for educational use.