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# *DeProgram Program*

*From the Mind of Sha'i ben-Tekoa*

*Transcript*

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It's the evening of the 6th day, Thursday, March 27th, 2003, and this is DeProgram Program.com, the only news and history program anywhere in the media.

News and history is what DPP puts out. I think that what listeners enjoy in yours truly's take on the day's events is the mix of history and current events affecting the Children of Jacob-Israel, particularly those living in the land of Jacob-Israel--which he deserved in his own right and the right of his father Isaac, and their father Abraham ben Terach, born not far from Baghdad, the country that Terach and Abraham set out from to the west. In the first address of the Holy One Blessed be He to Abram, He told him to go to a country that He will show him. He didn't even tell him its name, but Abram being Abram, the greatest man of faith ever, did what he was told.

News and history. Last night I took the lull in the day of the sandstorm in the region of Ur Casdim to spend some time on the history of Jerusalem, and today as well will take some time for some information about a story which is not exactly centered on the Jews, though they do play a part, a story of some resonance for people living today.

Today, March 27th, is the anniversary of the birth of the United States Navy, in the Christian year 1794. On that day the United States Congress formally signed off on a bill calling for the building of the first six warships of a navy, and the gentlemen sitting in the temporary capital of Philadelphia did so in response to the menace of Islamist terrorism in the Middle East.

I'll bet you never heard that before. But in fact, at the very moment of their vote, there were more than 100 US citizens in the Middle East being held for ransom, who were not only hostages in the hands of their Muslim captors but who were also, as they awaited being rescued by their government, enslaved. Housed in torchlight dungeons by night, some of them, by day, worked under cruel taskmasters in a rock quarry, toiling like the Children of Israel in Egypt.

Most of them had been in captivity for around six months, a handful for around nine years. That's right, you heard right: some fourteen survivors of an original twenty-one innocent American citizens who had been hijacked at sea off the coast of Portugal in 1785 were in their ninth year of slavery.

But as I say, the bulk of the more than 100 had been innocent passengers on commercial ships who at the moment were enslaved in Algiers. The eleven separate US merchantmen they were on in the fall of 1793 were captured by cruisers manned by

Algerines(!), as the English language then referred to the Mussulmen(Muslims) who lived in that walled city. It was considered the most ferocious of Islamic city-states, nicknamed in popular culture “The Scourge of Christendom” or “The Terror of the Nurseries,” (meaning kindergartens) for one way older children in those days terrorized their kid brothers was to threaten them with being kidnapped by pirates, with the Algerines considered the most ferocious of them, if not by much. Being captured by cruisers from Tripoli, Libya, Tunis or Morocco also resulted in slavery until friends or family or your church ransomed you. Two centuries ago, national governments routinely did not feel responsible. Piracy was considered something like hidden reefs or storms at sea, a hazard of travel and something for the insurance companies to deal with, not the national government. Christians from the Catholic countries looked to the church for rescue, specifically an order of priests formerly called the Order for the Redemption of Captives, popularly called the Mathurin Brothers, who had permanent representatives in Morocco, Tunis, Libya and Algiers to deal with the chronic appearance in those Muslim lands of captured Catholics.

In the Protestant countries, by contrast, Chambers of Commerce took on the responsibility of rescuing hostages. And also local churches, specifically those in the ports who served the families of the husbands and fathers and brothers taken captive, the professional seamen. Their church would hold lotteries and fundraising events to raise the ransom needed to free them. One such effort in New York City in the early 18th century raised more than enough cash, a surplus then used to top off the steeple of Trinity Church, still standing today on Broadway near Wall Street, which got hit by the falling debris on 9/11.

So that’s the way it was two centuries ago, until something new happened, which was the birth of the United States of America. The thirteen former colonies became legally independent in May 1784, when Congress, the only branch of government in those days, still under the so-called Articles of Confederation, approved the peace treaty with England. Just five months later, the first American passenger and cargo vessel was captured by cruisers from Morocco, and it took nine months to free them, after Congress promised to send the Sultan there \$40,000. (Nine months was really no time at all given the fact that in winter it could take months just to send a letter one-way across the Atlantic Ocean and get a reply.)

These merchant seamen were liberated in the spring of 1785, but two weeks later another two US merchant ships carrying 21 seamen were captured by cruisers from Algiers, and the US diplomatic corps in Europe, which was tiny, had to deal with the problem. They were the first US diplomats to have to handle a hostage crisis in the Middle East, and how they responded is instructive; men who couldn’t have been more American in their attitudes, considering who they were. When word reached Paris in September 1785 that several weeks back two more US ships had been hijacked by the so-called Barbary Pirates, on duty were three trade commissioners commissioned by Congress to launch US commerce into European markets, and what they had to say about the situation is most illuminating. And we’ll get to that after some music by Yosef Karduner. By the way, their names were Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

\* \* \* (Musical Interlude) \* \*

So, there they were in Paris, the three American trade commissioners. One of them, Benjamin Franklin, 76 years old, had been the most famous man in Colonial America. John Adams, although he didn’t know it yet, would become the future second president of the United States; Thomas Jefferson, the future third. All three had worked

together in the summer of 1776 on the proper language for a declaration of independence, with Jefferson the principle author. They had been commissioned by Congress in the first session of legal independence in May of 1784 to gather in Paris—actually for Jefferson to go there; Adams and Franklin were already there—to see about marketing US products in Europe, no easy task in that traditionally closed, mercantile economic system.

When Jefferson reached Paris in August - interestingly enough from our perspective – he sized up the political situation in Europe with a view to furthering the interests of American business overseas but discovered that one mundane fact seemed to pose the greatest and most immediate threat to the fledgling U.S. Americans were swamped in Revolutionary War debt, and the way to pay it off, of course, would be shipping to foreign markets the great natural wealth of the land, its raw materials and commodities, e.g. lumber from its endless forests, the abundant produce from its fertile soil, the skins of animals for clothing, etc. But with the thirteen ex-colonies now independent of England, when their merchant vessels made the trans-Atlantic crossing, they would no longer be protected by two things: 1) His Majesty's Royal Navy, the greatest in the world, with a base at Gibraltar--sort of a police station at the mouth of the Mediterranean—and 2) the “tribute” that the King of England paid yearly to the pashas of Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers and Morocco, basically insurance or protection money.

When Jefferson had made his first trans-Atlantic voyage in July, he had taken along for reading Cervantes' classic novel *Don Quixote*, in which several central chapters are devoted to slavery in Algiers, based on Cervantes' own five years as a slave there. So the subject of Barbary piracy could not have been wholly foreign to him.

But what surprised him during his investigation was that contrary to popular usage, which called these hijackers “pirates,” he discovered that they were not typical pirates at all, criminals out for lucre, who when ashore liked to hang out in taverns and get drunk and paw at wenches.

Oh no. These so-called Barbary “pirates” were in reality just normal Middle Easterners, Muslims, who did not drink alcohol at all. They prayed several times daily, like all good Muslims, and in fact saw themselves not as independent, free-booting, venal “pirates” but sailors in the official navies of the city-states they sailed from. And while their occupation was capturing and selling slaves--as well as the captured ships and their cargoes--their rationale for doing so was religious. They saw themselves engaged in a jihad and called themselves mujahiddin (holy warriors).

Jefferson - who like his two partners thought their principle work for Congress would be diplomacy in Europe having to do with trade relations there - saw right away the immediate danger to US cargo and merchant sailing ships no longer protected by the Crown, no longer flying the Union Jack but the Stars and Stripes, which flag no Mussulman had ever seen. Jefferson foresaw catastrophe and thus spent the fall of 1784 reading up on Islam, asking fellow diplomats in Paris how their countries dealt with the issue. He discovered that for a thousand years the Muslims of North Africa had plagued Europe with their hijacking, hostage-taking and enslaving. In truth, Europe also engaged in capturing Muslims and enslaving them too, but that practice faded away by the early 18 century.

Jefferson discovered that in practically every century some European navy got fed up and shelled these port cities, but no one power ever succeeded in ending the problem. There was also, from Europe's perspective, a religious dimension, as all Christian nations were themselves, for over a thousand years of Islam, no less locked in an eternal holy war with it, which according to Catholic doctrine is not another religion but a heresy with which there can be no peace. The kings of Catholic Spain on their coronation oath for centuries pledged eternal war against the infidel Muslims. The

Crusades may have ended centuries earlier, but not the animosity or the low-level violence.

Jefferson also discovered that a major turning point in history occurred in the 1680s when Protestant England became the first Christian state to ignore religion and see the problem pragmatically. With the British Empire burgeoning in that period, men of business reasoned that it would be better to free the Royal Navy for safeguarding the global empire than remain bogged down in the Mediterranean protecting the increasingly small percentage of their trade there.

A couple years later, Louis XIV of France followed England's lead, and before long every maritime trading country in Europe was paying for the right to sail and do business in the Middle East unmolested.

But Jefferson also found out that the purchase of peace was at best a temporary solution, for the Mussulmen would always find some excuse to break the agreement, saying it was the European country's fault, and then force new negotiations for higher tribute.

Now, Thomas Jefferson is remembered as the father of the American principle of a "wall of separation" between church and state, and thus he found it unacceptable that in his enlightened age - what his friend Tom Paine nicknamed "The Age of Reason"- there were still such people in the world as these Mussulmen who did such things as kidnap and enslave on the basis of holy war.

Finally, Jefferson discovered that the "tribute" was in reality less about cash and gifts of jewels, spices and fine fabrics, and more about weapons. The "tribute" was largely a demand for guns, ammo and naval supplies, without which the so called Barbary Pirates couldn't be pirates at all. They were much too primitive to have their own foundries capable of producing cannon and cannon balls, gunpowder, the iron spikes and nails required on sailing ships; not to mention strong canvas and sturdy rope.

And the Europeans, led by the French, were only too happy to oblige. Sending weapons meant helping the pirates arm themselves for their attacks on Christians, meaning, fellow Europeans aboard innocent sailing vessels, but so what? European states were routinely in a state of war with one another, so, for example, what cared the French if the weapons they supplied the Algerines and Tripolitans were used to hijack and enslave Spaniards and Italians?

\* \* (Musical Interlude) \* \*

So Thomas Jefferson, after three months of living in Paris and researching the history and current status of the menace of militant Islam, formulated a policy in contrast to his two partners, both of whom had spent years as diplomats in Europe. Franklin, the Pennsylvania Quaker, reckoned that since most US maritime business was conducted elsewhere, U.S. importers and exporters might just avoid that dangerous sea. Franklin didn't think the US did enough business there and could just avoid the problem.

But John Adams, a lawyer to Boston shippers well-versed in maritime commerce and the laws of piracy, knew that in fact the US did enough business in the Mediterranean not to want to give up that market. He too knew something of the history of the problem and reasoned that since the super powers, England, France, Spain, with their major navies, had chosen the path of tribute rather than violence, America, with no navy, had no choice. After the Revolution the U.S. had sold off or scrapped every armed vessel it had.

Still, Jefferson, the father of the American liberal tradition, wanted to fight. He found it intolerable that their revolutionary and little-in-population new country would join this corrupt European practice in which civilized nations gave arms and money to

uncivilized “barbarians”--his word--who used the weapons to attack civilized people and turn them into slaves, a slavery, by the way, which meant a high chance of death due to the cruel and unsanitary conditions. North Africa was a swamp of diseases, and in those days when a ship docked in a European port after having sailed from the Middle East, all the passengers and crews were required to enter a dormitory-like facility (lazaretto) and remain in quarantine for weeks, to prove they were not carriers of disease, before being allowed into the country.

People in slavery also died from being beaten to death--though not too often, because they were, after all, a man’s property.

Anyway, within weeks of formulating his strategy and tactics for dealing with the so-called and misnamed “Barbary Pirates,” (really Barbary Islamic fundamentalists) which included his prescription for the building of a fleet of American warships, he got word of that first hijacking by Morocco (already mentioned) and later, in the summer of ‘85, the next two ships.

Jefferson remained in Paris for another four years, during which time he and Adams never succeeded in winning freedom for those 21 hostages, who were still in captivity when the former returned home after five years in France to become the United States’ first Secretary of State.

And for the next three years - unlike Colin Powell - he was the number one “hawk” for war in America, pressing Congress and President Washington to build a navy to rescue the hostages and put an end to hijacking and hostage-taking in the Middle East, perpetrated by Mussulmen who did so in the name of their religion.

\* \* (Musical Interlude) \* \*

In 1790, as the first Secretary of State, Jefferson wrote a report on the status of Mediterranean commerce pertaining to the U.S., which dealt with the plight of the hostages still in Algiers.

In 1792, he commissioned John Paul Jones, the great naval hero of the Revolution, who was a fellow radical liberal, to go to Algiers to see what could be accomplished diplomatically but also to size the place up as a possible target for a U.S. attack (though Jones died before he could execute the mission).

In late 1793, Jefferson, after three years in office, wanted to retire, and the last report to Congress on any subject he wrote was again about the situation in the Mediterranean and the recent, dreadful news that Algiers had struck again, captured those 11 merchant ships mentioned earlier, and the crisis of the American economy as a result of it. When the word reached New York City of the mass hijacking, the stock market crashed. In the few days it took for the news to travel up and down the Atlantic seaboard, voyages were canceled in every major port, seamen were thrown out of work, and ship suppliers went out of business. What 9/11 did to the US economy in 2002, the mass hijacking of late 1793 did too.

So it is not surprising that four months later, on March 27th, 1794, the US Congress finally, after debating the topic sporadically over a decade since the first hijacking to Morocco, finally decided to build a fleet of warships: six extra-large frigates, including the first Constellation, which today is a tourist attraction in Baltimore’s Harbor Place, and the forerunner of the Constellation, the aircraft carrier on station today in the Persian Gulf in the war against Iraq.

Also among the six was the Constitution (Old Ironsides), to this day on display in Boston harbor.

Congress’ compromise idea was to build the ships in hope that the construction itself might scare the Algerines, while at the same sending negotiators (John Adams-style)

to appease them by imitating Europe and offering to join the tribute system. The law passed 209 years ago tried to please both hawks and doves in Congress by ordering the building of a fleet, while simultaneously sending negotiators to deal, with the legislation specifying that if they succeeded, the ship-building, immensely expensive in every generation, would stop. And that is exactly what happened. The U.S. wound up paying close to \$1,000,000 in ransom and also, to atone for the tardy delivery of the barrels of gold coins, to throw in, for free, a brand new warship as a gift to the pasha of Algiers. It was christened "The Crescent," in honor of the Islamic flag.

In 1796, some 85 surviving American hostages, crippled and emaciated by the ordeal, were freed from slavery.

Eventually the ship-building resumed, but the menace of Barbary piracy continued to plague the US and led to a four-year war against Tripoli conducted by President Thomas Jefferson that started in 1801.

Not until France finally occupied Algiers in 1830, and later Tunisia and Morocco, did Barbary Piracy completely disappear. Only under imperial occupation could the piracy be suppressed.

Indeed, after France left, in 1962, liberated Algeria emerged as a major base for so-called international terrorism, meaning, largely, Arab terrorists terrorizing the world.

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