

## ABSTRACT

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STRATEGIC VISIONS OF THE U.S. NAVY,  
1783-1812

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This study examines the years 1783-1812 in order to identify how the Founders' strategic visions of an American navy were an extension of the debate over the newly forming identity of the young republic. Naval historiography has both ignored the implications of a republican navy and oversimplified the formation of the navy into a bifurcated debate between Federalists and Republicans or "Navalists" and "Antinavalists." The Founders' views were much more complex and formed four competing strategic visions-commerce navy, coastal navy, regional navy, and capital navy. The thematic approach of this study connects strategic visions to the narrative of the reestablishment of the United States Navy within the context of international and domestic events. This approach leaves one with a greater sense that the early national period policymakers were in fact fledgling naval visionaries, nearly one hundred years before the advent of America's most celebrated naval strategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan.

A NAVY IN THE NEW REPUBLIC:  
STRATEGIC VISIONS OF THE U.S. NAVY, 1783-1812

By

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## Introduction

Samuel Smith slowly rose from his seat to address his fellow Representatives. The Republican from Maryland was a respected veteran of the Revolutionary War, but having held himself from the debate as long as he could, he was too exasperated with his fellow Congressmen to stay silent any longer.<sup>1</sup> Reminding his colleagues that at least eleven American merchant ships had been captured by Algerine raiders, the successful merchant was disgusted that his fellow Republicans were reluctant to provide any protection for the nation's commerce. Surely a republic could provide this minimal amount of protection for its citizens. Smith was sure that "this defen[s]eless state" of America "was contrary to the maxims of the Republics of all former ages."<sup>2</sup>

In February 1794, Smith was part of a much broader debate than how the young republic would respond to the depredations of Barbary corsairs upon American commerce in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. The naval question was a byproduct of the larger question over the direction the republic's economy should take, and ultimately what the proper role of commerce was in a republic.<sup>3</sup> Naval historians have traditionally focused on the Founders' arguments over the proper role of a military in a republic. The Founders did wrestle with each other over the meaning of a republican military, but in the early 1790s that debate was only one part of the broader contest between policymakers over the direction American society should take, more specifically, the proper balance

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<sup>1</sup> Frank A. Cassell, *Merchant Congressman in the Young Republic: Samuel Smith of Maryland, 1752-1839* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 12-31.

<sup>2</sup> Cassell, *Merchant Congressman*, 37-43; U.S. Congress, *Annals of the Congress of the United States*, 42 vols. (Washington, DC, 1834-56), 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., pp. 447. Hereafter cited as *Annals of Congress*.

<sup>3</sup> Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 166-167.

between commerce and agriculture.<sup>4</sup>

A brief inspection of the example of Marylander Samuel Smith will demonstrate that the debate over a republican navy in 1794 should not be separated from its economic context. To do so is to perpetuate the myth that continental defense motivated the reestablishment of the navy. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the 1790s, policymakers like Benjamin Williams from North Carolina did not fear an invasion by Great Britain or France because as he noted, “we were three or four thousand miles distant from them.”<sup>5</sup> Often lost amidst the exciting exploits of the young United States Navy in the Caribbean in 1799-1800 and along the Barbary Coast from 1801-1805 is the fact that these ships were defending American overseas commerce. In fact, the first resolution creating the naval force in 1794 read, “That a naval force, adequate to the protection of the *commerce* of the United States against the Algerine corsairs, ought to be provided.”<sup>6</sup>

In the late 1790s, during the tension-filled years of the Quasi War, while some policymakers began to voice the first concerns over coastal defense, many more representatives were still thinking foremost about the security of commerce. It is important to remember that by definition, “commerce” for elites did not necessarily equal free markets, but usually represented the idea of foreign trade. In the late eighteenth century most economic theorists argued that the expansion of overseas trade was the key

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<sup>4</sup> McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 174; The Founders is used here in a broad sense to encompass the convention of 1787 through 1812. For a similar example of a broad usage of “the Founders” see Bruce Ackerman, *The Failure of the Founding Fathers: Jefferson, Marshall, and the Rise of Presidential Democracy* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 873.

<sup>6</sup> Emphasis added. *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 154.

to a nation's economic health.<sup>7</sup> This continued concern over commerce was consistent with President John Adams' declaration on May 16, 1797, that if the republic's commerce was not secure, "Any serious and permanent injury to commerce would not fail to produce the most embarrassing disorders. To prevent it from being undermined and destroyed is essential..."<sup>8</sup>

The second myth that Samuel Smith's example undermines is the historiographical construction of the stereotype that all Antifederalists or Republicans opposed standing armies and the creation of a permanent naval establishment, while their opponents, the Federalists, all championed strong armies and navies as one facet of their larger conception of a strong central government.<sup>9</sup> The conventional interpretation teaches us that Republicans opposed strengthening the central government and expanding its powers, which included the establishment of standing armies in peacetime.

Additionally, many Republicans also advocated the virtues of an agrarian economy and viewed the over-commercialization of American society as a vice that would corrupt the ideals of republicanism. Commerce was acceptable as long as it was in proper balance with agriculture.<sup>10</sup> So, for these agrarian-minded policymakers, the establishment of a national navy was indicative of the overemphasis of commerce and posed the added threat of heavy taxation in order to support never-ending ship-building programs.

The reality was much more complex. Republicans from the Middle Atlantic States, such as the Baltimore merchant Samuel Smith, represented the commercial

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<sup>7</sup> Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 139.

<sup>8</sup> James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* 10 vols. (Washington, DC, 1896-99), <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/8/9/10894/10894.txt>, (accessed online April 20, 2006). Hereafter referred to as *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*.

<sup>9</sup> Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 28-42.

<sup>10</sup> McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 170-175.



interests of the merchant class and in some ways had more in common with mercantile Federalists from Massachusetts than with other Middle Atlantic and Southern Republicans.<sup>11</sup> These men were concerned with securing the nation's commerce and endeavored to convince their fellow agrarians that what was good for commerce was good for agriculture.<sup>12</sup> For these policymakers, a *commerce navy* represented a valid vision of a navy in a republic because commerce was a key component to the stability of the republic.

By undertaking a fresh investigation into the meaning of a republican navy we uncover the fallacy of a third myth. Historians under the influence of Mahan's broad shadow often regard the influential scholar as the nation's first significant naval strategist. However, when we examine the complex and nuanced debates of policymakers from 1783 to 1812 over the kind of navy befitting a republic we find that the Founders were in fact offering several distinct, coherent naval strategies. Their strategies were firmly grounded in the financial limits of the nation, its economic interests, the reality of the United States' position amidst the powers of Europe, and the contested ideals and virtues of a republican government. Often these factors contradicted one another and lent a confused character to Congress' voice, but out of this cacophony of voices four strategies emerged and took turns directing the naval policy during the first thirty years of the nation's existence. These strategic visions of a republican navy took four general forms: *Commerce Navy*, *Coastal Navy*, *Regional Navy*, and *Capital Navy*.<sup>13</sup> These four strategic visions directed U. S. naval policy during the first thirty years of the

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<sup>11</sup> Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 176; *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 873.

<sup>12</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 870.

<sup>13</sup> It should also be noted that some Founders wanted no navy at all, a subject that will be addressed. "Capital navy" refers to navies composed of "capital ships" (ships-of-the-line boasting in excess of 70 guns) such as those possessed by Great Britain, France, and Spain.

republic, from 1783 to 1812. Five phases of strategic policy can be discerned from the years between the American Revolution and the War of 1812: a period of no naval establishment from 1783 to 1793, a commerce navy from 1794 to 1796, a regional navy from 1797 to 1800 (with a push towards a capital navy from 1799 to 1800), a commerce navy again from 1801 to 1805, and finally a coastal navy from 1806 to 1812. During these years, the strategic visions were hardly monolithic or hegemonic. There was little consensus on naval policy in the early republic, and debates over the republic's navy were often long and acrimonious. However, despite the variety of opinion regarding naval strategy in the new republic, these five phases represent the visions most representative of the official direction being taken by the new United States Navy in its first three decades.

Beyond taking a fresh look at the narrative of the early U. S. naval establishment, it is important to understand how the evolution of the U. S. Navy was a part of the debate over republicanism in the new nation. Seeking to understand the meaning of republicanism, scholarship on the early national period has flourished in the past few decades, expanding its scope to include the complex cultural and societal dynamics of late eighteenth century America. Scholarship has often overlooked the U.S. Navy as an important part of this understanding of republicanism and national identity. As Franklin Roosevelt wrote, “the early Navy played a notable part in the development of the national spirit...It may therefore be said that in many senses our naval forces...were among the important makers of the Nation.”<sup>14</sup> Yet, while an “important and innovative new work” in the early national period emerges seemingly every other month, fresh works

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<sup>14</sup> Dudley Knox, ed., *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi War between the United States and France*, 7 vols. (Washington, DC: 1935-38), iii. Hereafter referred to as *Naval Documents*.

incorporating the U.S. Navy into the broader fabric of the early republican experience are almost nonexistent. While contemporary historians are redefining our understanding of the republic in the early national period, the navy as a manifestation of republican identity has been overlooked, perhaps viewed by academic history as an inconsequential offspring of military history.

Military history itself is partly to blame. Nearly all of the early scholarly works on the formation of the U.S. Navy breeze through the early years of the service and perpetuate the standard myth that the debate over the navy's creation was a simple partisan battle between pro-navy Federalists and their anti-navy opponents, the so-called Antifederalists and their progeny, the Jeffersonian Republicans. Even though these histories overlook the fact that the Founders' arguments were much more nuanced than this simple black and white painting, a greater shortcoming is that their approach tends to oversimplify or ignore the more important question of the implications of a republican navy altogether. By failing to connect the creation of the navy to the larger debate over the meaning of republicanism, historians have often misinterpreted the strategies and visions behind the creation of the U.S. Navy and have oversimplified what was a part of a complex discussion of the role of militaries in a republic.

The Founders faced many questions. If the young republic was to create a navy, how would it do so? How could this navy be a servant of the republic and not an agent of its demise? Would it protect commerce in foreign seas, or stay close to America as a coastal defense force? Would it defend America's interests among the European navies, or would it enforce a U.S. claim of hegemony in the Americas? The historiography of the establishment of the U. S. Navy does not clearly answer these questions. It is clear

that Federalists and Republicans were at odds with each other over the very idea of whether a navy was a proper instrument of a republic, but the Founders' concepts of a navy's purpose demands more illumination. What was the Founders' strategic vision and did they envision the republic's navy being used for coastal defense, as a regional force, or as an international force? How did these visions shape the form the U.S. Navy took during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century? The Founders were in uncharted waters. Not only were they debating the concept of republican armies and navies, but policymakers were engaged in a precarious experiment that many worried would lead to disunion and the establishment of a European-style collection of competing states.<sup>15</sup> In that light, we must ask how competing visions of the purpose of a republican navy reflected the contested formation of the new republic.

This study examines the years 1783-1812 in order to identify how the Founders' strategic visions of an American navy in the late eighteenth century were an extension of the debate over the newly forming identity of the young republic. Traditionally, naval historiography has both ignored the implications of a republican navy and oversimplified the formation of the navy to a bifurcated debate between Federalists and Republicans or "Navalists" and "Antinavalists."<sup>16</sup> However, to gain a more complete understanding of the debate over the identity of the new republic it is important to recognize the complexity of the competing visions of a U. S. naval force, each revealing a slightly different concept of the purpose of a republic's navy. This study aims to do this by

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<sup>15</sup> James E Lewis, Jr., *The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire: The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> For an example of the Federalist vs. Republican argument see Harold and Margaret Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1939) and Marshall Smelser, *The Congress Founds the Navy, 1787-1798* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959). For the origin of the "navalists vs. antinavalists" thesis see Craig L. Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists: The Naval Policy Debate in the United States, 1785-1827* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980).

expanding the traditional binary interpretations into a four-part explication, focusing on the four major strategic visions of a republican navy offered by policymakers from 1783 to 1812. The framework of this study departs from the historiography in another notable way by forgoing the standard approach of explaining the reestablishment in a traditional chronological narrative format. Instead, the thematic approach of this study connects strategic visions to the narrative to demonstrate the coherence of policymakers' arguments. The context of the international and domestic events surrounding the debates of policymakers over the role of a navy will be noted throughout the study. By reducing the emphasis on the chronology, however, one is able to better grasp the continuity of these visions over time. The danger of the traditional narrative is that it subsumes the strategic visions of the Founders beneath the weight of "important events," the very thing this study endeavors to avoid.

The four major visions of a navy-commerce navy, coastal navy, regional navy, and capital navy-encapsulated specific visions representing special meanings for Federalists and Republicans alike; meanings that transcended their vision for the American navy and act as a window into their conceptions of a republican identity. Expanding from naval historiography's binary interpretation is not only more accurate, but also better describes the variety of views of the Founders whose positions on the creation of a navy were not as simple as black or white, pro or con. By understanding the complexity of their arguments and visions one gains a greater appreciation for these men as fledgling late eighteenth and early nineteenth century naval strategists, and one is struck by the realization that the debate over the purpose of an American navy was as much a part of the emerging identity of the republic as it was a debate about wooden

ships and iron cannons.

*The Four Strategic Visions*

The emphasis of this study on the four strategic visions of the Founders builds on the past three decades of scholarship by a new generation of innovative naval historians. Incorporating the tenets of the new military history, these historians have used cultural, social, and political contexts to challenge the dominant binary interpretation of early American naval policy. Craig Symonds is one such scholar who corrects historians' understanding of the Federalist-Republican debates by arguing that Republicans such as Thomas Jefferson did not believe navies to be simply a waste of time and money for an indebted nation.<sup>17</sup> Rather, Symonds demonstrates that the Republicans opposed the formation of a capital navy for the purpose of national prestige and leverage; they feared the inherent risks accompanying the creation of such a navy, including the large expense, unnecessary involvement in European affairs, and possible provocation of hostilities.<sup>18</sup> Symonds' correction of the historiography extends to his usage of the terms "Navalist" and "Antinavalist" to characterize the debates rather than the traditional bifurcation of Federalists as pro-navy and Republicans as anti-navy. His rationale is that historians have erred by characterizing Republicans as anti-navy, rather they opposed the kind of navy the Navalists offered and hence they are more accurately referred to as anti-Navalists.<sup>19</sup>

Symonds provides a helpful clarification of the debate over what kind of navy the new republic should build, and he adds a great deal of insight into the Founders' various naval visions. However, his renaming of the key players in the debate with new

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<sup>17</sup> Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-14.

monikers blurs the variety of opinion within the Antinavalist ranks. They certainly opposed the dominant Navalist dream of a grand capital navy and the correlating identity of a strong American republic asserting its place amidst the powerful monarchies of Europe. However, Antinavalist visions were hardly homogeneous and encompassed everything from those who argued that a republic should never maintain a peacetime navy, to those who argued for strong coastal and commerce navies. Additionally, the Founders' visions for a navy were not static ideas; prominent Founders such as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were forced to reevaluate their naval goals depending on the situation confronting them.<sup>20</sup>

While Symonds does not ignore these conflicting arguments within the Antinavalist Founders, his narrative of the congressional debates and consistent usage of “navalist” and “antinavalist” signposts overshadows the level of complexity in the debate over the purpose of an American navy. Antinavalists included policymakers who favored a commerce navy to secure American interests overseas and others who advocated a coastal force to protect the republic's shores. Additionally, contrary to Symonds' analysis, some Republicans were in fact “anti-navy” and argued that a republic should never have a navy. While these policymakers were not the majority, it is misleading to ignore the substance of their argument as it offers an important alternative conception of the early republic's identity. One such example is Virginian John Nicholas who asserted that he hoped to never see a navy established because he was certain that “a Navy would never do any real good to this country, but would increase the unhappiness of it.”<sup>21</sup>

These hardly seem the words of a man who is merely anti-capital navy, and does not

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<sup>20</sup> Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 19-21.

<sup>21</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., pp. 2123.

seem to fit Symonds' definition of an "antinavalist." It is this complexity of strategic vision that reinforces the need to explore the depth of these policymakers' ideas and how they fit into the concept of a republic's military force.

These naval visions were hardly developed in a comfortable incubator free from the social, economic, and political realities of the time. Joseph Henrich, despite his traditional binary interpretation of anti-navy Republicans and pro-navy Federalists, correctly stresses the importance of ideology in the formation of naval policy. Navies had typically been exempt from the Whig suspicion of standing armies, but this was beginning to change by the 1770s when radicals in Great Britain began to view the national debt as the most important threat to their liberties. Naturally, because of their large expenditures, the Royal Navy was an easy target for this concern. Henrich argues that through the influence of anti-navy radicals like Joseph Priestley and Thomas Cooper, Republicans in the United States adopted similar philosophical and moral positions.<sup>22</sup> However, Henrich goes too far in arguing that ideology and partisan politics of anti-navy Republicans and pro-navy Federalists are the sole explanations for the positions of policymakers on naval issues during the early republic.<sup>23</sup> Despite Henrich's arguments to the contrary, it is clear that policymakers' naval strategies were often a product of their regional and economic backgrounds. Historians like Harold and Margaret Sprout and Marshall Smelser have stressed the divide between northern and southern ideologies, but it is more instructive and accurate to examine the actual social contexts of policymakers. Southerners representing commercial districts near the coast like Robert Harper and Samuel Smith were often ardent supporters of naval expansion, while northerners from

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Henrich, "The Triumph of Ideology: The Jeffersonians and the Navy, 1779-1807," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1971, 69-84.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-106.



further inland and agrarian areas of the north were often opponents of naval measures.<sup>24</sup> Regional economic interests were certainly an important factor in the formulation of policymakers' naval strategies.

Diplomacy was another key component of the Founders' naval strategic visions. Throughout the Quasi-War, President Adams attempted to negotiate with France in an effort to avoid war. Despite the French rejection of the new American minister Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Adams' strategic vision of a regional navy allowed for the important role of diplomacy in a vigorous attempt to "preserve peace and friendship with all nations."<sup>25</sup> Throughout the next two years, Adams refused to declare war on France as many demanded, and instead attempted to steer a middle course that could continue to allow for the possibility of a diplomatic solution. The coastal navy vision of Adams' successor, Thomas Jefferson, also depended on non-military measures. Enacting an unpopular embargo in 1807 while Congress built up a coastal navy, Jefferson too endeavored to avoid armed conflict with European nations, preferring instead to use diplomatic and economic tools to achieve national goals.

International and domestic events also played an important role in the formulation of early American naval strategy. Episodes like the depredations of the Barbary States, the French Revolution, the Quasi-War, and the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair placed the Founders in a position of having to respond to international events that held complex ramifications. Previous to 1798, it was very difficult to enact naval building programs in Congress. However, after the XYZ Affair, not only did Congress create a separate

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<sup>24</sup> William G. Anderson, "John Adams and the Creation of the American Navy," Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1975, 91-92.

<sup>25</sup> *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10894/10894-h/10894-h.htm>, (accessed August 2, 2006).

Department of the Navy, but in 1799 it laid the foundation for a capital navy. These well-known “big events” forced policymakers to voice their strategic visions and take a position on the role of a navy in the young republic.

These four strategic visions-commerce navy, regional navy, capital navy, and coastal navy-were products of numerous factors, including contingency, international and domestic politics, republican ideology, and economic realities. They were part of a broader conception of the Founders’ republican identity and are the focus of this study. However, before these strategic visions could give birth to a new naval force, the new republic first disbanded its navy and forged into its first ten years with no national naval force of any kind. Technically, the first naval strategic vision of the United States was that the nation should have no navy at all.

## Chapter 1: A Navy Disbanded, 1783-1793

During the first decade of the United States' existence, policymakers who believed that the new republic had no need of a naval force succeeded in working their vision into American naval policy. In August 1785, despite achieving unexpected success against the British Navy during the Revolution, the *Alliance*, the final ship of the Continental Navy, was sold because many in Congress considered a navy to be incompatible with the republican ideals, economic realities, and the political objectives of the new independent republic.<sup>26</sup> Ideologically, the critique of radical British political theorists of the 1770s had an impact on how many Americans situated a navy in their republican ideology. Additionally, the economic condition of the republic was not one conducive towards naval building programs. As Robert Morris, agent of marine and chief administrator of the Continental Navy wrote Congress on July 10, 1783

Until Revenues for the Purpose can be obtained it is but vain to talk of Navy or Army or any thing else. We receive sounding Assurances from all Quarters and we receive scarce any thing else. Every good American must wish to see the United States possessed of a powerful fleet but perhaps the best way to obtain one is to make no Effort for the Purpose till the People are taught by their Feelings to call for and require it. They will now give money for Nothing.<sup>27</sup>

As Elizabeth Nuxoll has demonstrated, this statement by Robert Morris illustrated a “nationalist” naval policy at the end of the American Revolution that anticipated a future creation of a new, powerful United States Navy, but recognized that current economic and political obstacles were too great at the present for the establishment of such a force. Rather, many of the nationalist Founders who desired a naval force set out to create a

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<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth M. Nuxoll, “The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era,” in *The Early Republic and the Sea: Essays on the Naval and Maritime History of the Early United States*, ed. William S. Dudley and Michael J. Crawford (Washington, DC: Brassey's Inc., 2001), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Morris, *The Papers of Robert Morris*, 9 vol., edited by E. James Ferguson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), VIII: 265.

political and economic climate in the new republic that could give birth to a strong navy at some point in the future.<sup>28</sup>

The question of how a navy fit into a republican idea of government was just one element of the debate over what role a military would play in the new nation. Richard Kohn argues that when this debate emerged in 1783, American citizens and policymakers drew upon experiences dating back to the 1680s, that included European conflicts, Indian wars, the Seven Years' War, and of course, the American Revolution. He maintains that these experiences had fixed in the American mind the proper relationship of martial issues with the public and state, and that these events during the colonial period helped shaped the naval and military debates in the first two decades of the new nation's existence.<sup>29</sup>

The first way these experiences manifested themselves was represented by Samuel Adams's 1776 declaration that

[a] Standing Army, however necessary it may be at some times, is always dangerous to the Liberties of the People. Soldiers are apt to consider themselves as a Body distinct from the rest of the Citizens...Such a Power should be watched with a jealous Eye."<sup>30</sup>

The roots of this fear lay in the radical Whig political thought that feared a return to the strife in England from 1620-1689 over a Crown-Parliament contest for control of the English army. Whig pamphleteers like John Trenchard countered that a militia, populated with men who had a stake in society and liberty was the answer to the standing army.<sup>31</sup> While this argument originally exempted navies from this assessment, by the late

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<sup>28</sup> Nuxoll, "The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era," 3

<sup>29</sup> Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

1770s radicals in Britain were beginning to lump the Royal Navy into their tirades against tyranny because of its contributions to the large increases in national debt.<sup>32</sup>

For many Americans, personal experience had reinforced the Whig philosophy that tyranny and despotism went hand in hand with a large peacetime standing army. In this analysis, standing armies were a threat to overthrow legitimate governments, enforce the will of a despotic ruler, or persecute a civilian populace.<sup>33</sup> In the twenty-first century age of professional armies and navies, it is hard to fully grasp the fear that Americans had of the European military system. However, the classic image of the eighteenth century European army in American consciousness was that of the Hessian, the professional, yet brutal society of warriors hired by Great Britain to fight their colonists in North America. This was the quintessential highly disciplined army and subservient not to a national constitution, but to an aristocratic ruler. While in the late eighteenth century, European armies such as that of Great Britain were beginning to change to reflect the new values of the Enlightenment, for most Americans it was the stereotype of the brutal, plundering, liberty-hating Hessian army that was to be avoided at all costs.<sup>34</sup> Often, in the colonial experience, the British Army was little better. From Bacon's Rebellion of 1676 in Virginia, to Leisler's Rebellion during 1689-1691 in New York, to the American Revolution, Americans were taught that standing armies were a threat to freedom.<sup>35</sup>

One group of Americans, however, did not emerge from the American Revolution with the same republican disdain for professional armies and navies. Rather, the

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<sup>32</sup> Henrich, "The Triumph of Ideology," 65-75.

<sup>33</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 3-4.

<sup>34</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 33-40, 52-59; Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> The U. S. Constitution reflects this fear, and the use of Federal soldiers and sailors remains an issue even in twenty-first century America, as demonstrated by criticism of President Bush's use of the U. S. Army, Navy, and Air Force during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2004. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 4.

experience of many of the Founders during the Revolution had taught that militias were undependable, inefficient, and seldom victorious when confronted by a professional army. These leaders, including George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, Henry Knox, James McHenry, Timothy Pickering, and Benjamin Stoddert, recognized the benefits of professional military forces, and their Revolutionary experience in turn shaped how they approached the establishment of both a republic and a military force. During the 1790s, these men emerged as some of the foremost advocates of a national military establishment.<sup>36</sup>

When the Continental Congress put Robert Morris in charge of the Continental Navy in 1781, he faced several obstacles. Financially, amidst a deepening economic depression, the confederation of states faced the daunting challenge of paying off large debts.<sup>37</sup> The fact that the government under the Articles of Confederation had little power to raise revenue only compounded the situation and further undermined the future of America's revolutionary navy. Eighteenth century navies were indeed expensive operations. A typical 74-gun ship-of-the-line required over 3000 loads of oak and 400 loads of elm plus trees tall enough to produce its large masts. By 1797 the average life span of one of these ships could be as few as ten years due to the dreaded "dry rot."<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly, Robert Morris lamented in July 1783 that as long as America lacked financial resources, talk of building a navy was pointless. Believing that the republic needed a "powerful fleet," yet faced with fiscal realities, Morris was forced to

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<sup>36</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 9-13.

<sup>37</sup> Charles O. Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration, 1775-1911* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1968), 51-53; Willis J. Abbot, *The Naval History of the United States* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1903), 179; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 249.

<sup>38</sup> Henrich, "The Triumph of Ideology," 47-49.

recommend the selling off of the last of the ships of the Continental Navy, admitting that “the public Wants and Distresses are so numerous and so urgent...that it becomes necessary to cut off every possible Source of Expense.”<sup>39</sup>

This did not stop Morris from proposing a plan to fund both the national debt and expand the small Continental Navy. In his budget address of July 30, 1782, Morris explained his plan and also voiced his concept of what a republican navy should do. According to Morris’ strategic vision, the navy would protect the sovereignty of America’s coastline by forcing enemy fleets to concentrate their ships for their own security and thereby prevent a blockade of coastal trade. The navy would also be a cruising navy in the mold of John Adams’ regional navy (see chapter 3). A cruising navy would not just hover close to shore, but would protect American commerce by ranging out from the coastal United States to bother foreign commerce in time of conflict, and keep sea lanes open for free trade and communication. Practically, Morris’ plan called for building six ships a year and a 1783 budget of \$2.5 million, but Congress did not share his vision and only authorized \$300,000.<sup>40</sup> Discouraged by repeated setbacks, Morris began to trim the Continental Navy.<sup>41</sup>

John Paul Jones approached Morris in October 1783 about reorganizing the navy. Morris was in the process of resigning his post as agent of marine, and he forwarded Jones’ proposal to Congress where it was never formally introduced. Only a draft of Jones’ proposal remains, but it seems that he wanted to maintain a fleet for training purposes in order to develop a proper officer corps.<sup>42</sup> Jones did succeed in convincing

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Nuxoll, “The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era, 8.

<sup>40</sup> *The Papers of Robert Morris*, VI: 65, 95; V: 147-148.

<sup>41</sup> Nuxoll, “The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era,” 7-8.

<sup>42</sup> *The Papers of Robert Morris*, VIII: 109, 579-581.

Thomas Jefferson in 1785 to back a plan for Jones to command a squadron to protect American trade from Algerian commerce raiders, but like his 1783 proposal, nothing ever became of the plan.<sup>43</sup>

The Constitutional Convention was the scene of the next debate over the role of the navy in the new republic. Nationalists, now known as “Federalists,” were intent on making the government’s right to establish peacetime armies and navies explicit in the new Constitution. Gouverneur Morris even went so far as to propose the creation of a separate cabinet position for a secretary of marine, but this was not included in the final draft.<sup>44</sup> The first draft of the Constitution completed by the Committee of Detail (John Rutledge, Edmund Randolph, James Wilson, Oliver Ellsworth, and Nathaniel Gorham) and presented to the Convention on August 6, 1787, authorized the Legislature “to make war; to raise armies; and to build and equip fleets.”<sup>45</sup> The significant verbiage here is “fleets.” This was no simple authorization of a nebulous naval force, but a clear mandate to the future Congress to build a capital navy. However, this provision did not survive and was not included in the amended draft of September 10, 1787. The September draft substituted the specific direction “to build and equip fleets” with the more general provision to “provide and maintain a navy,” which illustrated the Convention’s reluctance to commit to a particular naval strategic vision.<sup>46</sup> However, a second change, this one to the provision “to raise armies” was telling in that it stipulated that “no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years.” The fear of a tyrannical

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<sup>43</sup> Nuxoll, “The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era,” 13.

<sup>44</sup> Max M. Mintz, *Gouverneur Morris and the American Revolution* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 194-195; Nuxoll, “The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era,” 15.

<sup>45</sup> Merrill Jensen, ed., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, vol. 1 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976), 255, 264, 275, 289, 310. Hereafter cited as *History of the Ratification*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 275, 289, 310.



peacetime army was still strong, and was reflected in the Constitution's final iteration. But, in the minds of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention navies did not pose this same threat.

After the Constitutional Convention established the right of the Federal government to establish the United States Navy, proponents of a naval force from 1788 through 1793 were largely resigned to the fact that other more pressing national matters needed attention before a navy could be created. As Elizabeth Nuxoll notes, creating a sense of national unity, a federal government whose legitimacy was recognized, solving the problems of wartime debt, and strengthening the new national economy were acknowledged to be more immediate priorities.<sup>47</sup> Most importantly, American overseas commerce was still relatively safe. For the moment, American commerce around the Mediterranean was still enjoying protection from Algerian raiders by the Portuguese Navy. France and Great Britain were not formally at war with each other and impressments and neutrality of trade concerns were not the issues they were to become in the 1790s and 1800s when the French Revolutionary Wars reignited fighting between France and Britain in 1793.

Another circumstance that explains the absence of naval force from 1785 until the Naval Act of 1794 is that many policymakers simply did not believe that a naval force was compatible with the goals and ideals of a republic. This is one way that the "navalist vs. antinavalist" thesis is misleading, because it obscures the existence of an important group of representatives who opposed the very idea of a navy. Craig Symonds describes the debate over the establishment of a navy as one between navalists, or what can be more accurately called supporters of a capital navy strategic vision, and men like Gallatin

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<sup>47</sup> Nuxoll, "The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era," 15-25.

and Jefferson who he claims were not anti-navy, but anti “big” or capital navy.<sup>48</sup> This is an important point, but it still neglects the fact that an important voice in the early republic was the one arguing against a navy in all forms. These isolationist and Antifederalist/Republican policymakers enjoyed a period of ten years from 1783 to 1793 when their naval vision held sway. The following chapter describes the strategic vision that supplanted the “no-navy” policy in 1794, but even as the tide of opinion in Congress and the nation turned against them, the anti-navy policymakers did not just quietly acquiesce. In 1797, 1798, and even 1807, the anti-navy clique continued to remind their peers in Congress why the republic was making a grave mistake by instituting various naval strategic visions.

One of the foremost of these men was William Giles, the Antifederalist and Republican representative from Virginia. A strong supporter of Jefferson and vocal opponent of Hamilton, Giles was the classic representative from a rural region who was determined to defend republican principles against the centralization and strengthening of the national government. When Giles began his congressional service in 1790 he was placed on the Committee for Military Affairs, putting him in prime position to oppose the military increases proposed by various Federalists.<sup>49</sup> Consistently from 1794 to 1797 he articulated an anti-navy stance, best characterized by his declaration in February 1794 that “he considered navies altogether as very foolish things” and responsible for ruining many strong nations.<sup>50</sup>

In March, Giles explained his opposition to the commerce navy vision being

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<sup>48</sup> Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Dice Robins Anderson, *William Branch Giles: A Study in the Politics of Virginia and the Nation from 1790 to 1830* (Gloucester, MA: George Banta, 1914, reprinted by George Banta, 1965), 10-12.

<sup>50</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 447.

offered by some of his peers as being two-fold. First, while he was willing to admit that America's overseas commerce needed protection, Giles did not believe that a naval force was the best way to protect commerce. Secondly, he was opposed to all national naval strategies because they meant the creation of a permanent naval establishment.<sup>51</sup> Giles declared that "the question of a permanent naval establishment was one of the most important which could be presented" and he feared "that the most serious consequences were necessarily connected with it." In the opinion of anti-navy policymakers like Giles, a naval establishment would entangle American in the affairs of Europe and "possess the greatest tendency to war."<sup>52</sup> Additionally, Giles echoed the radicals in Britain who argued that permanent naval forces were "the most expensive of all means of defen[s]e" and "the expensiveness of [the] machinery" of governments was the root cause of tyranny. In Giles' opinion, "there is no device which facilitates the system of expense and debts so much as a Navy."<sup>53</sup> Specifically, for the crisis at hand, Giles preferred diplomacy, such as paying off the Dey of Algiers, to any kind of naval or military solution. Giles is the perfect illustration of a policymaker who was not an Antinavalist, because his "strong objection to the establishment of a Navy" clearly demonstrates his anti-navy republican vision. The consistency of Giles' opposition is further proof of his position, as he reiterated his anti-naval message in 1797 when the commerce debate had shifted to the problem of French attacks on American commerce.<sup>54</sup> Giles would not relent on his anti-navy position until 1801 when the "emergency" of Tripoli's declaration of war upon the United States led him to support the use of existing naval vessels to

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<sup>51</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 486-488.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 489.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 490-491.

<sup>54</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 246.

protect American overseas commerce.<sup>55</sup>

Giles was joined in 1797 by Republican John Nicholas of Virginia who was a policymaker that further illustrated the problematic nature of the thesis that Antinavalist policymakers did want a naval force of some kind in the future, but just did not think the republic was ready in the 1780s and 1790s.<sup>56</sup> It is true that some policymakers made such an argument, but others like Nicholas joined Giles in supporting an anti-navy republican vision. For Nicholas it was not a matter of timing, “he did not want to see any such establishment” because “a Navy would never do any real good to this country, but would increase the unhappiness of it.” Posing too great an expense and holding doubtful benefits, Nicholas was not willing to invest in something that “might be of very mischievous consequence to the nation.”<sup>57</sup> A year later, Nicholas had not changed his tune, still asserting that “[i]t would be perfectly consistent with the honor and independence of our country, to say we will have no Navy.”<sup>58</sup>

Many of these anti-navy policymakers were isolationists who feared the machinations of the Old World. Nicholas’ classmate at the College of William and Mary, Republican John Heath, not only believed that the effort in 1797 to build more ships would “increase our folly and disgrace our councils,” but “he was sorry to see such a desire to imitate the practice of monarchal Governments” and “he wished to stand aloof from European politics and European broils.”<sup>59</sup> Quoting a contemporary philosopher, the Philadelphia astronomer David Rittenhouse, the representative from Virginia concluded

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<sup>55</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 7<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 327-329.

<sup>56</sup> “Nicholas, John,” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-2005* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=N000084>, (accessed July 28, 2006). Hereafter referred to as *Biographical Directory*.

<sup>57</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2123.

<sup>58</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1444.

<sup>59</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2134; “Heath, John,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000431>,(accessed July 28, 2006).

that he wished ““Nature would raise her everlasting bars between the new and the old world, and make a voyage to Europe as impracticable as one to the moon.””<sup>60</sup> Heath believed European influence would pollute the republican experiment, although his fellow Virginian John Page believed their experiment could teach Europe some valuable lessons about representative government. Page argued that a peaceful and economically successful United States could show the rest of the world that a nation did not need a navy. Accordingly, he moved to immediately sell the three 1794 frigates under construction and “show the world that we can be happy without [a navy].”<sup>61</sup>

It made perfect sense to anti-navy policymakers of the 1790s that the United States could be economically successful without a navy. The independent-minded Federalist Joshua Coit of Connecticut argued this very thing in February 1797, because as he declared four months later “[f]or his part he did not wish [for] a permanent naval establishment in this country.”<sup>62</sup> One of the foremost anti-navy policymakers, Albert Gallatin could not have agreed more. Gallatin suspected that the commerce navy of 1794 would turn into a capital navy and Gallatin was “of the opinion that a Navy was not essentially necessary to the protection of commerce.”<sup>63</sup> The future Secretary of the Treasury was always endeavoring to find ways to maximize the few financial resources of the young republic, and in his opinion, commerce could be protected through diplomacy. Gallatin was always concerned with protecting the virtue of the agrarian

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<sup>60</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2134; Brooke Hindle, *David Rittenhouse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 3-10.

<sup>61</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2145; “Page, John,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=P000018>, (accessed August 1, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> Chester McArthur Destler, *Joshua Coit: American Federalist* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 99-100; *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2137; *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess. 369-370/

<sup>63</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2137-2139.

republic and “conceived a Navy to be prejudicial to the true interests of [America].”<sup>64</sup>

Craig Symonds argues that Gallatin was not anti-navy, but statements like his declaration in 1797 that “he considered a Naval Establishment as highly injurious to the interest of this country” hardly persuades one that he was an antinavalist.<sup>65</sup> Rather, in Gallatin’s mind, the proper course to steer was one of non-partisanship in European affairs, and he constantly resisted his peers’ efforts to favor one nation over another.<sup>66</sup>

Gallatin’s primary concerns were ensuring the republic’s financial stability and maintaining the independence of the new nation. These two goals were connected in Gallatin’s mind, because legitimacy in international diplomacy would only come when America had paid off its outstanding debts. L. B. Kuppenheimer maintains that Gallatin regarded a naval establishment as one of the foremost threats to his goal, regarding navies as “offensive weapons, prime instruments for war, debt, and ultimately, tyranny.”<sup>67</sup> The Maryland Republican Gabriel Christie agreed with Gallatin that commerce could be protected by other means. He was yet another policymaker who was clearly anti-navy and not an antinavalist interested in delaying the establishment of a navy until another day. Instead, Christie “trusted he should never see a single armed vessel belong to the United States; he hoped also, that his posterity might not.”<sup>68</sup>

Other policymakers were even more radical and argued that the Federal government was not obligated to provide any kind of protection for commerce. John Smilie, a Pennsylvania Republican, told his peers in 1807 that “[h]e believed there was

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<sup>64</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2342.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 2349; Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> L. B. Kuppenheimer, *Albert Gallatin’s Vision of Democratic Stability: An Interpretive Profile* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 115; Raymond Walters, Jr., *Albert Gallatin: Jeffersonian Financier and Diplomat* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 103-108.

<sup>67</sup> Kuppenheimer, *Albert Gallatin’s Vision of Democratic Stability*, 9, 113-114.

<sup>68</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2139-2140; “Christie, Gabriel,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000382>, (accessed August 1, 2006).

no country on earth whose commerce would justify the creation of a navy merely for its protection.” To the shock of policymakers with ties to the merchant community, Smilie countered that “[h]e would rather, therefore, give up the whole trade than protect it by a navy.” Not only was Smilie opposed to a commerce navy, but he did not support the coastal navy strategic vision being argued in 1807. He was willing to defend the nation, but “he would never consent to defend the country by a fleet.”<sup>69</sup> The opposition of anti-navy policymakers to a commerce navy in 1797 was clear, but some policymakers who shared Smile’s sentiments did not believe that coastal defense was a valid reason for establishing a navy either. Page claimed

That he had said it would be better for the United States that an enemy’s army should get into the centre of the country (because we could get rid of it as we had done) than that the country should be perpetually taxed to guard against a possible invasion.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the escalation of tensions in 1807 over the attack on the *Chesapeake* and other violations of American sovereignty, anti-navy policymakers like North Carolina Republican James Holland were convinced that if the United States had a strong navy, they would already be at war. A naval force was not the solution, and Holland declared that he “would not vote a single cent for fortifications or a navy.”<sup>71</sup> Others in the anti-navy camp included Republicans Orchard Cook from Massachusetts and Gideon Olin from Vermont.<sup>72</sup>

The historiography of the navy from 1785 to 1794 is thin. Both early and recent

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<sup>69</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 469; “Smilie, John,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000508>, (accessed August 1, 2006).

<sup>70</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2144.

<sup>71</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 589; “Holland, James,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000718>, (accessed August 1, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> “Cook, Orchard,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000723>, (accessed August 1, 2006); “Olin, Gideon,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=O000067>, (accessed August 1, 2006).

historians of the navy ignore and mischaracterize the Founders' debates over the Revolutionary Navy and its peacetime transition. Historian Willis Abbot exemplifies early scholars who do not mention the naval debates of the 1790s at all in their narratives, leaving the reader confused as to how the navy transitioned from the disbanding of the Continental Navy in the mid 1780s to the deployment of frigates to the Mediterranean in the late 1790s. Implicit in his silence is the judgment that Congress "awoke" and finally ordered the building of some warships.<sup>73</sup> Highly celebratory of the growing American Navy, Abbot basks in the glories of victorious engagements and is not concerned with connecting the military with the political and cultural forces shaping the composition and mission of the Navy. Despite producing an important work on the Continental Navy, William Fowler completely mischaracterizes Morris and Congress by arguing that "[b]y 1783 it was apparent that neither Morris nor Congress had much need for the navy."<sup>74</sup> As historian Elizabeth Nuxoll demonstrates, this argument is not supported by the historical record.<sup>75</sup> Morris and others in Congress wanted to maintain a navy during peacetime, but acquiesced to the financial realities of the new nation.

Ultimately, the navalist-antinavalist thesis needs to be expanded because it denies the existence of the significant anti-navy voice during the early national period. The thesis is correct that some policymakers were antinavalist in the sense that they opposed navalists or those who advocated a capital navy. However, grouping all opponents of capital navies into a category of antinavalists misrepresents the position of many policymakers who did not desire a naval force of any kind; policymakers whose

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<sup>73</sup> Abbot, *The Naval History of the United States, 179-187*.

<sup>74</sup> William M. Fowler, Jr., *Rebels Under Sail: The American Navy during the Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 89.

<sup>75</sup> Nuxoll, "The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era," 3-25.



philosophy was dominant from 1785 to 1793. Although by 1794 European politics were setting in motion a series of event that would bring about a change in America's naval strategy, these anti-navy policymakers continued to voice their dissent throughout the first three decades of the new republic. But, by 1794, their hold over the new nation's naval policy was weakening in the face of threats to what many were beginning to argue was the republic's most important interest: overseas commerce. The year 1794 would bring about a new strategic vision of a republican navy, the commerce navy.

## Chapter 2: Commerce Navy, 1794-1796 and 1801-1805

The importance of commerce to the young republic is often overlooked amidst historians' and the public's nostalgia of American naval victories in the Mediterranean in the early nineteenth century. The republican navy cutting its teeth in the Mediterranean was not defending overseas land possessions, but it was defending American possessions of another sort. It is important not overlook the fact that the interests being defended were the commercial interests of the republic's merchant ships. Advocates of the reestablishment of a navy during the Constitutional Convention of 1787 argued that the republic needed a naval force to defend the nation's trade.<sup>1</sup> When Alexander Hamilton argued in *The Federalist*, No. 11 that one purpose of a new central government would be to establish a naval force, his argument was not founded on the necessity of a coastal defense. Rather, Hamilton argued that commerce was the life blood of the new republic, and that a naval force would be crucial for protecting trade and facilitating its growth.<sup>2</sup> This concern over the future of the republic's commerce continued into the early 1800s, as the dialogue over naval defense remained centered on securing the republic's commerce. Federalists and Republicans alike advocated a commerce navy, although Republicans were often suspicious that the Federalists' true motivation in pushing for a commerce navy was to establish the foundations of a capital navy. However, for both Republicans and Federalists the root purpose of the late eighteenth century American navy was quite simply the protection of America's increasingly far-flung commercial endeavors.

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<sup>1</sup> Nuxoll, "The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era," 15.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist*, No. 11 in Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *The Works of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1886), IX: 60-67.

Prior to the Revolution, the colonies rarely worried about the protection of their commerce thanks to the regulations of the Acts of Trade and Navigation and the physical presence of the Royal Navy. After the Revolution, this double-edged sword turned against American merchants, who saw their ships seized, their sailors impressed, their insurance rates skyrocket, and their markets constricted with the closure of the West Indies to American trade in July 1783 by the British government.<sup>3</sup> Not only did American shipping suffer, but the American shipbuilding industry was seriously impacted. An investigation by Lord Hawkesbury and the Royal Privy Council's Committee on Trade and Plantations determined that while 182 ships were under construction in the United States in 1772, by 1789 this number had fallen to only 31.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, during the 1780s, American merchants ranged further and further from North America in an effort to escape the British mercantilist system, sending their ships to the Mediterranean, the East Indies, the Philippines, and even China.<sup>5</sup> While this expansion of trade routes helped merchants escape the high duties imposed on American trade goods by Great Britain and the European continent, it exposed American merchantmen to the dangers posed by pirates and privateers, most notably by the commerce raiders of the Barbary Coast.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a sampling of the British depredations of American commerce see Rufus King, *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, vol. III (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), 53, 74-76; Nuxoll, "The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era," 17; Richard Buel, Jr., *In Iron's: Britain's Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 250-251.

<sup>4</sup> Jerald A. Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 88.

<sup>5</sup> Mary A. Y. Gallagher, "Charting a New Course for the China Trade: The Late Eighteenth Century American Model," in William S. Dudley and Michael J. Crawford, ed., *The Early Republic and the Sea: Essays on the Naval and Maritime History of the Early United States* (Washington, DC: Brassey's Inc, 2001), 55-74; Robert W. Love, Jr., *History of the U.S. Navy: 1775-1941* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1992), I: 44-45.

<sup>6</sup> Algiers, Tripoli, Tunisia, and Morocco comprised the "Barbary Coast" and existed as states of the Ottoman Empire under Selim III. Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 74-75.

However, during the new nation's first ten years, from 1783 to 1793, the United States faced little external pressure to reestablish a naval force. World events in 1793 quickly altered the status quo and provided an opportunity for more naval-minded policymakers to voice their strategic visions. First, France declared war on Great Britain on February 1, 1793, instantly calling into question the continued neutrality of America's trade because of the United States' 1778 Treaty of Amity and Commerce with France.<sup>7</sup> Initially, American trade flourished when France completely opened her West Indian trade to America, but this economic boom proved short-lived as the British responded by seizing American vessels and impressing American seamen engaged in trade with the French colonies. Upset over the United States' failure to resist the seizures of its commercial vessels, which France interpreted as a violation of the 1778 treaty, French ships began to seize American vessels carrying goods to England.<sup>8</sup> French actions against American commerce only grew more antagonistic after the signing of Jay's Treaty of 1794, which in the eyes of the French was a complete abrogation of the Alliance of 1778.<sup>9</sup>

In December 1793, things grew even more precarious for the republic's commerce as news reached America that Portugal had signed a treaty with Algiers. American merchantmen had long benefited from the patrolling ships of the Portuguese Navy at the Straits of Gibraltar which kept the Algerine commerce raiders bottled up inside the Mediterranean. But in late 1793, Great Britain convinced Portugal to join them in a coalition against France and so drove Portugal into striking a bargain with the Dey of

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander DeConde, *Entangling Alliance: Politics and Diplomacy under George Washington* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1958), 86-87, 91.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 92, 99.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France, 1797-1801* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 10.

Algiers.<sup>10</sup> Within days, several American ships were captured by Algerian raiders prompting President George Washington to direct Congress to find some way of resolving the Algerine problem.<sup>11</sup> Congress responded to Washington's direction by exploring both diplomatic channels and military solutions, and began to debate whether "a naval force, adequate to the protection of the commerce of the United States against the Algerine corsairs, ought to be provided."<sup>12</sup>

Collectively, these events provided the impetus for a debate from 1794 through 1796 over the merits of creating a naval force for the purpose of securing the nation's commerce. Most often this argument rested on the assertion that foreign commerce was the lifeblood of the republic, and without it the young nation could not survive.<sup>13</sup> Many policymakers agreed with the importance of securing the nation's commerce; however, there was no single idea of what a commerce navy should in fact look like. Variations of a commerce navy voiced during the 1790s included the construction of a small number of powerful frigates to interdict enemy vessels on behalf of commerce, the arming of merchant vessels, the sanctioning of privateers, and the employment of convoys.<sup>14</sup> Each of these variations represented different tactical applications of the same strategic vision, the protection of trade by a republican commerce navy. Ultimately, in 1794, the variation that won out was the creation of a squadron of frigates to interdict on behalf of American commerce in the Mediterranean. The "Act to provide a Naval Armament" passed March 27, 1794 authorized the construction and employment of four 44-gun frigates and two 36-

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<sup>10</sup> Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 29; Nuxoll, "The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era," 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/1/3/1/11314/11314.txt>, (accessed online April 14, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 153-154.

<sup>13</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 869, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2126-2127.

<sup>14</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 869-880, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1476-1522.

gun frigates.<sup>15</sup> This act led to the eventual construction of the 44-gun frigates *Constitution*, *President*, and *United States*, the 38-gun *Constellation*, and the 36-gun frigates *Congress* and *Chesapeake*. Progress on these ships was interrupted 1796 when President Washington negotiated a peace treaty with Algiers. As per section 9 of the 1794 act, construction was to cease upon peace being made with Algiers, but on March 15, 1796, Washington suggested to Congress that they continue construction.<sup>16</sup> Congress responded by authorizing the continued construction of two 44-gun frigates and one 36-gun frigate, but this construction was by no means quick or efficient, and by the time of the XYZ Affair in March 1797, none of the ships were yet completed.<sup>17</sup>

### *Frigates*

Although the Act authorizing the construction of six frigates was the naval strategy that Congress enacted in 1794, it was not the only option available to policymakers. Federalist William Loughton Smith of South Carolina acknowledged as much in March 1794 by listing the other options that Congress had to consider. These included purchasing a peace with Algiers, convincing Portugal to resume its traditional role of piracy suppression, passing commercial regulations against Great Britain, who many policymakers believed was behind the Algerine attacks, and finally paying a European naval power to protect American ships.<sup>18</sup> Smith represented policymakers who believed that the answer lay in building a commerce navy consisting of powerful frigates that would interdict on behalf of American merchant vessels. Answering assertions that a

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<sup>15</sup> *The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1859-), Act of March 27, 1794, ch. 12, 1 *Stat.* 350.

<sup>16</sup> Act of March 27, 1794, ch. 12, 9 *Stat.* 351; *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11314/11314-h/11314-h.htm>, (accessed August 3, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Act of April 20, 1796, ch. 14, 1 *Stat.* 453.

<sup>18</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 492.

commerce navy composed of frigates was merely a pretense for establishing a capital navy, Smith responded that if the purpose of the act was the “establishment of a navy, merely for the idle purposes of vain parade” then he would be opposed to it. Instead, he countered that the vision being offered was that of a naval force to defend the nation’s trade, and that ultimately, “the question was, simply whether our commerce required protection against the Algerine corsairs, and whether this was the best mode of protection.”<sup>19</sup> Indignant at proposals that the republic should depend on hiring Portugal’s navy to protect its commerce and frustrated with arguments that deploying frigates would only serve to involve America in the disputes of Europe, the lawyer from Charleston responded that America was “particularly fitted for a navy,” possessing domestically natural resources which other nations were forced to find abroad.<sup>20</sup> Smith believed that the popular voice was behind him, arguing that the people of the United States “wish to see a Navy established.” He concluded that not only would the frigates secure the nation’s commerce, but they would also provide “a kind of Naval Academy” for instructing youth in the art of naval tactics.<sup>21</sup> Smith, who in the next Congress would be appointed to the chairmanship of the Committee on Ways and Means, was so confident that people would support his naval vision that he was willing to tax both land and slaves to raise the necessary funds. He was also willing to plunge the nation further into debt, proposing in 1796 that the President be allowed to borrow money to complete the building program with the expectation that new taxes could pay off the debt.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 492.

<sup>20</sup> George C. Rogers, *The Evolution of a Federalist: William Loughton Smith of Charleston (1758-1812)* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1962), 90-91; *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 494-496.

<sup>21</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 876-877.

<sup>22</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 239-240; Rogers, *The Evolution of a Federalist*, 301.

In the mid 1790s, overseas commerce was overwhelmingly the driving force behind the support for building frigates. Samuel Smith of Maryland was the rare Republican who supported a commerce navy consisting of frigates, probably because of his background as a Baltimore merchant.<sup>23</sup> In February 1794, he joined another representative sensitive to maritime issues, Federalist Fisher Ames of Massachusetts, in charging that the republic's commerce was "on the point of being annihilated" from seizures and the increase of insurance rates which necessitated the "sending out the proposed fleet" of frigates "as quickly as possible."<sup>24</sup>

Two years later, the debate over the frigates was renewed after President Washington's announcement on March 8, 1796, of the signing of a peace treaty with the Dey of Algiers.<sup>25</sup> As per the wording of section 9 of the 1794 Act, construction on the frigates was to halt if peace was made with Algiers. Washington suggested to Congress that it would be wise to continue the construction of the frigates and many policymakers agreed with their President. Federalist Theodore Sedgwick of Massachusetts supported the vision of a commerce navy in addition to a general expansion of the republic's military forces. Americans would support building warships while the country was in the midst of an economic upturn, and the New England lawyer argued in April 1796 that continuing uncertainty in the Mediterranean mandated that frigates be built to guard the republic's overseas economic interests.<sup>26</sup> Sedgwick voiced the common belief that building frigates would be cheaper in the long run than continuing the practice of

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<sup>23</sup> Cassell, *Merchant Congressman in the Young Republic*, 40-45.

<sup>24</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., pp. 435-436; Winfred E. A. Bernhard, *Fisher Ames: Federalist and Statesman, 1758-1808* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 196-197.

<sup>25</sup> *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11314/11314-h/11314-h.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Richard E. Welch, Jr., *Theodore Sedgwick, Federalist: A Political Portrait* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1965), 9-11, 170-173; *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 878-879.



annually buying peace with the Barbary States. Theodore Sedgwick believed that a republican sense of honor demanded that its citizens and commerce should be protected.<sup>27</sup> With the support of policymakers like Sedgwick, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee was able to convince the lame-duck session of Congress to approve the April 20, 1796 “Act supplementary to an act” (the March 27, 1794 “Act to provide a Naval Armament”). This act provided the necessary funds to continue the construction of the three frigates furthest along in the construction process, the *Constitution*, the *United States*, and the *Constellation*.<sup>28</sup>

However, frigates were not the only manifestation of the strategic vision of the commerce navy. During debates from 1794 to 1796 some representatives offered a more informal vision of a commerce navy consisting of privateers and armed merchant ships, hoping that the young republic could avoid the formal establishment of a naval force.

#### *Privateers and Armed Merchant Ships*

During the debates in early 1796 over whether to continue the frigate building program of 1794, many policymakers voiced alternate conceptions of a commerce navy. Federalist John Williams of New York was one such representative. He believed that the identity of the new republic was separate from the European Powers and therefore should not be patterned after their tired model of large armies, navies, and never-ending conflicts.<sup>29</sup> Williams was another individual who defies the stereotype of Federalists as navalists trying to force through their vision of a capital navy. Despite having been born in England and having served as a surgeon on a British man-of-war, Williams did not

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<sup>27</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 878-879.

<sup>28</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2339, 2342, 2349; Rogers, *The Evolution of a Federalist*, 300; Act of April 20, 1796, ch. 14, 1 *Stat.* 453-454.

<sup>29</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 872-873.

want the American republic and its navy to follow the example of his birthplace.<sup>30</sup> “Letters of marque...were the best fighting ships,” argued Williams; a solution which he maintained was cheaper and when compared to frigates, less apt to provoke the wrath of the European powers.<sup>31</sup> His vision of the republican identity centered on agriculture, which Williams argued was “the true interests of this country” and would inevitably suffer from increased taxation in support of a more conventional navy established to protect American merchant interests.<sup>32</sup> For a “Spartan” like Williams, an undue emphasis on foreign commerce was bound to undermine the republican order, and the obvious benefit of privateers was the absence of a formal naval establishment: “no officers, no sailors, no materials to provide.”<sup>33</sup>

A slight variation on William’s privateer argument was the concept of arming merchant ships; an idea offered by William Loughton Smith after he came to the realization that the 1794 Act might not be extended.<sup>34</sup> Using merchant vessels was a tactic which Smith argued had served Great Britain well in her East Indian trade and could be adapted for the purpose of defending American commerce.<sup>35</sup> The concept behind this idea was that Congress could encourage merchants through financial incentives to build a style of trading vessel which could be easily converted into a ship of war should necessity arise. By quickly adding guns to their ships the republic would

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<sup>30</sup> “Williams, John,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000513>, (accessed April 14, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Vessels operating under a letter of marque were known as privateers, and their sanction by a recognized state distinguished them from pirates (who possessed no such authority). It should be noted that this was considered an act of reprisal which stopped short of a formal declaration of war. Privateering represented an important contribution to the American seagoing effort during the American Revolution. Potter, *Sea Power*, 37; *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 873.

<sup>32</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 873-874.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 889; McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 23, 100. It was common for eighteenth century critics of luxury to compare their republic to Sparta, who had banished commerce in order to preserve its citizens’ virtue.

<sup>34</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 886.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 887, 890.

have an effective navy without incurring the cost necessary to establish a formal navy.<sup>36</sup> If only one fifth of the nation's trade vessels were so modified, then in a few years "they might have 1000 vessels of this description."<sup>37</sup> Despite the benefits of such a plan, it was a tough argument for the southern planter to make to his fellow congressmen because it opened up a heated debate over the neutrality of armed merchants and the danger posed by hot-headed merchantmen involving the country in a war by instigating an incident, rather than merely protecting themselves.<sup>38</sup> But Smith's alternate vision of a republican commerce navy found a ready ally in Federalist John Williams of New York, because it posed little threat to his concept of the republic's agrarian society as representing its true character; a character Williams feared would be corrupted and threatened by a conventional naval establishment.<sup>39</sup> Williams was yet another Federalist who could hardly be labeled a navalist.

### *Convoys*

1797 was a year of transition between two naval strategic visions. New President John Adams brought a different strategic vision for a republican navy with him to Washington in 1797 (see chapter 3); however, it would not be until after the XYZ Affair in 1798 that he had the political capital necessary to enact legislation supporting his naval plan of action. In the meantime, Adams' May 16, 1797 address to the special session of the newly elected 5<sup>th</sup> Congress sparked several debates in the House of Representatives. One debate was over the tactic Adams had mentioned in his speech regarding the use of convoys to protect American merchant ships. Adams called the session in response to the

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<sup>36</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 887.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 890.

<sup>38</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 268-280.

<sup>39</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 889.

French Executive Directory's expulsion of America's minister to France, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and its declaration of "limited maritime hostilities" against American commerce in March.<sup>40</sup> In the intervening month between Adams' call for the session and Congress' assembly in May, Adams sought advice from his Cabinet on how best to respond to the growing French crisis. Secretary of the Treasury Oliver Wolcott, Jr., Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, and Secretary of War, James McHenry all forwarded Adams' questions to Alexander Hamilton and his thoughts formed the basis the ensuing reports they each submitted to Adams. These reports formed most of Adams' May 16 speech, so for this reason it is hard to discern Adams' ideas from those of Hamilton.<sup>41</sup> This could be one reason why Adams' recommendation to Congress that "it appears to me necessary to equip the frigates, and provide other vessels of inferior force, to take under convoy such merchant vessels as shall remain unarmed" seems at odds with his strategic vision of a regional navy outlined in chapter 3.<sup>42</sup>

Creating a commerce navy of frigate-convoys was a significant departure from some of the preceding visions of a commerce navy because it would necessitate a formal "naval establishment" that contrasted with the informal and relatively inexpensive commerce navy of privateers or armed merchant ships. Accordingly, advocates of a fleet of convoy ships attracted sharp criticism from opponents of a naval establishment, but policymakers supporting the convoying of merchant ships were equally passionate about protecting what they perceived as America's vital interest. Building and employing

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<sup>40</sup> DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 17-19, 25; Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 546.

<sup>41</sup> Page Smith, *John Adams* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), II: 924; DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 17-24.

<sup>42</sup> *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/8/9/10894/10894.txt>, (accessed April 21, 2006); DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 26.

American warships for the purpose of convoying merchant vessels was supported fervently by Federalists John Allen of Connecticut and Harrison Gray Otis of Massachusetts.<sup>43</sup> These attorneys argued that it was a simple decision to defend “the whole mass of the citizens distributed into different professions” which collectively constituted the identity of the republic. Their vision of the republic protected the sanctity of a citizen’s property, whether it was a piece of land or a trade good. Specifically, Otis was convinced that “the ship of a merchant is not less the property of the country than the house of a farmer” and it would be disastrous for the unity of the republic to tell its merchants, “Your country cannot protect you.”<sup>44</sup> Allen shuddered to think that his republic would embrace the identity of a weak nation, unwilling to stand up to other countries’ “insults” and “robberies.”<sup>45</sup>

Otis and Allen were fierce defenders of private property, and not merely the version characterized by soil and water, but consumer goods as well. Neither land nor trade goods were more important than the other; they were equal components of the sacred entity, property. Additionally, “agriculture and commerce are twin sisters,” Otis argued, “and cannot live separate from each other” because if they were forced to do so they would “expire at the same moment.”<sup>46</sup> Not only did America have a right to convoy its commerce, but the very nature of a republic that ensured the sanctity of private property demanded that it defend its commercial trade. Otis and Allen were representative of New England Federalists who readily supported convoys of the

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<sup>43</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harrison Gray Otis, 1765-1848: The Urbane Federalist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969); “Allen, John,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=A000129>, (accessed April 14, 2006); *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1476-1522.

<sup>44</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1488-89.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1476-88.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1548; DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 26.

republic's commerce, but it was not just Federalists or New Englanders who supported this strategic vision. Republican Samuel Smith of Maryland reminded policymakers that there was no reason why the frigates he had argued for several years before could not be put to use in convoy duty.<sup>47</sup>

One of the most cogent arguments in favor of establishing a commerce navy for the purposes of convoying American commerce was offered by the hawkish Federalist Robert Goodloe Harper of South Carolina. Arguing that “except there was a spirit to defend property, there could be no security in the possession of it,” the southern lawyer maintained that a “few millions of dollars” was a small price to pay to secure the republic's commerce.<sup>48</sup> Fervently believing that without a naval establishment “commerce could not exist,” Harper rejected the argument of policymakers who thought the new republic should be isolationist, in the order of China and the East Indies. Harper worried that a commerce navy of privateers would ultimately prove more expensive for the public because the cost incurred by merchants would be passed on to consumers through higher costs for their imported goods.<sup>49</sup> Following the Directory's actions in March 1797, marine insurance had risen 10 cents practically overnight.<sup>50</sup> Answering the charges of policymakers intent on defending the interests of agriculture, Harper asserted that agriculture would “fall into speedy decay” if commerce were destroyed, and he trusted that common Americans “would discern the conn[ec]tion between commerce and agriculture.”<sup>51</sup> Policymakers would be completely justified in taxing agriculture to pay

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<sup>47</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1494.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph W. Cox, *Champion of Southern Federalism: Robert Goodloe Harper of South Carolina* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), 104-133; *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1452.

<sup>49</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2128.

<sup>50</sup> DeConde, *Quasi-War*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1452.

for a commerce navy because the agricultural interest would “easily perceive that money paid for the defen[s]e of commerce, was, in effect, paid for the defen[s]e of agriculture.”<sup>52</sup> Commerce was the “market” for the republic’s agricultural production, and provided an important cog in the emerging consumer culture of America. As Harper reminded his peers, proceeds from the trade of agriculture allowed them to buy “the comforts and necessaries which our own country does not produce.”<sup>53</sup>

Otis, Allen, Harper and others who argued that a commerce navy was necessary in order to protect the republic’s trade faced a tough fight against advocates of republicanism who viewed the British mercantile system as the embodiment of corruption. These policymakers feared that an overemphasis on commerce was leading their fledgling republic steadily down a similar path to ruin.<sup>54</sup> The debate over a commerce navy was part of a much larger phenomenon overtaking America as well as Europe: the emergence of the market economy and the initial transformation from an agricultural society to an industrial society.<sup>55</sup> Otis defended the virtue of the new market, arguing that not only did commerce raise the value of the nation’s lands, but the market helped satisfy the fluctuations of demand.<sup>56</sup> According to Otis’ logic it was wrong to penalize the “enterprise of the exporter” who discovered that demand for the nation’s agricultural produce was high due to famine or war, because “when trade is free” the only limit to America’s profit would be the limit of her production. However, restricting trade would only discourage the enterprising merchant and certainly result in a lower demand

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<sup>52</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1452.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 1454.

<sup>54</sup> McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 57-62.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Brugel, *Farm, Shop, Landing: The Rise of a Market Society in the Hudson Valley, 1780-1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 4-5; McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 17-18.

<sup>56</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1492.

for the republic's agricultural goods.<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, defenders of a more Spartan brand of republican virtue, like New Yorker John Williams, felt threatened by the growing emphasis on trade and feared his constituents would share an undo part of the financial burden of a commerce navy.<sup>58</sup> Even though Williams was a large landholding Federalist who acknowledged that “the commercial and agricultural interests were intimately connected,” he argued that if property holders were liable “for three or four millions of dollars a year to protect commerce” then it would be better for the republic to have “no commerce at all.”<sup>59</sup> For Williams, the establishment of a commerce navy was symptomatic of “a mistaken zeal which drove men to pursue commerce instead of agriculture, and suppose that it was that which served the best interests of the country.”<sup>60</sup> American commerce had been “extended too far” and had produced an unhealthy consumerism which turned the happy sufficient citizens of the early 1780s into troubled debtors. Worse yet, Williams argued, the post-Revolutionary influx of foreign commodities had “annihilated” domestic manufacturing.<sup>61</sup> What was Williams' vision of a navy fit for the new republic? He concluded that “the landed interest would cheerfully come forward to defend the country against invasion, but not for extensive convoys to protect our trade.”<sup>62</sup>

Finally, it should be mentioned that some Federalists, like Alexander Hamilton and Rufus King, advocated an alliance with Great Britain and recommended accepting Great Britain's offers in 1797 and 1798 to allow American merchant vessels to sail in

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<sup>57</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1492.

<sup>58</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1465; McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 72.

<sup>59</sup> “Williams, John,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000513>, (accessed April 25, 2006); *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1464-1465.

<sup>60</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1465.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 1464-1465.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 1465.



convoy with the Royal Navy. This was not a concept widespread enough among policymakers to merit discussion here, but the nature of the idea will be discussed more in depth in chapter 3.

#### *Commerce Navy, 1801-1805*

Although in 1797 the strategic vision of the commerce navy was in the process of being superseded by Adams' vision of a regional navy, the concept of a commerce navy would continue to drive the arguments of many policymakers. America benefited from its role as middleman between the warring nations of Europe and U. S. trade continued to grow despite the British Admiralty court *Polly* decision (1800) which forced American merchants to engage in a process called "re-exportation." In a routine that soon proved to be a mere charade, American merchants were permitted to carry cargo of Great Britain's enemies as long as they first imported their goods to a neutral country.<sup>63</sup> The value of American exports more than tripled after the French National Convention officially declared war on most of Europe in 1793, and by 1800 the value of American re-exports had increased from around 1 million to nearly 50 million dollars in response to increased European demand.<sup>64</sup> The emergence of the market economy, the growing interdependence of commerce and agriculture, and flourishing consumerism provided an important rationale for a republic to establish a naval force dedicated to securing commerce, be it with frigates, privateers, armed merchant ships, or convoys. In 1801, in response to new hostilities in the Mediterranean, the new Republican President, Thomas

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<sup>63</sup> American merchants were supposed to offload their ships, pay duties, and reload them; Congressional statute refunded their duties if they re-exported within a certain time. Burton Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis: Commerce, Embargo, and the Republican Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 15-16.

<sup>64</sup> T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787-1802* (New York: Arnold, 1996), 100-101; McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 166; Burton Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis*, 7.

Jefferson, was forced to revisit the commerce navy vision.

Traditionally, naval historiography has considered the Republican Jefferson as the architect of the gunboat navy that dominated the naval planning from 1807-1812.<sup>65</sup> In reality, however, his naval vision was much more complex than this erroneous stereotype and will be covered more in depth in chapter 5. Although Jefferson's preferred strategic vision was a coastal navy, from 1801 to 1805 he reinstated the commerce navy vision of 1794-1796. Late in life, Jefferson wrote to John Adams that he wished "we could have a convention with the naval powers of Europe, for them to keep down the pirates of the Mediterranean" indicating his desire to keep the nation's naval force close to home.<sup>66</sup> Jefferson was pushed into this position by the Bashaw of Tripoli, Yusuf Karamanli, who on February 26, 1801, declared war on American shipping. Upset that Tripoli was not receiving annual tribute like his neighbors Algiers and Tunis, Karamanli demanded a one time payment of \$225,000 and annual payments of \$25,000 from the United States.<sup>67</sup> After consulting with his cabinet on May 15, 1801, Jefferson ordered the U.S. frigates still in service to the Mediterranean to protect American commerce, although he recognized that he was in a grey area constitutionally. Only Congress could declare war, and although it did not formally do so, Congress passed the "Act for the protection of the Commerce and Seamen of the United States, against the Tripolitan Cruisers" on February 6, 1802. This Act authorized Jefferson to employ all seaworthy vessels in the U. S. Navy and also permitted the commissioning of private vessels to act as privateers authorized to

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<sup>65</sup> Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*, 71-93; Spencer C. Tucker, *The Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 10-35.

<sup>66</sup> *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, XV: 403.

<sup>67</sup> Lambert, *The Barbary Wars*, 123-125.

seize any Tripolitan vessels.<sup>68</sup> Unlike in 1794, when the commerce navy vision attracted much criticism within Congress, in December 1801 when the February 6, 1802 Act was first debated in the House, even traditionally anti-navy representatives like William Giles had softened their resistance. Giles was now resigned to the fact that the republic did possess a navy, and although he was not willing to supplement it, he was willing to deploy it to the Mediterranean since the situation in late 1801 qualified as an “emergency.”<sup>69</sup>

While the importance of securing commerce would remain a significant goal of congressional naval strategists throughout the late 1790s, the new executive who assumed office in 1796 held a different naval strategic vision. Protecting commerce would remain an important priority of the strategic vision of President John Adams, but it was only one piece of his plan. Thanks to the XYZ Affair in 1798, Adams was given a chance to implement his idea of what he thought a republican navy should be: a regional navy.

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<sup>68</sup> Act of February 6, 1802, ch. 4, 1, 3 *Stat.* 129-130.

<sup>69</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 7<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 328-329.

## Chapter 3: Regional Navy, 1797-1800

While the heightened tensions of the Quasi-War allowed some Federalists to advance their strategic vision of a capital navy in the new republic (chapter 4), the strategic vision actually employed during the limited war with France from 1798-1800 was that of a regional navy. Practically, this naval philosophy maintained that the young republic's navy must patrol and exert influence in a geographic region that included the coastal United States and Caribbean. With regard to the Quasi-War, this meant the deployment of U.S. sloops and frigates along the American coast and to the Caribbean to secure American commerce and strike back at French privateers and warships seizing U.S. merchant vessels throughout the region. Accordingly, this vision incorporated elements of both the commerce and coastal navy strategic visions by making the security of the American coastline and American commerce both priorities.

Since few American policymakers before, during, and after the Quasi-War advocated a regional navy, the question worth asking is how the regional navy policy came to dominate the naval operations from 1798-1800. Despite enjoying few supporters in Congress, the regional navy was endorsed by a most important naval strategist, President John Adams. Washington's successor was the most identifiable proponent of establishing the republic's navy as a regional force, a vision that was a byproduct of his foreign policy ideologies. Chief among these was the concept of a "balance of powers," that can be traced back to the writings of Gabreel Bonnet de Mably and Emmerich de Vattel.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Works of John Adams*, VII: 133; William G. Anderson, "John Adams and the Creation of the American Navy," Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1975, 33.

Those who describe Adam’s naval vision often begin with his well-known “wooden wall” quote, which was actually part of a written reply to an address of the Boston Marine Society in September 1798. Public support for Adams soared following the publication of the XYZ Affair as American citizens responded with indignation to the diplomacy of the French Directory. This public outcry was exactly what Adams needed to convince Congress to enact the new taxation necessary to support his naval vision.<sup>2</sup> Americans of all kinds and throughout all parts of the nation sent the President many letters, or addresses, expressing encouragement and support.<sup>3</sup> The address from the Boston Marine Society was just one of these, and in reply, Adams reminded the Massachusetts society that

Floating batteries and wooden walls have been my favorite system of warfare and defen[s]e for this country for three and twenty years. I have had very little success in making proselytes. At the present moment, however, Americans in general, cultivators as well as merchants and mariners, begin to look to that source of security and protection...<sup>4</sup>

While this quote seems to support the common assumption that Adams was a classic coastal navy theorist (see chapter 5), the entire body of his naval thought needs to be examined in order to understand his true strategic vision for the republic’s naval force. As Adams wrote to Benjamin Rush in 1811, “floating batteries and wooden walls” did not translate into a Republican coastal navy of gunboats, rather he “always believed that [Jefferson’s] system of gunboats for a national defen[s]e was defective.”<sup>5</sup> Adams had long advocated establishing a naval force, believing that without one “our Union will be

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<sup>2</sup> Rogers, *The Evolution of a Federalist*, 318.

<sup>3</sup> *The Works of John Adams*, IX: 180; Frederick C. Leiner, *Millions for Defense: The Subscription Warships of 1798* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 17.

<sup>4</sup> *The Works of John Adams*, IX: 221-222.

<sup>5</sup> *Correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, 1812-1926*, ed. by Paul Wiltach (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925), 27.

but a brittle China vase, a house of ice, or a palace of glass.”<sup>6</sup>

However, unlike many Federalists, Adams was not a proponent of the capital navy vision advanced by many in his party during the Quasi-War, and in 1808 he expressed regret over his decision to allow his Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert, push the nation towards a capital navy by recommending to Congress the construction of six ships-of-the-line in February 1799.<sup>7</sup> In an 1808 letter to the Speaker of the House, Massachusetts Republican J. B. Varnum, Adams maintained that “I never was fond of the plan of building line of battle ships.”<sup>8</sup> Rather, Adams reiterated his desire was “to have fast-sailing frigates to scour the seas and make impression on the enemy’s commerce; and in this way we can do great things.”<sup>9</sup> He was certainly opposed to the navalist philosophy of fleet engagements, countering that “our policy is not to fight squadrons at sea.”<sup>10</sup>

Adams’ address to the special session of Congress in May 1797 after the French Directory’s rejection of Pinckney and announcement of new restrictions upon American commerce provides a window into Adam’s strategic vision

But besides a protection of our commerce on the seas, I think it highly necessary to protect it at home, where it is collected in our most important ports. The distance of the United States from Europe and the well-known promptitude, ardor, and courage of the people in defense of their country happily diminish the probability of invasion.<sup>11</sup>

Securing the American coastline and commerce were clearly both priorities of Adams which distinguishes his vision from those offering coastal or commerce naval visions

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<sup>6</sup> Adams to Jefferson, June 28, 1812, *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>7</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, I:65; *Naval Documents*, II:129-134.

<sup>8</sup> *Naval Documents*, IX: 607; “Allan, John,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=V000074>, (accessed July 6, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> *Naval Documents*, IX: 607.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/8/9/10894/10894.txt>, (accessed April 21, 2006).

which focused exclusively on protecting either commerce or the American coast, but not both. In concluding his message, Adams stated how the United States fit into the balance of powers

However we may consider ourselves, the maritime and commercial powers of the world will consider the United States of America as forming a weight in that balance of power in Europe which never can be forgotten or neglected. It would not only be against our interest, but it would be doing wrong to one-half of Europe, at least, if we should voluntarily throw ourselves into either scale.<sup>12</sup>

So, what exactly was Adams' idea of naval balance of powers? Adams knew from experience during the American Revolution that the U.S. could not defeat a great navy such as Britain's on the seas, but still needed to prevent a European navy from seizing command of the American coastline. During the Revolution, this meant forming an alliance with a European power that could do a job the Continental Navy could not. In 1779, Adams, along with Benjamin Franklin and Arthur Lee, petitioned the French to send a fleet to seize "naval superiority" along the American coast and in the West Indies from the British.<sup>13</sup> Again, in 1780, Adams wrote to William Carmichael, the American secretary of legation in Spain, in an effort to secure more ships and fewer troops from both France and Spain in an effort to break the Royal Navy's "domination of the American seas."<sup>14</sup> After the Revolution, Adams remained steadfast as ever in his desire to prevent another nation from seizing control of America's waters. His desire was to keep a navy such as Britain's off balance by exploiting geographic advantages and making full use of diplomacy, while fielding a naval force consisting of frigates, brigs,

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<sup>12</sup> *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/8/9/10894/10894.txt>, (accessed April 21, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> *The Works of John Adams*, VII: 74-77; *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, 6 vol., Francis Wharton, ed. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1889), III: 4-6. Hereafter referred to as *RDC*.

<sup>14</sup> *The Works of John Adams*, VII:162-164; *RDC*, III: 672-673; "Carmichael, William," *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000161>, (accessed July 6, 2006).

and sloops in order to allow American trade to continue under the banner of neutrality.<sup>15</sup>

By and large, historians have overlooked Adams' concept of a naval balance of power and his concept of regional influence.<sup>16</sup> Frederic Hayes was the first historian to call attention to Adams' notion of balance of sea power, and he argued that after Adams studied the Royal Navy's command of the sea, he came to the conclusion that America must exert control over an area Hayes termed the "North-American-West Indian triangle."<sup>17</sup> As far back as 1779, Adams believed that it was essential that America control this region. Writing the Marquis de Lafayette in 1779, Adams argued that the West Indian Islands were vital to America's independence, calling them links in a mutually supporting chain, of which if "one or two were taken away, the whole, or at least the greater part, must fall." Adams continued that it was "indispensably necessary to keep a clear naval superiority, both on the coast of the continent and in the West India Islands."<sup>18</sup> Later that fall, Adams made the same argument to Congress, asserting "that I have ever thought it a main principle of their policy to maintain a constant and decided superiority of naval power in the West India Islands and upon the coast of this continent."<sup>19</sup> And lest the French forget what sort of naval support America required, Adams wrote French foreign minister Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes, that "the

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<sup>15</sup> Palmer, "The Quasi-War and the Creation of the American Navy, 1798-1801," 300-301.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick claim that Adams possessed an obsession with "balance," but do not connect it to his concepts of international politics. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 534-537.

<sup>17</sup> Frederic Hayes, "John Adams and American Sea Power," *American Neptune* 25 (Jan., 1965), 39-41. Other historians who agree with Hayes' analysis include William Anderson, "John Adams and the Creation of the American Navy," 33-37, and Michael Palmer, "The Quasi-War and the Creation of the American Navy, 1798-1801," 296.

<sup>18</sup> *The Works of John Adams*, VII: 84-85; *RDC*, III: 55-56.

<sup>19</sup> *RDC*, III: 389.



policy and necessity of keeping always a superior fleet both in the West India Islands and on the coast of the continent of North America” was of utmost importance.<sup>20</sup>

Adams believed it was “essential that the sovereign of every commercial State could make his nation’s flag respected in all the seas and by all the nations of the world” and thereby “produce a balance of power on the seas.”<sup>21</sup> If all the maritime nations asserted themselves in their geographic spheres of influence, the lesser maritime nations of the world could exert a naval balance to counter the more dominant nation.<sup>22</sup> One of Marshall Smelser’s students, historian William Anderson argues that Adams’ concept of the North-American-West Indian triangle is what led him to oppose war with the Dey of Algiers in the early 1790s, preferring instead to pay the demanded tribute. Many historians have noted the irony of Jefferson’s support for the war against Algiers, whereas Adams, the longtime naval advocate, argued against the use of military force in the Mediterranean. However, Adams’ strategic vision of the regional navy was focused on America’s regional influence and did not include sending a navy across the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. In this light, Adams’ desire to avoid military action so far from North America makes more sense and it provides an answer to a policy position by Adams that has long troubled historians.<sup>23</sup>

So, how did Adams’ naval strategy of the regional navy manifest itself practically during the Quasi-War? On May 16, 1797, Adams asked Congress to equip the three frigates still under construction under the Naval Act of 1794 (the *USS United States*, *USS*

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<sup>20</sup> *The Works of John Adams*, VII: 223.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 131, 133.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*; Anderson, “John Adams and the Creation of the American Navy,” viii-x, 33-37; Palmer, “The Quasi-War and the Creation of the American Navy, 1798-1801,” 296.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, “John Adams and the Creation of the American Navy,” 62-65; Craig Symonds explains Adams actions by arguing that Adams was a navalist and knew Congress would not be willing to build the kind of navy he desired, so he opposed the 1794 Act. Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 19-20.

*Constitution*, and *USS Constellation*), to build an unspecified additional number of sloops of war, permit the arming of merchantmen, and authorize the convoying of American commerce.<sup>24</sup> Congress, however, was not willing to give the President a blank check to create his vision of a republican naval force. The “Act Providing a Naval Armament” passed by Congress on July 1, 1797, only authorized equipping the three frigates.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, these three frigates would launch later that year and achieve respectable victories against French ships in the West Indies during the naval action of the Quasi-War.

After the publication of the XYZ Affair on April 3, 1798, Congress was willing to sign off on more of Adams’ naval vision.<sup>26</sup> On April 27, 1798, an act authorized the President to build or purchase up to twelve 22-gun vessels, while three days later Congress established the Department of the Navy.<sup>27</sup> On May 3 and 4, acts were passed to provide for coastal defense through the construction of coastal and harbor fortification along with authorizing the procurement of up to ten galleys.<sup>28</sup> Congress had stopped short of declaring war on France, but in three separate acts during the summer of 1798 they escalated the conflict by authorizing limited maritime hostilities. First, on May 28, Congress authorized American commanders to capture any foreign armed vessel “found hovering on the coasts of the United States, for the purpose of committing depredations” upon American commerce.<sup>29</sup> Then on June 25, they declared that American merchant

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<sup>24</sup> *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/8/9/10894/10894.txt>, (accessed April 21, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Act of July 1, 1797, ch. 7, 1 *Stat.* 523.

<sup>26</sup> DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 72.

<sup>27</sup> Act of April 27, 1798, ch. 31, 1 *Stat.* 552; Act of April 30, 1798, ch. 35, 1 *Stat.* 553.

<sup>28</sup> Act of May 3, 1798, ch. 37, 1, *Stat.* 554; Act of May 4, 1798, ch. 38, 1, *Stat.* 555; Act of May 4, 1798, ch. 39, 1, *Stat.* 556.

<sup>29</sup> Act of May 28, 1798, ch. 48, 1, *Stat.* 561.

vessels would be allowed to defend themselves from search and seizure by French ships.<sup>30</sup> The escalation continued just two days after Congress declared all treaties with France void, as they expanded their act of May 28 to allow American commanders to seize French vessels operating anywhere on the high seas while also authorizing the President to grant privateering commissions.<sup>31</sup> Finally, on July 16, Congress appropriated money to complete the final three 1794 frigates, the *USS President*, *USS Congress*, and *USS Chesapeake*.<sup>32</sup>

During the Quasi-War, the implementation of Adams's regional navy reflected his strategic vision, but elements of it also supported the vision of the anglophile faction of Federalists including Alexander Hamilton, Timothy Pickering, Rufus King, and of course, Benjamin Stoddert. This influence is primarily reflected by the authorization to build six 74-gun ships-of-the-line in 1799 (see chapter 4) and limited cooperation with the Royal Navy on West Indies intelligence and maritime convoys. These policies are not evidence of inconsistency in Adams' vision of a regional navy, but strategies indicative of the "high" Federalist influence within his administration.

Adams was very reluctant to make a naval alliance with Great Britain part of his naval strategy. Such an alliance was desired by many Federalists, including William Loughton Smith, but Adams never fully shook his Revolutionary suspicion of Britain.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, an Anglo-American alliance ran counter to the very essence of Adams' belief that Britain's global maritime dominance needed balancing. Steps towards cooperation with Great Britain were undertaken by Secretary of the Navy Benjamin

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<sup>30</sup> Act of June 25, 1798, ch. 60, 1 *Stat.* 572.

<sup>31</sup> Act of July 7, 1798, ch. 67, 1 *Stat.* 578; Act of July 9, 1798, ch. 68, 1,2 *Stat.* 579.

<sup>32</sup> Act of July 16, 1798, ch. 82, 1 *Stat.* 608.

<sup>33</sup> Rogers, *The Evolution of a Federalist*, 320-321; DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 6-7; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 74, 77-79, 86-87.

Stoddert, Secretary of State Pickering, and Rufus King, the American ambassador to Great Britain, but there is no evidence that Adams condoned any of their actions. Additionally, Stoddert allowed his officers to share intelligence with British captains in the West Indies, an informal cooperation that was aided by a set of maritime recognition signals devised by the commander of the Royal Navy's North American station, Vice Admiral George Vandeput, and Stoddert himself.<sup>34</sup>

While Stoddert quietly facilitated limited cooperation with the British, Pickering and King, both well-known anglophiles and Hamiltonians, advocated accepting the Royal Navy's offer to convoy American merchantmen.<sup>35</sup> In spring of 1797 and winter of 1798, King was approached by American merchants desiring to join British convoys, and King had sensed that the British government would be more than happy to oblige.<sup>36</sup> King sought authorization from Pickering, who replied that "if...that power voluntarily offers, or on the request of individuals, grants the requisite Convoys, are we to refuse them? Certainly not, and such is the sense of the President."<sup>37</sup> On this guidance, King allowed the spring merchant ships to sail from Britain under Royal Navy convoy.<sup>38</sup> However, it seems that Pickering was assuming too much, because a year later he replied to King in the negative, that although "threatening as is the aspect of our affairs with France, the President does not deem it expedient at this time to make any advances to Great Britain." Pickering concluded in words that had to have come from Adams, "All this is very convenient in our present defenseless condition, but how disgraceful to the United States

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<sup>34</sup> *Naval Documents*, II: 240, 258-259, IV: 429.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Ernst, *Rufus King: American Federalist* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 217.

<sup>36</sup> *Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, II: 153, III: 554-555.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 562.

if we continue to depend on the protection of the British Navy...”<sup>39</sup>

Finally, it is worth considering how Adams’ thoughts and philosophy of trade and commerce fits into his naval strategy. Early on, Adams consistently voiced a philosophy of free trade, but his failure to condemn the Jay Treaty in 1794 complicates the picture of Adams’ economic ideals. His contributions to the “model treaty” or Treaty Plan of 1776 rested on the principle of free trade. One example of this was his disdain for the British practice of considering certain goods carried by neutral flagged ships as “contraband” that could aid their enemy, and thus subject to seizure. Adams told Congress on April 14, 1780, that he thought “that the abolition of the whole doctrine of contraband would be for the peace and happiness of mankind; and I doubt not, as human reason advances... all neutral nations will allow, by universal consent, to carry what goods they please in their own ships...”<sup>40</sup> Adams was in effect advocating “free ships, free goods,” the classic liberal ideal of trade spreading throughout Europe and North America thanks to the writings of David Hume and Adam Smith.<sup>41</sup>

However, some historians like William Appleman Williams and Gerard Clarfield argue that Adams was not the simple economic liberal that the historiography has made him out to be.<sup>42</sup> They maintain that the economic liberalism attributed to Adams clashed with a naval strategy that advocated a regional sea power for not only the security of America’s territorial possessions, but also to ensure the security of its trade. Clarfield labels this a balancing of America’s international trade to assure that no one European

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<sup>39</sup> *Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, III: 296-297.

<sup>40</sup> *RDC*, III: 612-613.

<sup>41</sup> Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 105.

<sup>42</sup> Gerard Clarfield, “John Adams: The Marketplace, and American Foreign Policy,” *The New England Quarterly* 52, No. 3 (Sep., 1979), 347; William Appleman Williams, “The Age of Mercantilism: An Interpretation of the American Political Economy, 1763-1828,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 15, No. 4 (Oct., 1958) 427, 433.

nation had a monopoly on America's commerce. Additionally, Clarfield believes that Adams abandoned his idealism of free trade in the 1790s when he was faced with the realist implications of neutrality amidst the Revolutionary Wars of France and Britain.<sup>43</sup> This is an important point, because while the Adams of 1780 was willing to condemn contraband lists, the Adams of 1794 was not. His failure to condemn the Jay Treaty for its general restrictiveness towards American trade, including the continuation of the British contraband lists, complicates our understanding of Adams' true beliefs. The whole British mercantile system was founded upon the enforcing arm of the Royal Navy and Adams' many statements linking American trade and sea power are interpreted by historians like William Appleman Williams as evidence that Adams was a "key figure in the evolution of an American mercantilism."<sup>44</sup>

Neither of these historians' attempts to force Adams into some kind of neomercantilist box is completely convincing, however. Clarfield undermines his argument by illustrating Adams' concerted attempts to maintain balance in American commerce, efforts that hardly seem at odds with a philosophy of free trade. As Adams wrote to John Jay in April 1785

My system is a very simple one; let us preserve the friendship of France, Holland, and Spain, if we can, and in case of a war between France and England, let us preserve our neutrality, if possible... To avoid a war with England, we should take the regular diplomatic steps to negotiate, to settle disputes as they rise, and to place the intercourse between the two nations upon a certain footing...<sup>45</sup>

Historian Jerald A. Combs provides an insightful counter to the mercantilist arguments of Williams and Clarfield by stressing the context of the late 1780s and 1790s. Stressing that Adams, Madison, and Jefferson all preferred the principle of free trade, Combs

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<sup>43</sup> Clarfield, "John Adams," 347-351.

<sup>44</sup> Williams, "The Age of Mercantilism," 427, 433.

<sup>45</sup> *The Works of John Adams*, VIII: 235.

argues that the reality of European politics led them to believe that for the time being, such a policy would be unrealistic. Specifically, Adams seemed to believe that the Jay Treaty was as good as the United States could expect in 1794 without going to war with Great Britain. More important to these Founders was keeping the new United States out of another war with a European power, and so peaceful weapons, such as trade and commercial retaliation, were highly preferable to strictly military solutions.<sup>46</sup>

Williams' attempt to connect the naval strategy of Adams with a developing form of American mercantilism fails to fully explain of the reality of Adams' naval strategy. If Adams were advocating a capital navy like many of his fellow Federalists, Williams' argument might be more persuasive. However, the very fact that Adams rejected the concept of the capital navy supports the argument that he was also rejecting the mercantilism that went hand in hand with a capital navy such as Britain's in the eighteenth century. Instead, Adams' desire to field a regional navy with a "softer" footprint than that of a capital navy was entirely complimentary to the concept of free trade. In reality, Adams' naval strategy demonstrated that his advocacy of free trade was not simply an opportunistic grab at what was best for the economic interests of the early American republic. The neomercantilist label is perhaps better suited for some advocates of the capital navy strategic vision. While never quite dominant as a naval strategic vision, by 1799 the capital navy vision was beginning to eclipse Adams' regional navy strategy and was the closest it would come to becoming official naval policy during the early republic.

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<sup>46</sup> Combs, *The Jay Treaty*, 15-28.

## Chapter 4: Capital Navy, 1799-1800

The date was January 1798 and the House of Representatives was in the midst of a debate over whether to obligate money to complete the frigates first authorized by Congress in 1794. Federalist Samuel Sewall was determined to voice not only his support for the measure but his strategic vision for a republican navy, concluding his speech with the declaration that “...he considered a Naval Armament [sic] as necessary to the dignity and national character of the United States.”<sup>1</sup> The strategic purpose for a navy that would defend the honor and reputation of a nation advocated by the lawyer from Massachusetts was characteristic of the navalist concept of a navy’s ultimate purpose. This strategic vision of a navy assumed the republic’s maritime force would serve the functions of coastal and commerce navies, but when a policymaker invoked words such as “dignity and national character” his peers would instantly equate such words with the desire to establish a European-style capital navy.<sup>2</sup>

During the first thirty years of the new nation, the best opportunity for the advocates of a capital navy to implement their strategic vision of the republic’s naval force came during the “apex” of Federalist control in 1798 and 1799. During the Quasi-War, episodes like the XYZ Affair, outrages like the seizures of American merchant vessels along the republic’s coastline, and the fears in the South of a Haitian invasion supplied navalists with the political capital necessary to push for their strategic vision of a republican military. A formal cabinet position was created for a “Commissioner of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 826.

<sup>2</sup> Sewall, Samuel, *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000259> (accessed June 17, 2006).



Marine” soon after the XYZ Affair was made public on April 30, 1798.<sup>3</sup> Chief among the plans of this new department was the push by the first Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert, to build twelve 74-gun ships-of-line, a class of ships synonymous with late eighteenth century capital navies.<sup>4</sup> Historian Michael Palmer has argued persuasively that it was Stoddert who persuaded a reluctant Adams to sign off on a capital navy building project, and Adams’ own writings support this analysis. Looking back on the Quasi War years, Adams wrote in 1808 that he “was never fond of the plan of building line of battle ships,” which did not fit well with the president’s strategic vision of a regional navy.<sup>5</sup> Adams’ willingness to compromise on his naval vision was indicative of the constant conflict between himself and a cabinet under the influence of Alexander Hamilton and the Hamiltonian vision of America.

As one of the young republic’s foremost advocates of a capital navy, Stoddert oversaw federal naval expenditures that by 1800 reached \$3,448,716.03, representing 29% of the total expenses of the United States Government.<sup>6</sup> He repeatedly pushed for the construction of ships-of-the-line and the establishment of a navy possessing all the trappings of a large European navy, such as flag officers.<sup>7</sup> While acknowledging that it would expose him to “ridicule” to designate admirals for a Navy that in 1800 only possessed eleven frigates, Stoddert was convinced that “by a Navy alone we can secure

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<sup>3</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1545-1554; Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> My analysis of Stoddert’s strategic vision is at odds with historian Robert Jones, who argues that Stoddert “did not think of a navy as an instrument of national power.” Robert F. Jones, “The Naval Thought and Policy of Benjamin Stoddert, First Secretary of the Navy, 1798-1801,” *American Neptune* 24 (Jan 1964), 64; *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, I: 65; *Naval Documents*, II: 129-134.

<sup>5</sup> John Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, edited by Charles F. Adams (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1845), 607-608; Frederic H. Hayes, “John Adams and American Sea Power,” *American Neptune* 25 (Jan 1965), 35-45; Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 126-128, 230.

<sup>6</sup> George Henry Preble, *A Complete List of the Vessels of the United States Navy from 1797 to 1871* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1874), 33. Hereafter referred to as *Complete List*.

<sup>7</sup> *Naval Documents*, V:287-288; Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 238.

respect to our rights as a Sovereign Nation,” and recommended the designation of two full admirals, two vice admirals, and two rear admirals.<sup>8</sup> In 1801, with his Federalist party kicked out of power by the Republican Revolution, he continued to cling to his capital navy vision for America. Stoddert still maintained that twelve ships-of-the-line and “double the number strong frigates” would be the minimum necessary to allow the nation “to avoid those wars in which we have no interest.”<sup>9</sup> Stoddert’s argument highlights one of the key arguments of the supporters of the capital navy, that a strong maritime force in peacetime would ensure both the security of commerce and the nation’s coastline. In so doing, Michael Palmer argues the first Secretary of the Navy was a late eighteenth and early nineteenth century American policymaker that advanced ideas similar to that of the late nineteenth century naval strategy of Alfred Thayer Mahan.<sup>10</sup> The question of whether Mahan’s ideas were present among the naval visions of the navalists of the early republic is a question that deserves further investigation.

Although Sewall and other navalists had more popular support for their strategic vision of a capital navy during the Quasi War years of 1798-1800, it was not the first time such a vision had been proposed. Federalist Fisher Ames had argued for the formation of a capital navy as early as 1796. Like Sewall, Ames was a lawyer from Massachusetts, and possessed the same desire as Sewall to build a navy that would “induce some respect” and “would have some effect on the imagination of foreign Powers.”<sup>11</sup> The navy Ames envisioned would also protect commerce and provide a coastal defense, but what

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<sup>8</sup> *Naval Documents*, V:287-288.

<sup>9</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, I:75.

<sup>10</sup> Palmer, Michael A., “The Quasi-War and the Creation of the American Navy, 1798-1801,” Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1981, 301.

<sup>11</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 881-882; Ames, Fisher, *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=A000174> (accessed June 18, 2006).

distinguished the vision embraced by he and other proponents of a capital navy was the role of a navy in securing respect abroad for the new republic. For these navalists, “respect” in its most practical sense meant building a navy possessing enough retaliatory power to prevent the seizures of American merchant vessels by the British and French navies and put a halt to the Royal Navy’s practice of impressment. On a more philosophical level, “respect” equated to securing America’s place in the international political culture. In an age where the traditional European powers expected the American republican experiment to fail, the formation of a strong naval force would demonstrate that even though a republic was something new in the international arena, the new United States was a legitimate nation state.<sup>12</sup>

The theme of “respect abroad” was a common thread of unity in the discourse of those who supported a capital navy, and a typical manifestation of such a vision was Federalist Josiah Parker’s advocacy of constructing of ships-of-the-line. Parker was a former naval officer who endorsed his fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson’s support of a naval force consisting of eighteen ships-of-the-line, published in Jefferson’s *Notes on Virginia*.<sup>13</sup> Parker was taking Jefferson’s comments out of context (see chapter 5), but like Jefferson, who maintained that it was “foolish” to aspire to “a navy as the greater nations of Europe possess,” Parker did not believe the United States needed a navy equal the greatest capital navies of Europe. Parker’s example demonstrates that the capital navy vision did not necessarily mean that policymakers longed to build a navy that would be the equal of Great Britain. Rather, his desire was to build “a respectable naval force to

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<sup>12</sup> Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics*, 110-111.

<sup>13</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., 2835; Parker, Josiah, *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=P000065>, (accessed June 18, 2006); *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, III: 242-243.

protect us at home, our commerce abroad, and leave us in a situation to be more respected by foreign nations than we have heretofore been.”<sup>14</sup> Over one hundred years later Mahan advanced a similar argument in *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*, writing that during both the War of 1812 and Mahan’s own era it was not possible or in the best interests of the United States to pursue a naval force equal to that of Great Britain. Instead, like Parker, Mahan advocated a naval force sufficient to prevent a maritime power like Britain from being able to blockade and otherwise control the American coastline.<sup>15</sup>

Alexander Hamilton, champion of a strong federal union and proponent of an internationally active nation-state, played an important role in fostering the capital navy vision.<sup>16</sup> Although Hamilton did not have a direct hand in the formulation of policy in the late 1790s, it has been well-documented that several members of Adams’ cabinet sought his advice on many matters, including naval issues. In 1798, writing to Secretary Pickering, Hamilton advocated arming merchants, finishing the 1794 frigates, constructing a number of sloops-of-war, and “to provide and equip ten ships of the line.”<sup>17</sup> Then, in 1799, writing to Secretary of War James McHenry, he advocated again the construction of six ships-of-the-line and twenty frigates, for a total of 26 warships. Lest anyone conclude that Hamilton’s militaristic adventures led him to ignore the navy, as of 1800 the prominent Federalist was still advocating the completion over nearly thirty warships, six of which would be ships-of-the-line.<sup>18</sup> Hamilton was more occupied with

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<sup>14</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., 2836; *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, III: 242-243.

<sup>15</sup> A.T. Mahan, *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1919), II: 208-209; Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton* VIII: 477.

<sup>18</sup> *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, III: 173-174.

building himself a strong army, but it is evident that the navalism of a capital navy fit well into his vision of the United States as a powerful nation state that could compete with the great nations of Europe economically, politically, and militarily.<sup>19</sup> According to this vision, only after establishing a formidable army and navy, creating a strong system of raising revenues, reinforcing the nation's manufacturing capabilities, and enhancing the unity and power of the government, would the United States assume its rightful place as the leader of the western hemisphere.<sup>20</sup>

Secretary McHenry did not need much convincing, although many accused him of being a tool that Hamilton used to advance his agenda under the nose of a president he opposed.<sup>21</sup> In fact, this and the charge of inefficient management of the Department of War lent strength to the drive in 1798 to create a separate naval establishment.<sup>22</sup> While Stoddert's role in creating a capital navy is undeniable, it is worth noting that weeks before the creation of Stoddert's office, McHenry recommended to Congress on April 9, 1798 that the expansion of the navy should include six ships-of-the-line.<sup>23</sup> The purposes of this expanded U. S. Navy included every task conceivable for a navy: convoy duty, coastal protection, overseas interdiction, and the prevention of "humiliation" at the hands of the French Navy.<sup>24</sup> McHenry's collection of tasks for the republic's navy illustrates the ultimate goal of the capital navy, the ability to protect a nation's interests, wherever they may be. A hundred years before Mahan, American policymakers were already offering his principle that national prosperity was connected to the health of the nation's

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<sup>19</sup> Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 4, 566-568, 595, 671.

<sup>20</sup> Combs, *The Jay Treaty*, 31-46.

<sup>21</sup> Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 611-616.

<sup>22</sup> Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 7-8.

<sup>23</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, I:34.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

external trade. In the analysis of both Mahan and McHenry, this trade required the protection of a strong navy.<sup>25</sup>

One of the clearest examples of a policymaker stating Mahan's argument nearly a hundred years before the publication of *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* was that of the Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means in 1799, Federalist Robert Goodloe Harper.<sup>26</sup> In 1797, he succeeded a strong proponent of the naval establishment, William Loughton Smith, and also like Smith, Harper was a southern representative who supported a large naval establishment. He was after all, a staunch Federalist and even more importantly, Harper was gripped by the South's worst fear: invasion by a French-led black army. Writing to his constituents in March 20, 1799, Harper claimed that during the previous summer, the Count d'Hédouville, then French governor of St. Domingue, "was preparing to invade the southern states from St. Domingo, with an army of blacks...to excite an insurrection among the negroes...and first to subjugate the country by their assistance, and then plunder and lay it waste."<sup>27</sup> Horrific tales from white planters fleeing the island of St. Domingue and its bloody revolution during the 1790s only served to reinforce the nagging fear Southerners had of a slave uprising.<sup>28</sup> Harper had previously supported the commerce navy strategic vision (see chapter 2), but it seems the specter of a French-induced racial uprising and invasion drove him to embrace a capital navy in order to best protect the southern colonies. Before the outbreak of the Quasi War, Harper may have supported a commerce navy because the climate was

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<sup>25</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, with introduction by Louis M. Hacker (1890; repr., New York: Sagamore Press, 1957), xiii, 1, 28; Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command*, 6, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph W. Cox, *Champion of Southern Federalism: Robert Goodloe Harper of South Carolina* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), 131-132.

<sup>27</sup> *Papers of James A. Bayard, 1796-1815*, Elizabeth Donnan, ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 90.

<sup>28</sup> Cox, *Champion of Southern Federalism*, 125-126.

less favorable to his vision of a capital navy. In 1797, he was appointed the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, and he was prepared to do what it took to enact his naval strategic vision, including raising taxes to provide the necessary revenue.<sup>29</sup> The representative from South Carolina voiced his vision of an American capital navy using the Mahan's method of instruction by historical example. For Harper, the history of world sea power led him to a similar conclusion as Mahan. Speaking of Great Britain in nearly the same way Mahan would in the late nineteenth century, Harper declared that "it was that navy, and the wealth which commerce, protected by it, poured into her lap, that enabled her to support, with glory so unequal a contest..."<sup>30</sup> Harper used the example of another European nation, Holland, to further his argument by asserting that this comparatively tiny nation was able to "maintain not only an equal, but a distinguished rank, among the great Powers of Europe" while she supported a "formidable marine."<sup>31</sup> The South Carolinian was stating the classic ideology of a capital navy, that a strong naval force was the surest way to guarantee a nation's international prestige and security.

These capital navy buzz words were not the sole purveyance of Federalists, and the vision of a capital navy by no means died with the defeat of the Federalist Party by the Revolution of 1800. Throughout 1806, the Secretary of the Navy, Robert Smith, pushed for the reinstatement of the 1799 legislation to build 74-gun ships of the line. Like Benjamin Stoddert before him, Smith came to believe that abuses of America's maritime trade at the hands of Britain, Spain, and France would only end when the

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<sup>29</sup> Cox, *Champion of Southern Federalism*, 131-132.

<sup>30</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., 2836-2838, 2844.; Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, xiii, 1, 28; Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command*, 6, 27.

<sup>31</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., 2840-2841.

republic fielded a fleet that would earn the respect of Europe.<sup>32</sup> In fact, historian Thom Armstrong gives Smith all of the credit for formulating Jefferson's more complex coastal navy strategy, and argues that Jefferson consistently resisted this advice. However, Armstrong thesis falls short because it fails to adequately account for Jefferson's earlier writings which indicate his preference for a multi-tiered coastal defense.

Events like the *Leander* Affair in 1806 sparked a renewal of the debate over the proper strategic naval vision for the republic. The *HMS Leander* was a 50-gun ship that had previously seen action in the Battle of the Nile and made herself unwelcome in New York Harbor by frequently searching American merchant vessels for contraband and deserting sailors. In April 1806, the *Leander* fired a warning shot too close to an American ship just off New York City and killed a seaman named John Pierce.<sup>33</sup> Amidst the push by many Republicans to construct a coastal navy of gunboats, there was a vocal minority advocating the return to a capital navy vision. So, the debate over a republican navy was renewed, with capital navy advocates on one side and coastal navy visionaries on the other. Capital navy supporters advocated a revival of the 1799 legislation to build 74-gun ships, while coastal navy policymakers generally desired more gunboats. Somewhere in between was President Jefferson, who clearly supported a coastal navy, but was interested in using 74-gun ships as one part of that strategic vision (see chapter 5).

Smith sent his recommendations for resuming the construction of 74-gun ships to the house committee chair considering the issue, Republican John Dawson of Virginia,

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<sup>32</sup> Thom M. Armstrong, *Politics, Diplomacy, and Intrigue: The Cabinet Career of Robert Smith, 1801-1811* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1991), 29.

<sup>33</sup> Evan Cornog, *The Birth of Empire: DeWitt Clinton and the American Experience, 1769-1828* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 58.



who promptly recommended building both gunboats and six ships-of-the-line.<sup>34</sup>

Republican Josiah Masters supported building the 74-gun ships, not because he supported Jefferson's desire for a more varied coastal navy of frigates and a few ships-of-the-line, but because Masters wanted a more "powerful and respectable" navy.<sup>35</sup> Masters did not support Adam Smith's theory of laissez-faire economics extolled by many of his colleagues. By arguing in March 1806 that "neither commerce nor agriculture can flourish without protection," and by asserting that "it is foreign coin which circulates in this country...and the quantity of money naturally increases in every country with the increase of the wealth," Masters was stating the classic mercantilist philosophy.<sup>36</sup> For mercantilists, wealth was a zero-sum game, and if one nation was losing, that meant another was winning. The surest way for a nation to win was through a positive balance of trade (exporting more than one imported) and thus accumulate bullion, which was the ultimate measure of a state's wealth and therefore power.<sup>37</sup> Even though he was not the free trade idealist that Mahan was, Masters too concluded that the lesson of history was that national prosperity was tied to external trade and that sea power had played a decisive role in the history of international relations.<sup>38</sup>

A year later, during the debate over an "An Act to appropriate money for...Gun boats" that was signed into law on December 18, 1807, Federalist Jabez Upham of Massachusetts chided his peers that "before this could become a great nation at home or abroad, that they should have a large Navy; there could be no such thing as taking a

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<sup>34</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 302.

<sup>35</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 846.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*; "Josiah Masters," *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000232>, (accessed 24 June 2006)

<sup>37</sup> Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics*, 105.

<sup>38</sup> Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, xiii, 1, 28; Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command*, 6, 27.

commanding ground without a navy.”<sup>39</sup> Upham was not excited about the plan to construct 188 gunboats, because he wanted a capital navy that would earn respect for the new republic all over the world. In Upham’s mind, the War of Independence was not truly over, because “The United States had as much right to travel over the globe as any other nation; but they were not independent till they had a navy to defend themselves wherever they choose to go. This nation must depend upon itself.” Boasting a fine Old Testament name (Jabez), Upham justified his strategic vision with a dose of Biblical realism. The Massachusetts representative “believed ‘the original sin and depravity of our nature’ required every nation to erect a defen[s]e of this kind. One nation would receive respect from another so long as she could command it, and no longer.”<sup>40</sup> But for a navalist like Jabez Upham, a coastal navy or commerce navy was not enough; if the republic was to be a “great nation” then it needed a capital navy to ensure the “respect” of nations everywhere.

The policymakers who believed that the young republic should build a capital navy were outnumbered in the 1790s. Representatives like Samuel Sewall were navalists who were simply a hundred years ahead of their time, living in a republic possessing neither the financial means nor the ambition to become an expansive world power. However, if little support for a capital navy existed among policymakers during the first thirty years of the republic, a great deal of sympathy for the policymakers who advocated a capital navy can be found in the historiography of the navy in the early national period. From the late nineteenth century through World War II, the historiography is rife with the works of scholars who wish that Sewall’s vision was that of the majority and that the U.S.

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<sup>39</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1132; “Upham, Jabez,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=U000023>, (accessed August 6, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1132

had established a capital navy from the start. These American naval historians judge the Founders' naval vision to be shortsighted because of their reluctance to build a capital navy, particularly pointing to the Navy's failure to prevent the burning of Washington during the War of 1812 as evidence that coastal and commerce navies were insufficient naval strategic visions.<sup>41</sup>

Charles Paullin wrote a series of articles published in the U.S. Naval Institute's *Proceedings* during the height of American navalism in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The writings of Paullin and other historians, perhaps influenced by a common misinterpretation of the historical perspective and conclusions of Alfred Thayer Mahan, provided support for the nation's current course of battleship construction. Writing from a perspective that powerful nations should strive for command of the sea, Paullin endorses the abandonment of the republic's coastal and commerce navy heritage for the powerful identity of a capital navy, epitomized by the early twentieth century battleship.<sup>42</sup> Paullin begins with the debate over the Naval Act of 1794 and divides the argument into Federalists and their opponents from Virginia and Pennsylvania.<sup>43</sup> As a result of the historically dominant interpretation of Mahan that colors Paullin's history, he is inclined to favor the Federalists over the Antifederalists/Republicans, a trait not only

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<sup>41</sup> Howard I. Chappelle, *The History of The American Sailing Navy: The Ships and Their Development* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1949), I:179-180.

<sup>42</sup> The standard interpretation of the naval doctrine of Alfred Thayer Mahan claims that he espoused navies consisting of capital ships in the pursuit of large fleet engagements, all in the quest of command of the sea. For an example of this interpretation see Hagan, *This People's Navy*, 190-193; Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*, xxvi-xxvii. However, Jon Tetsuro Sumida offers a significant correction to this traditional interpretation by arguing that Mahan's concern with "naval competency" did not necessarily mean the building of a large fleet. Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Most historians would now call these "opponents" Antifederalists, soon to be Republicans. Paullin wrote his essays on the time period in question in 1906. Charles O. Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration, 1775-1911* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1968), 92-93.

indicative of many naval historians, but historians of his generation in general.<sup>44</sup> In Paullin's analysis, creating a Navy Department and a strong navy went hand in hand with the Federalist vision of a centrally strong republic, which he tacitly endorses. Paullin's disdain for Jefferson and the Republican coastal navy plan is clear from his description of the Republicans' decision to build a fleet of gunboats, "All things considered, the construction of these vessels during 1804-1807 was a blunder and a misdirection of the national resources."<sup>45</sup>

Abbot and Paullin wrote amidst the nationalism and celebratory spirit surrounding Manila Bay, dreadnought battleships, and large battle fleets, while Harold and Margaret Sprout reasserted the navalism of Abbot and Paullin on the eve of World War II. The Sprouts advocated a large seagoing navy, especially in light of the looming European crisis, and viewed the underdeveloped U.S. Navy as a legacy of Antinavalists and Jeffersonian Republicans.<sup>46</sup> Advocating a fleet structure consisting of capital ships, the Sprouts wrote a complete history of the rise of the U.S. Navy colored by their judgment that the coastal and commerce visions were misguided. To the Sprouts' credit, they eventually admitted that their analysis was overly influenced by their interpretation of Mahanian theory. Specifically, they acknowledged that they were too willing to champion the idea that the U.S. should model its navy after that of Great Britain in order to wield a comparative influence on the world scene.<sup>47</sup> Such bias is evident in their condemning judgment of Jefferson and the Republicans for their reliance on a coastal

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<sup>44</sup> Antifederalists in general have long suffered at the hands of historians partial to the Federalists. Saul Cornell, "The Changing Historical Fortunes of the Antifederalists," *Northwestern University Law Review* 84, Vol. 1 (1990), 39-73.

<sup>45</sup> Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration*, 133-135.

<sup>46</sup> Kenneth Hagan and Charles Campbell argue that the Sprouts were answering Charles Beard's skepticism of large navies in *The Navy: Defense or Portent?* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1932); Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*, viii, xxix.

<sup>47</sup> Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*, 7-9.

navy consisting of gunboats and their “failure to grasp the basic principles” of the naval supremacy of a capital navy, consisting of a fleet of 74-gun ships-of-the-line.<sup>48</sup>

In the last thirty years, historians have moved away from the navalism that colored many of the earlier works during the first half of the twentieth century. As previously mentioned, historian Craig Symonds revises the historiography in an important way by demonstrating the rational thinking behind the opponents of a large navy in the early national period. However, as historian Elizabeth Nuxoll points out, Symonds’ approach of highlighting the ideological conflict between navalists and antinavalists is misleading because it exaggerates the prevalence of navalist thought among Federalists and other nationalistic policymakers in the 1790s and early 1800s.<sup>49</sup> Policymakers like Josiah Parker whose support for a capital navy could be construed as late-eighteenth century navalism were the exception, and not nearly as common as Symonds’ analysis of the congressional debates would suggest. Instead, a close inspection of the congressional record from 1794 to 1807 reveals very little navalist thought, and the few policymakers who dared to suggest a more grand vision of a republican navy did so knowing they would be voicing a very unpopular position. Instead, with the advent of the Revolution of 1800, the navalists’ capital navy vision was abandoned as the new president, Thomas Jefferson, revived the commerce navy vision prevalent in the early 1790s. Then, in 1806, Jefferson and the Republican-dominated Congress engineered a shift to a naval vision solely concerned with the protection of America’s coastline: the coastal navy vision.

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<sup>48</sup> Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*, 80-81, 92-93.

<sup>49</sup> Nuxoll, “The Naval Movement of the Confederation Era,” 23.

## Chapter 5: Coastal Navy, 1806-1812

The Republican Revolution of 1800 affected naval policy no less than any other aspect of American political life. The strategic vision of a capital navy was interrupted nearly as soon as it was initiated; and likewise, Adams' vision of a regional navy was quickly pushed aside like an old newspaper. Efforts by navalists during 1799 were undone by the enactment of the "Act providing for a Naval peace establishment" of March 3, 1801. This piece of Republican legislation mandated the selling off of all the ships of the U. S. Navy except for thirteen frigates, six of which were to be retained on active duty. The rest were to be preserved on land for future need.<sup>1</sup> Naval budgets were reined in, and by 1810 the total federal expenditures on the navy was still only \$1,654,244.20, representing 12% of the total government expenses that year.<sup>2</sup> The irony of the situation was that while Congress moved to reduce the naval force, President Jefferson was forced to redeploy the Mediterranean squadron after the Pasha of Tripoli, Yusuf Karamanli, declared war on American commerce in February 26, 1801 (see chapter 2). Jefferson was forced to either accede to the tribute demands of Karamanli or redeploy the Mediterranean squadron in order to defend American interests in the Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> So, while Congress in effect pushed for no naval force at all, the President was forced by international politics to reinstitute the commerce navy vision of 1794-1796.

By 1805, peace was reached with Tripoli, but Jefferson had new problems on his

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<sup>1</sup> Act of March 3, 1801, Ch. 20, 1, 2 *Stat.*, 110-111; Norman K. Risjord, *Jefferson's America, 1760-1815*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002), 323-324; Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration*, 132.

<sup>2</sup> *Complete List*, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Lambert, *The Barbary Wars*.

hands. America's relationship with Great Britain took a turn for the worse in May of 1805, when British judges overturned the *Polly* decision in cases involving the American vessels *Aurora* and *Essex*. The admiralty judges ruled that the ultimate destination of goods would henceforth determine their "national character" and that re-exportation no longer "transformed the national identity" of a ship's cargo, in part because American merchants had abused the *Polly* rule.<sup>4</sup> Then, in October, the Royal Navy achieved supremacy of the seas after defeating the French and Spanish fleets off Cape Trafalgar. This freed up the Royal Navy to enforce the decisions in the *Aurora* and *Essex* cases, and during the fall of 1805, the Royal Navy seized over 200 American vessels trading in the West Indies. As war with Great Britain began to pose an increasingly real threat from 1806 to 1812, policymakers responded by formulating a new strategic vision of the navy, one more focused on coastal defense.<sup>5</sup>

Many policymakers shared Jefferson's vision of a coastal navy for the purposes of defending the republic. In his often quoted *Notes on Virginia* (1782), Jefferson wrote, "A land army would be useless for offence, and not the best nor safest instrument of defen[s]e. For either of these purposes, the sea is the field on which we should meet [a] European enemy."<sup>6</sup> He concluded that "to aim at such a navy as the greater nations of Europe possess, would be a foolish and wicked waste of the energies of our countrymen... a small naval force then is sufficient for us, and a small one is necessary."<sup>7</sup> Historians have often mischaracterized the Jeffersonian strategic vision as "anti-navy" or as simply favoring a coastal navy composed of gunboats, to the exclusion of any other

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<sup>4</sup> Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Hagan, *This People's Navy*, 63; Risjord, *Jefferson's America*, 363-364.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 20 vol., Edited by Andrew A. Lipscomb (Washington, DC: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904), III: 241-242.

<sup>7</sup> *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, III: 242.

vessels.<sup>8</sup> Naval historians have not only welded Jefferson to gunboats, but have also often condemned him for building and advocating the gunboat navy that failed to adequately defend the United States during the War of 1812. Citing Mahan's disdain for gunboats in *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*, these historians evaluate the naval policies of the early national period using their own narrow interpretations of Mahan as a litmus test; a practice that often leads to ringing condemnations of early naval policy.<sup>9</sup>

Historian Gene Smith reacts against previous historians' disdain for Jefferson's gunboat coastal navy and their historicizing and judgmental spirit.<sup>10</sup> Tired of the anti-Jeffersonian bias, Smith seeks to dig deeper than previous scholars and probe why Jefferson and his fellow Republican Congressmen trusted the nation's defense so heavily to the gunboat and explore the role envisioned for this much-maligned craft. Most notable is Smith's groundbreaking effort to situate the gunboat not only in the broad context of naval history, but more importantly, the larger picture of the early republic.<sup>11</sup> Seizing upon Jefferson's message to Congress in 1807 regarding the defensive potential of gunboats, naval historians traditionally characterize gunboats as the dominant component of Jefferson's naval strategy.<sup>12</sup> Smith, building upon the work of Julia MacLeod, has corrected this analysis by revealing that Jefferson envisioned a multi-tiered

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<sup>8</sup> Spenser C. Tucker, *The Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), xii, 9; Gene A. Smith, "For the Purposes of Defense": *The Politics of the Jeffersonian Gunboat Program* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 4; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 239.

<sup>9</sup> Mahan, *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*, II: 154, 159, 160, 161, 163, 164, 179, 195, 198; Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*, 91-93, 105-107.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, "For the Purposes of Defense", xi.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, xi-xiii.

<sup>12</sup> *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/8/9/10893/10893.txt>, (accessed April 15, 2006); U.S. Congress, *American State Papers, Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States* (Washington, DC, 1832): *Naval Affairs*, 1: 163; Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*, 79-82.



defensive naval strategy that included ships-of-the-line, frigates, and smaller vessels in addition to a network of gunboats; while a coastal navy consisting of gunboats was largely Congress' fixation.<sup>13</sup> As noted in chapter 4, even capital navy advocates used Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* to bolster the argument for ships-of-the-line. Jefferson clearly believed that finances should not hold back the construction of a navy, figuring that a force of 30 ships-18 ships-of-the-line and 12 frigates-was supportable.<sup>14</sup>

Diplomacy and economic sanctions were also important parts of Jefferson's coastal navy strategic vision. Determined to avoid a war with Europe at all costs, Co-ministers to Great Britain James Monroe and William Pinkney endeavored unsuccessfully throughout 1806 and 1807 to address American grievances with Great Britain.<sup>15</sup> Resisting pressure by many to regard the attack on the *USS Chesapeake* by the *HMS Leopard* as an act of war, Jefferson instead chose to exercise a non-militaristic solution by imposing an embargo on American goods on December 22, 1807.<sup>16</sup> The *Leopard's* actions certainly could have been considered an act of war. On June 22, 1807, 10 miles from Norfolk, Virginia, the 56-gun *HMS Leopard* hailed the 36-gun *USS Chesapeake*. The *Leopard's* captain, S. P. Humphreys, had heard local rumors while in Norfolk that several British deserters were on board the *Chesapeake*, but the captain of the *Chesapeake*, James Barron, knew better than to allow his ship to be searched. So, he refused and the *Leopard* called his bluff, opening fire and in twenty minutes laid waste to the U. S. frigate. With three dead, eighteen wounded (including himself), and after taking twenty-two shots in the hull and irreparable damage to the masts, Barron

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, "For the Purposes of Defense", 6-15; Julia H. MacLeod, "Jefferson and the Navy: A Defense," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 8, (1944-45): 1-2, 175-177.

<sup>14</sup> *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, III: 242-243.

<sup>15</sup> Armstrong, *Politics, Diplomacy, and Intrigue in the Early Republic*, 44-52.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 68; Act of December 22, 1807, Ch. 5, 1 *Stat.* 451-452.

surrendered. He allowed the seizure of four suspected deserters and offered his ship as a prize to Humphreys, who refused, unwilling to further compound his war-like actions. The sight of the battered American warship limping into port in Hampton Roads incensed not only the local population, but Americans all along the seaboard (see chapter 6), including many congressmen.<sup>17</sup>

However, despite the furor over the attack on the *Chesapeake*, Jefferson was not about to abandon his methods, and he certainly wanted to avoid war with Great Britain. Instead, he turned to economic sanctions. Jefferson steadfastly believed that American exports were so important to Great Britain and Europe that Britain would be forced to the bargaining table on problematic issues like impressment. The President was confident that any resultant loss in revenue by the American economy would be inconsequential. The embargo proved entirely unpopular in America and inconsequential in Europe, and Congress repealed the measure just over a year later, in February 1809.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to being multifaceted, Jefferson's naval strategy was flexible. Although he preferred a coastal navy, when American commerce was threatened by the Barbary States, he was willing to support wielding a commerce navy in its defense in the Mediterranean. Jefferson even foresaw the day in the not so distant future when the United States would field a capital navy, writing from Paris in 1788 that Congress should have recognized John Paul Jones with the rank of rear-admiral, because Jones was "young enough to see the day when we shall be more populous than the whole British dominions and able to fight them ship to ship. We should procure him then every

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<sup>17</sup> Hagan, *This People's Navy*, 65-66.

<sup>18</sup> Armstrong, *Politics, Diplomacy, and Intrigue in the Early Republic*, 90.

possible opportunity of acquiring experience.”<sup>19</sup> But, while this is an important correction to historiography’s mistaken consensus of Jeffersonian naval strategy, it does not add to the understanding of why Congressmen were such willing advocates of a coastal navy, particularly one composed of gunboats.

Lost amidst the historiographical debates over the wisdom of a gunboat-centered policy is the reality that by 1805, the debate over the formation of a republican navy was shifting from a commerce-centered debate to one primarily concerned with securing America’s coastline. Republican John Smilie’s declaration that “there was no country on earth whose commerce would justify the creation of a navy merely for its protection” and that he “would rather...give up the whole trade than protect it by a navy” demonstrated how the discussion of a republican navy was changing.<sup>20</sup> This change in strategic vision was clearly part of the larger Revolution of 1800. It also seems evident that the developments of 1805 played an important role as America’s deteriorating relationship with Great Britain introduced the possibility of an invasion. Suddenly, many policymakers forgot the old argument that the United States did not need a coastal navy because Europe was “3,000 miles away.” The increasing value of the republic’s coastline only added to the concern. Representative Uri Tracy of New York stressed the vulnerability of the private property of his constituents, valued at over one hundred million dollars.<sup>21</sup> The former missionary to American Indians did not expect to fortify New York City “like Babylon,” but he called on his fellow policymakers to think of a coastal navy as defending “their own property” as much as the defense of the hundreds of

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<sup>19</sup> *The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes*, Collected and Edited by Paul L. Ford, Federal Edition (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904-1905), V:403.

<sup>20</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 469.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 391-392.

thousands living in America's coastal cities.<sup>22</sup>

Impressments and depredations against American commerce had been an ongoing problem since the start of the French Revolutionary Wars in the 1790s. However, after 1805, the actions of the Royal Navy within American territorial waters grew more blatant than ever before. Republican Gurdon Mumford's outrage over the murder of an American seaman outside of the New York City harbor by the HMS *Leander* in 1806 demonstrated the growing concern over similar episodes taking place along the republic's coastline. Anger over these British incursions into American territorial waters peaked in June 1807, as a result of the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair.<sup>23</sup> "Will the United States," Mumford asked his colleagues, "submit to the humiliating degradation of having its own citizens murdered within its own limits...I hope we shall, in justice to ourselves and the duty we owe our country, pursue such prompt and efficient measures as will more effectually protect our own sea shores."<sup>24</sup> Mumford thought he exemplified a "plain republican" by "seeking neither office, nor courting popularity" and remaining "firmly attached" to the "true interest" of his country.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the coastal navy Mumford advocated would not serve the interests of merchants or manufacturers; it would be a true republican navy because it would serve the only proper interest: that of the republic as a whole. The former private secretary to Benjamin Franklin acknowledged the differences of opinion over the viability of a republican navy, but pleaded with his peers that "whatever may be the objections of some gentlemen to the wooden walls of a navy, and however we may differ on that point...I hope we shall ever be united in one sentiment, in

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<sup>22</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 392.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 384; Love, *History of the U.S. Navy*, 91-97.

<sup>24</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 384-385.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

the defen[s]e of our own shores.”<sup>26</sup> Gurdon Mumford was not to be disappointed.

During the summer of 1807, many in Washington thought the republic was headed for war with Great Britain, and most policymakers were beginning to support some form of a coastal navy, though they differed on its shape.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, Congress passed the “Act to appropriate money for the providing of an additional number of Gun Boats” that authorizing the purchase or construction of 188 gunboats.<sup>28</sup> However, gunboats, frigates, privateers and even 74-gun ships-of-the-line were all offered as visions of the young republic’s proposed coastal navy. The arguments of Mumford and Tracy were characteristic of the most popular strategy of defense among policymakers during the mid 1800s: gunboats combined with coastal fortifications.

### *Gunboats*

Gunboats were small, shallow draft vessels that could be stored on land until their moment of need. They were familiar to policymakers because of their role during the American Revolution in defending the Delaware River and the northern frontier on Lake Champlain. Nearly all of the countries of Europe and the Mediterranean employed gunboats, and Russia had actually employed them to success against Turkish ships-of-the-line at the mouth of the Dnieper River in 1788.<sup>29</sup> Many of the policymakers who supported the idea of a coastal navy built around gunboats espoused views similar to those expressed by Republican Samuel Latham Mitchill of New York in November 1807. As Mitchill explained to his fellow Senators, “It was not his intention to recommend the construction of a Navy” which would involve the republic in the pointless contests by the

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<sup>26</sup> “Mumford, Gurdon Saltonstall,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M001076>, (accessed April 29, 2006); *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 388.

<sup>27</sup> Spivak, *Jefferson’s English Crisis*, 73.

<sup>28</sup> Act of December 18, 1807, Ch. 4, 1 *Stat.* 451.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, “*For the Purposes of Defense*,” 14-15.

European Powers for the control of the seas. “His only object,” continued Mitchill, “was to provide a force sufficient to protect our acknowledged territory, and to preserve peace within our seaports and harbors.”<sup>30</sup> The coastal navy offered by the future founder of Rutgers Medical School provided the perfect option for Republicans like George Clinton, who took Mitchill’s seat in the House when the New Yorker was elected to the Senate.<sup>31</sup> Clinton, like many Republicans, feared the expense and implications of a conventional, large peacetime naval force, but was willing to admit that “the want of a naval force was then severely felt...of the kind to chastise marauders and pirates, and to protect our commerce and defend our ports.”<sup>32</sup> Policymakers arguing for a coastal navy of gunboats were not simply attempting to provide the cheapest navy possible (although that was a major selling point), but men like Republican Roger Nelson actually believed that gunboats were “the best species of defense.”<sup>33</sup> Born on a plantation in Maryland, the representative was a veteran of the Revolutionary War and wounded at the Battle of Camden, so no one was going to accuse Nelson of being weak on defense.<sup>34</sup>

But this was a defense that required clarification. Thomas Jefferson’s son-in-law, John Wayles Eppes informed his fellow representatives that he never considered the gunboats “as answering the purpose of a navy.”<sup>35</sup> Rather, the Republican from Virginia regarded them as a “proper substitute for expensive fortifications.”<sup>36</sup> Eppes’ Republican

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<sup>30</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 28.

<sup>31</sup> “Mitchill, Samuel Latham,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000831>, (accessed April 15, 2006); “Clinton, George,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000526>, (accessed April 15, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 385.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>34</sup> “Nelson, Roger,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=N000041>, (accessed on April 15, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 467; “Eppes, John Wayles,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=E000197>, (accessed April 15, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 467.

colleague from Pennsylvania, John Smilie, voiced the underlying fear of these men: if a conventional coastal navy of frigates were built for defense it would draw the young republic into disastrous confrontations with European Powers.<sup>37</sup> An Irish immigrant, and former Antifederalist, Smilie wanted the republic to forge a new way and forgo the building of capital navies, hoping “it never would be said, that they ought to defend themselves beyond their own shores.”<sup>38</sup> Despite the rhetoric of some policymakers, Smilie was “of opinion that there is no danger at present” and that America was “not at present threatened with war.” However, despite his lack of trepidation and opposition to navies consisting of larger ships, Smilie was ready “to go as far as the Government thinks proper in the building of gunboats.”<sup>39</sup> More money spent for fortifications and emplacements would be a waste, and Smilie “believed that all they could do at present was to increase the number of gunboats.”<sup>40</sup> These smaller craft fit his concept of a republican coastal navy perfectly since no standing or established force was required. The gunboats could be stored on land until the time of need arose, and they did not require permanent corps of seamen and officers to man them. Gunboats were the ideal solution for policymakers who wanted to avoid standing armies (and navies) and rely on the militia concept of defense as much as possible.

Most policymakers were strong proponents of gunboats, but others needed convincing.<sup>41</sup> Jefferson’s most outspoken Republican critic, John Randolph of Virginia, and his fellow Republican Andrew Gregg of Pennsylvania were skeptical of gunboats and

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<sup>37</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1073-4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1073; “Smilie, John,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000508>, (accessed April 17, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 389.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.

needed more evidence of their capabilities before they were willing to invest so heavily in a coastal navy consisting solely of the small, shallow water craft.<sup>42</sup> To this end, President Jefferson attempted to assuage the fears of doubting representatives by arguing that gunboats were employed by “every modern maritime nation” and particularly, that in the Mediterranean “few harbors are without this article of protection.” Proposing that 150 of the craft be built, Jefferson underscored their low cost in repairs and maintenance while stored in sheds during times of peace.<sup>43</sup>

Ultimately, gunboats were an appealing option because of the vision of a coastal navy which they offered. As Republican James Fisk of Vermont summed up, unlike frigates, gunboats precluded a formal naval personnel corps and “were not calculated to go abroad.” When all was said and done, the Universalist minister concluded that gunboats were quite simply the “cheapest and the best” means of defense.<sup>44</sup>

### *Frigates*

The faith in a coastal navy solely consisting of gunboats was not shared by all policymakers and a minority advocated a more diverse coastal navy using frigates to augment the gunboats. Federalist Jonathan Moseley from Connecticut endeavored in February 1807 to convince his peers that while he agreed that “the principle naval force” should be composed of gunboats, he thought that in some cases, a “single frigate...might be employed to much greater advantage. Why not,” asked the New England lawyer, “have them on hand?”<sup>45</sup> Moseley’s fellow Federalist William Milnor of Pennsylvania

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<sup>42</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 458-460; Carson, “Congress in Jefferson’s Foreign Policy,” 8-9.

<sup>43</sup> *American State Papers, Naval Affairs*, 1: 163.

<sup>44</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 466; “Fisk, James,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=F000154>, (accessed April 29, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 435-436; “Moseley, Jonathan,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M001023>, (accessed April 17, 2006).



also argued that gunboats and frigates could work in concert with each other to greater effectiveness.<sup>46</sup> Despite his party affiliation and his Philadelphia mercantile interests, Milnor was not attempting to lay the foundations for a capital navy even though he believed that “the construction of a few frigates would be expedient.”<sup>47</sup> To those who might suspect the intentions of a Federalist, Milnor countered that “he was not of opinion that they ought to have a large navy, nor was he a friend of one,” but maintained that even a single frigate employed for coastal defense would compel the enemy at all times to be on their guard.”<sup>48</sup>

This vision of a more diverse coastal navy was not new to the post-1805 debates. Republican John Swanwick of Pennsylvania, a policymaker concerned with protecting the interests of merchants, manufacturers, and farmers, had argued as far back as 1794, and again in 1796, that the republic would be best served by a coastal navy consisting of frigates operating specifically in defense of the republic’s coastline.<sup>49</sup> While Swanwick stressed the contributions that foreign trade had made to the economy of the new republic by bringing profits to “merchants, mechanics, and indirectly to the agricultural interests,” he was not advocating the protection of overseas trade like policymakers who advocated a commerce navy. “What,” Swanwick asked his fellow legislators, “would the Powers of Europe think of us? That whilst we were laying the foundations of new cities and flourishing in every respect beyond calculation,” and yet were “alarmed” at spending a few hundred thousand dollars to build a few frigates. “Will they not say,” Swanwick

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<sup>46</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1066.

<sup>47</sup> “Milnor, William,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000786>, (accessed April 17, 2006); *Annals of Congress*, 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1066.

<sup>48</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1066.

<sup>49</sup> “Swanwick, John,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S001095> (accessed April 14, 2006).

continued, “they are building cities and leaving them defen[s]eless?”<sup>50</sup> Swanwick’s concern was with a coastal defense, and in this way he was a marked departure from his contemporaries of the 1790s who advocated building frigates for interdictory missions on the behalf of American commerce. “Indeed there was no security against the bombardment of the new city,” Swanwick lectured the representatives, “or any other of their possessions, whenever an enemy chose to undertake the business, their extensive coast being wholly defen[s]eless.”<sup>51</sup> However, the Philadelphian, a so-called “mercantile-republican,” was concerned with more than the cities along the coast. If the republic possessed a coastal navy of frigates, Swanwick continued, Congress “would not have heard the other day of a vessel being taken near the New York light-house, or of insignificant privateers sometimes plundering us almost in our own harbors.”<sup>52</sup> Swanwick was willing to admit that frigates might not prevent the seizure of American ships along the coast, but he believed the mere knowledge that the republic possessed such ships would cause foreign captains to think twice before sailing their ships along the American coast. Embracing the deterrent potential of a coastal navy, Swanwick was not completely abandoning commerce like some advocates of a coastal navy, rather he thought that inter-coastal trade would be secured as a byproduct of the coastal navy.

Swanwick’s argument was a departure from the strategic vision of frigates protecting overseas commerce, and even in 1794, it had attracted a small minority of policymakers opposed to the idea of a commerce navy. Representative James Madison from Virginia had strongly opposed the formation of a commerce navy of frigates, but

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<sup>50</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 870.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 871.

was willing to endorse their construction for a coastal navy.<sup>53</sup> Defending the coast “against pirates and privateers” was a different matter than to “send them to a distant sea to effect an object to which they would be inadequate.”<sup>54</sup> This argument by the republic’s future president summarized the vision of the advocates of a coastal navy, whether they were in the 1790s or 1800s. Building ships to defend America’s coast was fine, but anything else was bound to involve the republic in unnecessary wars, fall short of the intended purpose, and prove prohibitively expensive. In many ways the arguments of policymakers advocating a coastal navy were isolationist. They recognized that commerce and international relationships were important, but did not believe they were so important as to necessitate the sending of American warships to the other side of the Atlantic in order to defend the republic’s interests. But, as John Swanwick reminded the policymakers trusting in the “three thousand or four thousand mile distance” between Europe and America, “they had possessions very near us-their naval and land forces could easily approach us.”<sup>55</sup>

The fear of invasion that Swanwick attempted to impart to his peers went largely unrecognized until 1807. By 1809, deteriorating relations to with Great Britain altered policymakers’ sense of security and even led them to endorse the use of frigates as a part of the coastal navy. The “Act authorizing the employment of an additional naval force” enacted on January 31, 1809, directed that four of the frigates laid up in ordinary (stored on land) after the 1801 Naval Peace Establishment were to be fitted out and manned. These frigates were to be used along with the other active frigates as a true coastal navy,

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<sup>53</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 433.

<sup>54</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 877-878.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 880.

“stationed at such ports and places on the sea coast as [the President] may deem most expedient.”<sup>56</sup>

74s

President Thomas Jefferson’s gentle nudging of Congress in 1805 to build 74-gun ships-of-the-line touched off a debate amongst policymakers as to the true intentions of building ships that traditionally represented a capital navy (see chapter 4).<sup>57</sup> Jefferson was advocating building 74s as merely one piece in his integrated strategy of defense: a coastal navy consisting of gunboats, frigates, and 74-gun capital ships.<sup>58</sup> Policymakers leery of the establishment of a capital navy were not so sure, and it was up to the supporters of Jefferson’s vision of a coastal navy to convince them. A supporter of Jefferson’s version of a coastal navy with a unique reason for advocating the construction of 74-gun ships was Republican Mathew Lyon of Kentucky. Sensitive to the interests of western traders and merchants, Lyon was a proponent of a coastal navy as a means to secure the mouth of the Mississippi, which he feared “any nation with whom we have a difference, possessing a single line-of-battle ship, may block up” and thus destroy the republic’s important western trade.<sup>59</sup> Lyon recognized another important mission for a coastal navy, ensuring the security of America’s inland waterways.

Skeptics of a coastal navy relying solely on gunboats were not limited to twentieth century naval historians. Federalist Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts embraced Jefferson’s interest in building 74-gun ships in April 1806 because he doubted the

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<sup>56</sup> Act of January 31, 1809, Ch. 11, 1 *Stat.* 514.

<sup>57</sup> *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/8/9/10893/10893.txt>, (accessed April 15, 2006); *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1047-1048.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, “*For the Purposes of Defense*”, 6-15; Macleod, “Jefferson and the Navy: A Defense,” 1-2, 175-177.

<sup>59</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1050; “Lyon, Mathew,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=L000545>, (accessed April 26, 2006).

effectiveness of gunboats in defending the coast from heavier ships-of-the-line. The graduate of Harvard recalled of a story from the American Revolution when a British 44-gun frigate ran aground in the Delaware River and suffered little damage despite the shots of numerous patriot gunboats.<sup>60</sup> Quincy was willing to admit that gunboats could be useful in certain situations, but he was not comfortable with their many fervent advocates in Congress and lamented that gunboats had seemed to become “a substitute for all other means of defen[s]e.”<sup>61</sup> Somewhat humorously he noted, “Now-a-days, sir, put what you will into the crucible, whether it be seventy-fours, or frigates, or land batteries, the result is the same; after due sweltering in the legislative furnace, there comes out nothing but gunboats.”<sup>62</sup> Less humorous to Quincy was the problem posed by a New York City harbor often too choppy for gunboats to operate effectively. However, Quincy pointed out that this would not be a problem for other types of vessels, and that a “ship-of-the-line chooses its own time to attack.”<sup>63</sup>

Josiah Quincy was concerned with more than strategies of coastal defense, and like the proponents of a commerce navy he stressed the stake all classes of Americans had in a republic whose secure coast would enable commerce to flourish. The Massachusetts lawyer argued that this growing market had created “within the country an immense fund of internal consumption,” and “merchants, tradesmen, mechanics, seamen, and laborers of every class and description” counted on the republic’s trade “for that profit which makes a great portion of their happiness.”<sup>64</sup> This was not to exclude

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<sup>60</sup> The ship was the *HMS Roebuck*. Smith, “*For the Purposes of Defense*,” 14; “Quincy, Josiah,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=Q000015>, (accessed April 27, 2006); *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1034-1035.

<sup>61</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 607.

<sup>62</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1035.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 1041.

agriculture by any means, because Quincy agreed with the argument that “the farmer is bound to commerce by a thousand intimate ties” and played an important role in “the supply of the wants of this internal consumption” of the republic’s growing market economy.<sup>65</sup>

Ultimately, a navy for the purpose of coastal defense had many supporters, regardless of their differences over its exact makeup. Republican George Clinton, son of Vice President George Clinton, “was not in favor of expansive navies or standing armies,” but like most policymakers “was clearly in the opinion that we should employ the force we possess in the defen[s]e of the country.”<sup>66</sup> Even John Williams, defeated in his vision of a informal commerce navy consisting of privateers, did not oppose a coastal navy.<sup>67</sup> While representatives disagreed over the exact ships that should constitute a coastal navy, Federalist and Republican policymakers alike agreed that for the republic to succeed, its citizens needed a strong sense of security. Defenders of agriculture and mercantile interests both recognized the importance of protecting the rights of property within the confines of the American continent. In this respect, the advocates of a coastal navy were not so different from the advocates of a commerce navy. However, after 1805, a distinguishing argument of those who fought for a coastal navy was their growing concern over the defensive vulnerability of a commercial republic. Drawing common cause with the Republic of Ragusa, which he claimed to be “the last of the republics of the ancient world,” Federalist James Elliot of Vermont stated in December 1806 that her

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<sup>65</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1041.

<sup>66</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 385.

<sup>67</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 254.

fate should be a lesson to America.<sup>68</sup> Elliot declared that “every republican on earth ought to shed a tear” for Napoleon’s capture of Ragusa, especially since like America, the Ragusans “were a simple, peaceful, unambitious [sic], industrious, virtuous, republican people.”<sup>69</sup> The Ragusans were “Friends of all the world,” the Vermont lawyer argued and these model republican people were now “slaves” because the “Ragusans were hostile” to the interests of the Emperor of France. If it were not for America’s geographic position, Elliot concluded that she would follow the same fate, for like the Ragusans, America was a republic which had too long ignored the realities of European politics.<sup>70</sup> Although Elliot reassured his fellow representatives that he was “no friend to large armies and navies” he condemned America’s “Lilliputian navy” as a “disgrace” to the republic and “the ridicule of Europe.”<sup>71</sup> While failing to offer specific steps to take beyond establishing a committee to investigate the best means for carrying out Jefferson’s call for a coastal navy, Elliot characterized a new concern among policymakers that while defense of commerce had long occupied the discussions of what kind of navy to establish, the importance of a coastal navy had been perilously ignored.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The Republic of Ragusa was a maritime city-state located on the Adriatic coast of present-day Croatia. It fell to the French Empire in 1806. *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 163.

<sup>69</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 163.

<sup>70</sup> “Elliot, James,” *Biographical Directory*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=E000122>, (accessed April 28, 2006); *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 161-163.

<sup>71</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 161, 164.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 6: The Public's Views on a Naval Force

One of the most overlooked aspects of the historiography of the U. S. Navy is how the public influenced the formulation of naval policy during the early national period. Most histories about the early years of the U.S. Navy, this thesis included, are heavy on the ideas and writings of prominent congressmen, presidents, and cabinet members. In so far as they address the popular sentiments regarding an American naval force, most naval histories just summarize public outbursts in a general sense in order to lend significance to various historic flashpoints like the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the public voice needs to be incorporated into the narrative of the establishment of a republican navy. The question remains, how best to do this?

The most obvious answer is to peruse the newspapers of the 1790s and 1800s for the public reaction to the congressional debates over naval policy. A reasonable place to start, early newspapers like the *Philadelphia Gazette of the United States* and the *Philadelphia Aurora* do contain many articles, advertisements, editorials, and news clips pertaining to maritime matters. Concern over the actions of privateers instantly jumps out as one important example of public opinion on maritime issues in the early republic. During the late 1790s, this concern revolved around the French privateers unleashed by the Directory's decision in 1797 to attack American commerce by declaring all British goods on neutral ships open to seizure. According to the Directory, any American vessel could be seized that did not contain a "role d'équipage" containing a list of cargo and passengers, composed according to French standards. No American merchant vessels

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<sup>1</sup> An example of this generalization of the public voice is in Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 120-121.



carried such lists, and so the Directory's ruling in effect authorized widespread seizures of American ships by French privateers. It was a war on American commerce in retaliation for the Jay Treaty, which the French interpreted as an abridgment of the 1783 treaties.<sup>2</sup>

When ships were seized, the newspapers responded. One example is the posting in the May 26, 1798 edition of the Philadelphia *Aurora*, under the title of "Highly Alarming!" The news clip warned, "It is said, that there are six French privateers Crusiers [sic] now on our coast, to take all American vessels, with British property on board!" Under this informative bit was the heading, "Highly Alarming, Again." The ensuing information passed on to the readers of the *Aurora* revealed the complexity of the young republic's attempts to maintain the neutrality of its commerce

It is said that there are ten sail of British Ships of war on the American coast, to put in execution the orders of the Duke of Portland, by taking all American vessels bound to or from the ports of France, Spain, or Holland, having the produce of those countries on board. A pretty pickle of filth for the United States to digest. Britons are opposed to us, in all our commercial concerns with those powers which furnish us with cash, and the French opposed to us in our commercial connections with British which serve to drain us of the circulating species, to pay for them. France gives us Hard Money, and the English give us fashionable Bonnets, shoes, etc. Who then won't be United to fight the French? Bonnets, and Shoes, and heavy debt, is certainly preferable to hard Money and a profitable trade, besides which we shall get connected with our *old friends* the British, and disconnected with our *old enemies* the French. The British burnt Charlestown, etc, but who would not be *united* to clasp them to our arms, rather than the French, who aided us to check their conflagrations.<sup>3</sup>

The sarcasm of the *Aurora* is palpable, and highlights the division of American society in the late 1790s between those who wanted to declare war on France, and those who supported the French Revolution (and excused its excesses) over the monarchy of Great Britain. The perspective voiced by the *Aurora* in May 1798 reveals that some Americans

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<sup>2</sup> DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 8-11, 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Aurora* (Philadelphia), May 26, 1798.

did not support Adams' naval strategy that brought America to the brink of war against France. The *Aurora* was clearly such a paper, even going so far as to defend the actions of French privateers and decrying the "insults to the flag" of British naval commanders.<sup>4</sup> In May 1798, the *Aurora* published a poem by Jonathan Pindar, "addressed to the Yeomanry of the United States" entitled "The Farmer and the Sailor: A Fable" that warned the farmers of the republic from joining the nation's new naval force. The concluding moral lesson of "The Farmer and the Sailor" was clear

Thus, if to gratify the Tar  
Ye FARMERS, ye engage in WAR,  
Thousands will surely find their graves,  
Like honest PLOUGHSHARE in the waves.<sup>5</sup>

Just a few months before, the *Aurora* had published an attack on Adams' regional navy strategic vision from "A Boston Correspondent"

If the United States adopt the principle that "A PUBLIC DEBT IS A PUBLIC BLESSING," the sentiments of the President on the subject of a MARINE are perfectly right....Should the United States adopt the system of a marine they must immediately throw a debt upon themselves, beyond any advantages they could derive from their Commerce.<sup>6</sup>

This critic of Adams' naval building programs feared not only the cost incurred by navies, but like anti-navy policymakers, the Boston Correspondent feared the threat posed by navies to a republican society. Arguing that "PRESS GANGS are the natural attendants of a navy," the Boston Correspondent cautioned his fellow citizens not to be deceived by the rhetoric of their representatives. He believed that

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<sup>4</sup> *Aurora* (Philadelphia), July 10, 1798; *Ibid.*, January 8, 1799.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, May 17, 1798.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, December 15, 1797.

The idea of a marine to protect our merchants and seamen, is one of those common *catch terms* to deceive these classes of citizens: the commerce of England is burdened, instead of being benefited by their navy, for the Influence on their property, would not be in any proportion to their Duties for the support of a navy.<sup>7</sup>

Others like the “Quaker in Politics,” the famous English chemist, philosopher, and dissenting clergyman Joseph Priestley, believed that merchants had no right to expect their commerce to be protected by the public. Instead, overseas trade should be at the merchant’s “own ris[k], and the country, which receives more injury than advantage, and whole peace is endangered by it, should not indemnify him for any loss.” Furthermore, the Quaker in Politics continued that “the expense of building one man of war would suffice to make a bridge over a river of considerable extent,” while “the morals of lab[or]ers are much better preferred than those of seamen, and especially those of soldiers.”<sup>8</sup>

The Republican *Aurora* clearly overstated in purporting to represent the “indignation in every American bosom.”<sup>9</sup> While opposition papers like the *Aurora* were skeptical of Adams’ military and naval preparations in 1798 and 1799, others like the *Philadelphia Gazette of the United States* represented those Americans who supported the President’s actions. This perspective believed that “without a well *disciplined army* and a *navy*, we should in a little time have neither *army*, *navy*, *loans*, *taxes*, *liberty*, or *government*.”<sup>10</sup> Not only were naval and military preparations right and proper for a republic, but the *Gazette* argued that “France lowered her tone of *insolence*, and *menace*

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<sup>7</sup> *Aurora* (Philadelphia), December 15, 1797.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, February 26, 1798.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, January 9, 1799.

<sup>10</sup> *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), June 11, 1799.

to the United States” after the commencement of preparations for defense.<sup>11</sup> It was the classic Federalist perspective; that “*Armies and Navies* are expensive things, but what country can long maintain its rights, commerce, and independence without them?”<sup>12</sup>

While the *Aurora* was running “The Farmer and the Sailor,” the *Gazette of the United States* published a long call to arms penned by an anonymous author under the name Fabricius. Stressing that “[f]or five years have we been insulted as well as injured by the French,” Fabricius chastised his fellow Americans

By Heaven! [I]t shall not be said that the Americans of 76 were succeeded by a submissive and degenerate race, that tamely surrendered up the liberties and independence of their country without even a struggle...My brave young Countrymen, you who are coming forward and devoting yourselves to the service of your country...let not the sacred flame expire...<sup>13</sup>

These reactions in Philadelphia newspapers reflected the escalating tension between France and the United States that followed Adams’ April 1798 publication of the XYZ papers. This is hardly surprising, because when one searches the newspapers of the early national period for public comments on naval matters, one does not usually find much relevant material unless one examines the weeks that followed such a historical “flashpoint.” Two similar naval flashpoints were the declaration of war by Tripoli’s leader Yusuf Karamanli on February 26, 1801 and the attack on the *USS Chesapeake* by the *HMS Leopard* on June 22, 1807.<sup>14</sup>

As was previously demonstrated, the difficulty of securing the republic’s commerce in the Mediterranean helped motivate Congress to enact naval legislation well before the 1800s. The Naval Act of 1794 was passed in reaction to the Dey of Algiers’

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<sup>11</sup> *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), June 11, 1799.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, June 11, 1799.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, May 24, 1798.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia L. Dooley, *The Early Republic: Primary Documents on Events from 1799 to 1820* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 126, 178.

demand for tribute, which, after it was granted, led to the decision in 1796 to cut the frigate building program in half. What distinguished the debate in 1801 over how best to respond to the renewal of problems with the Barbary States was that Republicans began to support armed retaliation much more forcefully than in the 1790s. Then, many policymakers, including John Adams, advocated paying off the Dey, as had been the custom of European nations. Ultimately, this strategy won out in the 1790s, but now in the early years of the nineteenth century, with Thomas Jefferson and the Republican Party in power, the reaction was different.

The Republican editor of the New York *American Citizen and General Advertiser*, James Cheetham, wanted policymakers to know that in many citizens' opinion, "the first duty of a government is the protection of its citizens in their lawful pursuits and enterprises, whether by sea or land. This right of protection imposes a duty upon our government to protect them in the Mediterranean as well as on our coast."<sup>15</sup> As has been constantly restated, one common argument of those who opposed the commerce and capital navy building programs of the 1790s was that these programs could not be afforded by a republic, especially one that was struggling to pay off its Revolutionary-era debts. Republicans had always been some of the loudest voices against protecting the commerce or honor of the nation on the seas, but now Republican papers were declaring that "for the honor of our country" they hoped that Congress would not pay off the Barbary States as it had in the 1790s. Expense was no longer a valid reason, countered the *American Citizen*, questioning "why then should we give up our rights in the Mediterranean on account of the expen[s]e which may attend supporting them...we know

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<sup>15</sup> *American Citizen and General Advertiser* (New York City), June 6, 1801, in Dooley, *Primary Documents on Events from 1799 to 1820*, 131.

that so slavish a spirit does not pervade the mind of our executive...And we hope it is reserved to Mr. Jefferson to liberate us.” Why the sudden change in Republican attitude in the summer of 1801? Because, as the *American Citizen* concluded, “it is the desire of every man in the United States that we be freed from the shackles of the Mediterranean powers” and “it would be far better for our republican cannon to thunder in the ear of the barbarians than to pay them a tribute.”<sup>16</sup>

Publishers Samuel Pennington and Stephen Gould of the Newark, N.J. *Centinel of Freedom* stressed in June 1801 the contradiction of Adams’ administration’s “millions for defense but not a cent for tribute” policy towards France, while the Barbary States continued to receive tribute. They hoped, like their Republican colleague, James Cheetham, that this shameful practice would not continue.<sup>17</sup> The next day, an anonymous Republican author of a article in the Philadelphia *Aurora* blamed the British for manipulating the Barbary States like some grand puppeteer, because “the commerce of the United States in the Mediterranean has been a source of jealousy and discontent to the government of Great Britain ever since the treaty of peace in ’83.”<sup>18</sup> As in 1798, the *Aurora* still favored France over Great Britain, but now, the paper reflected a growing sentiment among Republicans that a defense of American overseas trade was not only desirable, but necessary.

After the establishment of a blockade and a series of battles in 1803 and 1804, the Republican editor of the Trenton, New Jersey, *True American* celebrated in January 1805 that on the occasion of the new year, he was

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<sup>16</sup> *American Citizen and General Advertiser* (New York City), June 6, 1801, in Dooley, *Primary Documents on Events from 1799 to 1820*, 131.

<sup>17</sup> *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, N.J.), June 9, 1801, in *ibid.*, 131-132.

<sup>18</sup> *Aurora* (Philadelphia), June 10, 1801.

able to recall the reader's attention to their progress...[W]ithin the last year, our defensive navy has added greatly to the dignity of our country, and its officers and seamen, by their skill and bravery, have given an idea of what they can and will do, when necessity commands their employment in such enterprises.<sup>19</sup>

Wilson applauded his republic's commerce navy, even if he was unwilling to admit that sailing thousands of miles in order to blockade and shell an enemy coastline was not exactly true to the definition of a "defensive navy." A commerce navy was rejected by many Republicans in the 1790s, but now, in a new century, Republican citizens made it clear that they supported the commerce navy strategic vision. Public support was now so strongly in favor of the commerce navy's actions in the Mediterranean that Jefferson's Federalist opponents had trouble criticizing him on his naval strategy. The few editors who tried, like Alexander Young and Thomas Minns of *The Mercury and New-England Palladium* (Boston) had to resort to splitting hairs over the words used by the President in speeches celebrating the victories of his naval commanders in the Mediterranean.<sup>20</sup>

The attack on the *Chesapeake* on June 22, 1807, came on the heels of other British depredations including the episode the previous year when an American merchant sailor, John Pierce, was killed by a cannon shot from the *HMS Leander* in New York harbor (see chapter 4). The *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair involved the controversial British practice known as impressment, whereby British warships stopped American vessels, searched them for Royal Navy sailors who were skipping out on their enlistments. If found, these sailors were returned to service in the Royal Navy, or as in the case of one of the four men seized on the *Chesapeake* only ten miles from Norfolk, Virginia, they were tried as deserters and hanged. From the American perspective, not

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<sup>19</sup> *True American* (Trenton, N.J.), January 7, 1805, in Dooley, *Primary Documents on Events from 1799 to 1820*, 134; Lambert, *The Barbary Wars*, 124-150.

<sup>20</sup> *The Mercury and New-England Palladium* (Boston), January 15, 1802, in *ibid.*, 132-133.

only was American sovereignty challenged by such actions, but many times the impressed sailors were American citizens wrongfully accused of desertion. From the British point of view, she was involved in a struggle for her very existence with Napoleon's France and her chronic shortage of sailors was aggravated by American merchant vessels and warships that were illegally harboring deserting seamen.<sup>21</sup> Jefferson's response to these growing threats along the American coast was to institute an embargo on December 22, 1807, while the same week Congress added to the coastal navy force consisting of galleys and gunboats.<sup>22</sup>

Predictably, the response from American citizens to the events taking place along their coast in 1806 and 1807 was one of outrage. As an anonymous letter to the editor of the *American Citizen* demonstrated, Americans viewed the unprovoked attack on the *Chesapeake* as just "another proof of what we may expect from the British government, unless, foregoing all considerations but of our sovereignty and honor, we are resolved to right ourselves by resistance."<sup>23</sup> This unknown individual advocated "resistance," but in the weeks following the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair, few ideas were offered in the popular sphere regarding how exactly that was to be done. The U. S. Navy was ill-equipped to defend the coast in any manner, and instead, as Samuel Harrison Smith, the editor of the *National Intelligencer* noted, merchants were showing "circumspection" by restraining the natural impulse to strike back at Britain. Instead, Smith counseled them to continue to "repress their spirit of adventure, and run as few risks as possible."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Hagan, *This People's Navy*, 64-68; *National Intelligencer* (District of Columbia), June 26, 1807, in Dooley, *Primary Documents on Events from 1799 to 1820*, 181.

<sup>22</sup> Act of December 22, 1807, ch. 5, 1, *Stat.* 451; Act of December 18, 1807, ch. 4, 1, *Stat.* 451.

<sup>23</sup> *American Citizen* (New York City), August 20, 1807, in Dooley, *Primary Documents on Events from 1799 to 1820*, 183.

<sup>24</sup> *National Intelligencer* (District of Columbia), July 10, 1807, in Dooley, *Primary Documents on Events from 1799 to 1820*, 184-185.



Newspapers are helpful in determining popular sentiment, but they do have their limitations, specifically if one is trying to find popular opinion about naval strategy. Public opinions regarding military or naval strategies are difficult to measure through the papers, although one can find examples of opposition to certain specific proposals, like the negative reaction by some when President Adams proposed allowing merchants to arm themselves in response to the threatening actions of the French Directory.<sup>25</sup> Most entries in early American newspapers either announced that a ship had been seized at sea or reflected the incendiary reactions to flashpoints like the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair. Such articles are useful for determining the national mood amidst crisis-provoking episodes, but not as helpful in discerning any public will pertaining to what naval strategy the nation ought pursue. For such an insight, we can follow the lead of recent scholarly work by William Anderson, Andrew Swan, and Frederick Leiner in exploring the role of American citizens who actively supported a naval force during the Quasi-War through subscription.<sup>26</sup> This alternative way of discerning the naval thoughts of the American public examines how citizens from Newburyport, Massachusetts to Charleston, South Carolina built warships from 1798-1800 by utilizing the common eighteenth century method of the subscription list. Used for building everything from highways in Pennsylvania to libraries in New England, American citizens discovered that subscriptions could be used effectively to augment the painfully slow congressional naval building project of 1794.

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<sup>25</sup> *Aurora* (Philadelphia), March 20, 1798.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson, "John Adams and the Creation of the American Navy," 96-97; Andrew Swan, "'Now We Find It Necessary to Take Care of Ourselves': Citizen Involvement and Influence in the Creation of the United States Navy: 1796-1798," *Essays in History* 42 (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2000), <http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/EH/EH42/Swan42.html>, (accessed online Nov. 9, 2006); Leiner, *Millions for Defense*.

Subscription building projects built the *Philadelphia* (36 guns), *New York* (36 guns), *Essex* (Essex/Salem, 32 guns), *Boston* (28 guns), *John Adams* (Charleston, 28 guns), *Merrimack* (Newburyport, 24 guns), *Baltimore* (24 guns), *Maryland* (Baltimore, 24 guns), and the *Richmond* (Richmond/Petersburg/ Manchester/ Norfolk, 16 guns) and constitute an important form of the public voice largely ignored or misconstrued by the historiography.<sup>27</sup> Some historians have mischaracterized these private building projects as products of Congressional legislation enacted in June 30, 1798. In reality, the citizens of Newburyport were already working on the first subscription in May 1798 and petitioning Congress for supporting legislation by early June. By this time, notices such as the one that appeared in the June 1 edition of Philadelphia's *Aurora* were appearing in many American papers and spurring cities all along the coast to follow the example of Newburyport, as

The patriotic citizens of this town, determined to show their attachment to their own government, and to vindicate its commercial rights, have opened a subscription for the purpose of building a 20-gun ship: and loaning her to government. The sum proposed for building her, is 20,000 dollars. Moses Brown, Esq. has patriotically subscribed 1500 dollars. *An example this, worthy prompt imitation.*<sup>28</sup>

Newburyport had been hit particularly hard by French privateers, having lost \$682,000 from seventy-seven merchant vessel seizures prior to 1800.<sup>29</sup> The town had good reason to desire a commerce navy.

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<sup>27</sup> Ken Hagan is an example of a naval historian who mentions that these ships were built, but after explaining in detail the policy debates of the 1794 frigates, does not explain where these other ships came from. Hagan, *This People's Navy*, 50-51; Anderson, "John Adams and the Creation of the American Navy," 96-97; James L. Moody, ed., *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, 9 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1959-1991).

<sup>28</sup> *Aurora* (Philadelphia), June 1, 1798.

<sup>29</sup> Swan, "'Now We Find It Necessary to Take Care of Ourselves'," <http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/EH/EH42/Swan42.html#n49>, (accessed July 19, 2006).

The so-called subscription ships entered service in the United States Navy from 1798 to 1800, and ranged from ships that were built from the bottom-up according to the latest trends in naval architecture like the *Philadelphia*, to converted merchant vessels like the *Baltimore*. They were built in small towns like Newburyport and large metropolises like New York, northern cities as well as southern cities, but the one thing they shared was that they were all voluntarily funded by private citizens who usually received government bonds rated at six percent annual interest in return.<sup>30</sup>

The amazing thing about these building projects, as Frederick Leiner notes, is that they were undertaken at a time when the United States Navy was very unimpressive and lacking in tangible governmental support.<sup>31</sup> The *Constitution*, *United States*, and *Constellation* had not yet sailed, and American citizens could read congressional reports in newspapers that revealed that support for naval programs were hotly contested.<sup>32</sup> In the summer of 1798, with concerns over war with France rising, the U.S. Navy consisted solely of the converted merchant vessel, the *USS Ganges*, which when it sailed out of Philadelphia on May 24, 1798, had the distinction of being the first warship put to sea since the reestablishment of the Navy with the Act of 1794.<sup>33</sup> However, in spite of this lack of governmental support for a naval establishment and the high cost involved in constructing warships, citizens from New England, the mid-Atlantic, and South were all willing to invest in construction projects in exchange for an uncertain investment.

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<sup>30</sup> Act of June 30, 1798, ch. 64, 2, *Stat. 575*; Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*.

<sup>31</sup> Leiner, *Millions for Defense*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> *Gazette of the United States*, April 12, 1794.

<sup>33</sup> "Ganges," *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, <http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/g1/ganges.htm>, (accessed July 12, 2006).

Secretary Stoddert was convinced these citizens were building ships “at a certain loss of their own money equal to 15 or 20 [percent] on the sum expended.”<sup>34</sup>

Who were the subscribers? Complete lists remain for the *Boston*, *Philadelphia*, *Richmond*, and *Essex*, although only the *Essex*'s list makes any mention of the subscribers' occupation. While one might guess that the vast majority of the subscribers would be merchants, a quick perusal of the *Essex*'s list reveals that only 34 of the 101 subscribers were either a merchant or trader. Many occupations are represented on the list, including shipmasters, shopkeepers, a physician, a lawyer, a blacksmith, a tailor, and an apothecary. These subscribers were a varied lot and they averaged \$744.06 in subscribed contributions.<sup>35</sup> While the *Essex* subscription list does not alter the fact that merchants were clearly the driving force behind the construction of private warships during the Quasi-War, it demonstrates that individuals from many walks of life were willing to do whatever they could to provide their republic with a naval force.

Finally, what do the subscription lists say about the popular conception of a republic's naval strategy? Obviously, these subscriber lists tell us little about how the ships were to be employed. However, the ships supplied to the U. S. Navy averaged 28-guns and fit well into President Adams' concept of a cruising regional navy. These were not capital ships meant to impress Europe, nor were they gunboats intended to ensure the coastal security of America's coastline. Instead, these subscription frigates and sloop-of-war were built for the purpose of convoying American merchant vessels and countering the war on American commerce being waged by French warships and privateers. As far as one can measure a popular voice, it is evident that a large number of

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<sup>34</sup> *Naval Documents*, IV: 32-33.

<sup>35</sup> Leiner, *Millions for Defense*, 192-194.

merchants and many citizens of other professions as well, desired the benefits of a regional navy that could secure their coastline, escort merchant vessels throughout the West Indies, and strike back at the privateers.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Swan, “‘Now We Find It Necessary to Take Care of Ourselves’”, <http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/EH/EH42/Swan42.html#n49>, (accessed July 19, 2006).

## Conclusion

The first thirty years of America's naval strategy was the product of worldwide events, internal politics, economic pressures, personal convictions, and Americans' ideas of what a republic should be. The ideas of republicanism surfaced repeatedly as representatives, presidents, and the public argued why their particular strategic vision of a navy best embodied the values of the American Revolution. From 1782-1793 anti-navy policymakers held sway as the poor state of America's finances and lack of external pressures provided little justification for a peacetime naval force. The last ships of the Continental Navy were sold and the Articles of Confederation provided little authority for Congress to establish a new naval force. The Constitution of 1787 granted this power to the legislature, but it was not until Portugal removed her ships from the mouth of the Mediterranean that advocates of a commerce navy were able to pass an act to build six frigates for the purpose of protecting overseas commerce.

Peace with Algiers interrupted this building plan and the vision of a commerce navy gave way to the regional navy vision of John Adams. From 1797 to 1800 this vision dealt with the threat to American commerce and coastal security posed by French privateers and warships by building frigates and sloops and dispatching them along the American coastline and the Caribbean and indirectly expanding the nations' regional influence. Citizens all along the American seaboard supported the regional navy by building frigates, brigs, and sloops to augment the Federal governments' inconsistent building programs. Adams' strategic vision faced competition from Benjamin Stoddert and other Federalists who envisioned a capital navy, and in 1799 their strategic vision began to predominate as Congress authorized the construction of six ships-of-the-line.

This switch philosophically to a capital navy was short-lived and Adams himself admitted years later he regretted authorizing the six 74-gun ships. Instead, the new century saw the United States return to the strategic vision of the commerce navy. The new Republican president, Thomas Jefferson, ordered the remaining ships of the peacetime naval establishment act of 1801 to the Mediterranean after the Pasha of Tripoli declared war on the United States in May of 1801. The commerce navy was America's naval strategic vision until peace was made with Tripoli in 1805 and violations of America's coastal sovereignty like the attack on the *USS Chesapeake* in 1807 led to the establishment of a coastal navy. This strategic vision has been popularly conceptualized by the much-maligned gunboat and was more the product of congressional policymakers than President Jefferson. Jefferson preferred a coastal navy, but one that was more complex and that would utilize ships-of-the-line, frigates, sloops, and gunboats. The coastal navy dominated American strategic planning until the War of 1812, when the gunboats' failure to prevent the Royal Navy from sailing up the Chesapeake led to the burning of Washington, D.C. Events like this quickly led to the construction of ships-of-the-line and the end of the coastal navy strategic vision.

Events in North America, Europe and the Mediterranean form an important context to the debates over the founding of the U. S. Navy from 1783-1812. However, it is important not to focus so heavily on the chronology of events that we lose sight of the coherency of the strategic visions being offered by policymakers for the establishment of commerce and coastal navies. While domestic and international events provided the pressure to enact some form of policy, Congressional representatives advocated certain visions of an American navy after carefully considering economic, social, and political

factors. Additionally, by focusing on the diversity of policymakers' strategic visions, we see that more color must be added to the "black and white" historiography of Federalists and Republicans during the first two decades of the new republic.

What emerges from this recognition of a more complex debate over the purpose of a navy in the early national period is that policymakers were wrestling with the larger issues of republicanism amidst the discussion of a national defense. Standing armies were feared, and yet despite this trepidation, during the early nineteenth century Congress invested millions into coastal defenses for fear of invasion. The Founders were always hesitant, however, to invest significantly in a navy, so it was up to the policymakers to convince their peers why their particular naval vision best suited the needs and identity of a republic. Everything the Founders did over the first thirty years of the United States was precedent-setting. No one in modern times had attempted to establish a republican form of government on such a large scale, and many fully expected the American experiment to fail. From the inauguration of President Washington to the resolution of the election crisis of 1800, the words and actions of the Founders would impact American government and society for generations. The competing strategic visions of a republican navy—commerce navy, regional navy, capital navy, coastal navy—were equally important in determining the direction that America would take over the next century. Navies were and are among the most expensive and complex organizations known to man, and these policymakers knew the importance of finding the right naval vision for the new nation as they endeavored to forge the identity of the world's first modern republic.



## Timeline of Naval Acts and Appropriations

August 1785 – Last ship of the Continental Navy, the *Alliance*, is sold

March 27, 1794 – “An Act to provide a Naval Armament” authorizing four 44-gun frigates (*United States*, *Constitution*, *President*, and *Constellation*-a 38-gun ship) and two 36-gun frigates (*Congress* and *Chesapeake*) to be built to protect American commerce from Algerine corsairs

June 5, 1794 – “An Act to authorize...a number of Vessels to be equipped as Galleys,” not exceeding ten

April 20, 1796 – “An Act supplementary” to the March 27, 1794 act, allowing construction to continue on two 44-gun frigates (*United States* and *Constitution*) and one 36-gun frigate (*Constellation*, although she was actually a 38-gun frigate) as a result of the peace settlement with the Dey of Algiers

March 2, 1797 – The French Directory issues a decree targeting American commerce

March 3, 1797 – “An Act making appropriations for...Naval establishments” providing extra funding for the completion of the *United States*, *Constitution*, and *Constellation*

March 7, 1797 – President Adams learns that the French Directory refused to receive the United States’ Minister to France, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney

July 1, 1797 – “An Act providing a Naval Armament” that allowed the *United States*, *Constitution*, and *Constellation* to be equipped, manned, and employed

March 27, 1798 – “An Act for an additional appropriation...” to meet cost overruns of the *United States*, *Constitution*, and *Constellation*

April 3, 1798 – President Adams releases the “XZY” dispatches to Congress

April 27, 1798 – “An Act to provide an additional Armament” authorizes the purchase or building of up to twelve 22-gun vessels (including *Adams*, *General Greene*, *George Washington*, and *Enterprise*)

April 30, 1798 – “An Act to establish an Executive department, to be denominated the Department of the Navy”

May 4, 1798 – “An Act to authorize... a number of small vessels to be equipped as gall[ey]s,” not to exceed ten, for the protection of the United States

May 28, 1798 – “An Act to more effectually to protect the Commerce and Coasts” that authorized American commanders of armed vessels to capture any foreign armed vessel “found hovering on the coasts of the United States” for the purpose to seizing American commercial vessels

June 25, 1798 – “An Act to authorize the defen[s]e of the Merchant Vessels” that allowed merchant vessels to arm and defend themselves against the search and seizure by French vessels

June 30, 1798 – “An Act supplementary” that authorized the President to accept up to twelve publicly-financed vessels (*New York* – 36 guns, *Philadelphia* – 36 guns, *Essex* – 32 guns, *John Adams* – 28 guns, *Boston* – 28 guns, *Merrimack* – 24 guns, *Baltimore* – 24 guns, *Maryland* – 24 guns, *Richmond* – 16 guns) in exchange for government bonds (6 percent interest)

July 9, 1798 – “An Act further to protect the Commerce” that authorized American commanders of public armed vessels in service of the U. S. to seize armed French vessels anywhere and also authorized the commissioning of privateers

July 11, 1798 – “An Act for the establishing and organizing a Marine Corps”

July 16, 1798 – “An act to make a further appropriation” for the completion and equipping of three ships of no less than 32-guns (*President*, *Congress*, and *Chesapeake*)

February 25, 1799 – “An Act for the augmentation of the Navy” authorizing six 74-gun ships-of-the-line to be built and six 18-gun sloops to be built or purchased

February 26, 1801 – War declared on U.S. by Yusuf Karamanli, the Pasha of Tripoli

March 3, 1801 – “An Act providing for a Naval peace establishment” that authorized selling all naval vessels except *United States*, *Constitution*, *President*, *Constellation*, *Congress*, *Chesapeake*, *Philadelphia*, *New York*, *Boston*, *Essex*, *Adams*, *John Adams*, and *General Greene*; six of the retained frigates were to be kept in constant peacetime service, while the other were to “be laid up in convenient ports”

February 6, 1802 – “An Act for the protection of the Commerce” that authorized the President to “equip, officer, man, and employ” what vessels he deemed necessary to secure American commerce in the Mediterranean; also authorized commissioning privateers to seize any Tripolitan vessel

February 28, 1803 – “An Act to provide an additional armament” that authorized building or purchasing four 16-gun sloops to protect Mediterranean commerce (*Argus*, *Siren*, *Nautilus*, *Vixen*) and ten gunboats

June 10, 1805 - End of the First Barbary War (or the Tripolitan War)

April 21, 1806 – “An Act in addition to an act” that allowed the President to keep in service as many frigates and other vessels as he saw fit and lay up the rest

June 18, 1807 - *USS Chesapeake* is attacked by the *HMS Leopard*

December 18, 1807 – “An Act to appropriate money for...Gun boats” that authorized the President to build or purchase up to 188 gun boats to protect the ports and harbors of the United States

December 22, 1807 – “An Act laying an Embargo” against all foreign commerce

January 31, 1809 – “An Act authorizing the employment of an additional naval force” that authorized the fitting out and manning of four frigates (*United States*, *President*, *Essex*, and *John Adams*) in addition to whatever other smaller vessels and gunboats the President deemed necessary for the defense of ports and the American coast

March 30, 1812 – “An Act concerning the Naval Establishment” that authorized the repairing and equipping of the *Constellation*, *Chesapeake*, and *Adams* and the rebuilding of the *Philadelphia*, *New York*, *Boston*, and *General Greene*

June 18, 1812 – War declared on Great Britain

## Late Eighteenth Century Ship Classifications

Ship-of-the-line – A warship with multiple gun decks, powerful enough to assume a position in the “line of battle.” The Royal Navy used the following rating system: first rate=100 or more guns (*HMS Victory*), second rate=90-98 guns, third rate = 64-80 guns

Frigate – A medium sized warship with one gun deck, for patrolling and escort duty. The Royal Navy system classified frigates: fourth rate=50-60 guns (*USS Constitution* was often considered a fourth rate), fifth rate=32-40 guns, sixth rate=20-28 guns

Sloop – A small warship carrying 10-18 guns.

Brig – A small, 2-masted, square-rigged ship carrying 10-16 guns.

Gunboat – A small, shallow-draft ship carrying one or more guns.

Galley – A small ship propelled by a combination of oar and sail.

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