

President Jefferson's Dilemma Dealing with Pirates



“England has become a den of Pirates, and France has become a den of thieves”

- John Adams achieved peace with France, but not for long.
- 1803- France and Great Britain were at war again
- Both nations soon started to seize American ships that were trading with their enemy
- President Jefferson took office in 1801, and following in the footsteps of Washington and Adams, he tried to follow the policy of neutrality

Impressment

- Great Britain began impressing American soldiers (kidnapping and forcing them to serve in the British navy)
- British claimed that the men they impressed were their British deserters, some this was true, but thousands of Americans were impressed.

War Fever

The background of the slide features a faded, historical-style illustration of a large, multi-masted sailing ship, likely a frigate or a similar warship, on the open sea. The ship is shown from a side-on perspective, with its sails partially visible. The water is depicted with soft, wavy lines, suggesting a calm but slightly choppy sea. The overall tone is historical and maritime.

- In 1807 Americans were extremely angry after the *Leopard* (British ship) stopped a US warship *The Chesapeake* to search for deserters.
- *Chesapeake's* captain refused to allow the search.
- The *Leopard* opened fire
- 21 American sailors were killed or wounded
- Another war fever struck, but this time against Britain

Piracy

- American ships faced a different threat from the Barbary states of North Africa: Piracy, or robbery at sea.
- Pirates from Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli had attacked merchant ships entering the Mediterranean Sea.
- The pirates seized the ships and held the crews for ransom.

Hypocrisy?

- President Washington and Adams both paid a tribute to Barbary State rulers in exchange for the safety of the American ships.
- While Americans were shouting “millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute” during the XYZ Affair, the United States was quietly sending money to the Barbary States.

Atlantic Ocean



Tangier

Algiers

Tunis

Tripoli

500 miles
500 km

TIME Map by Joe Bertola

Declaring War

- The US had paid the Barbary States almost \$2 million dollars by the time Jefferson became president.
- The ruler of Tripoli demanded more tribute, to show he was serious he declared war on the United States.
- Jefferson hated war, but he HATED paying tribute. The question was... which was worse?

Jefferson Solves the Problem



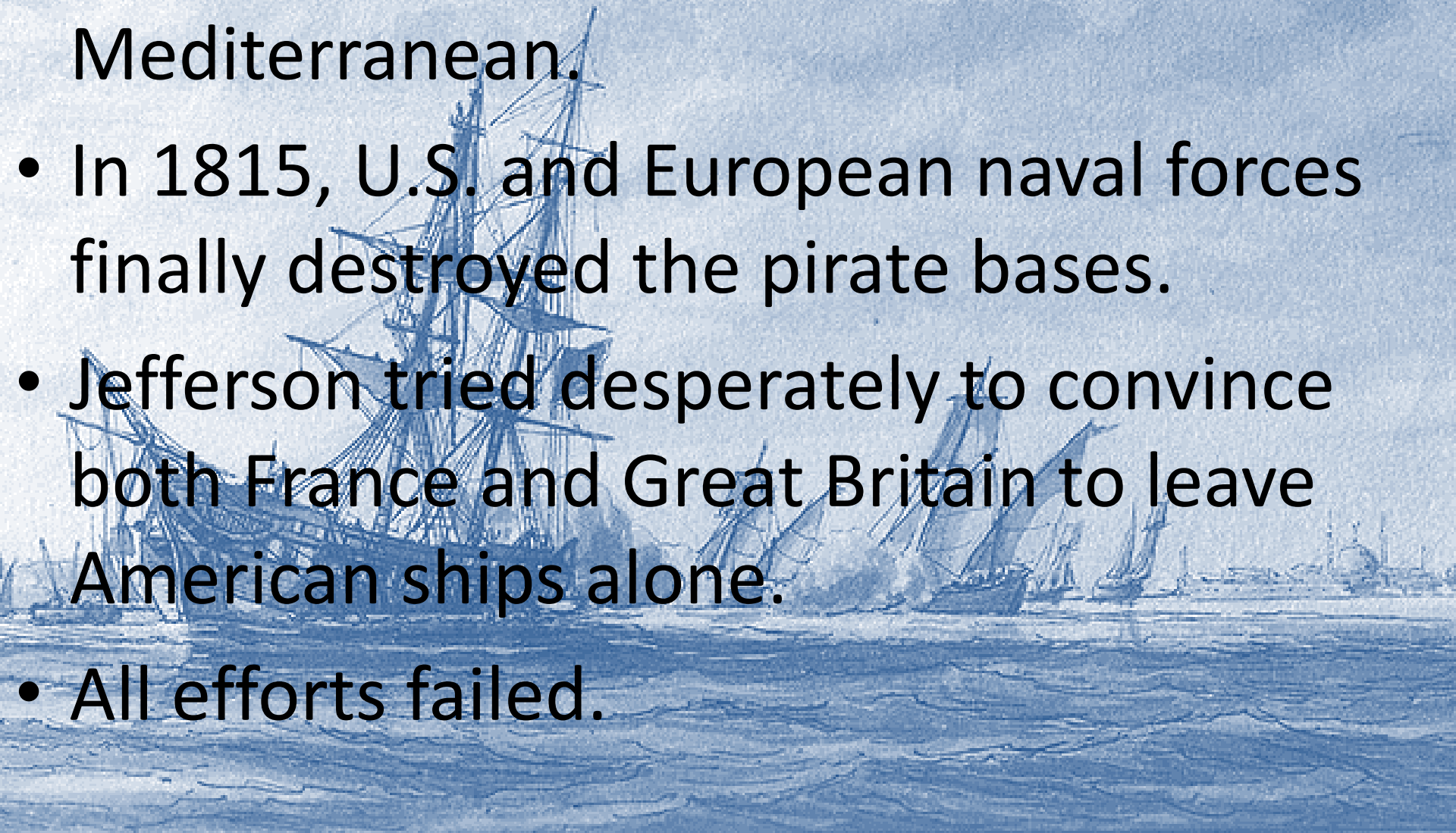
- As much as Jefferson hated war, he hated paying tribute more.
- In 1802, he sent a small fleet of warships to the Mediterranean to “protect” American shipping interests
- The war with Tripoli plodded along until 1804, when American ships began bombarding Tripoli with their cannons.

FIRE!

- Then one of the ships, the *Philadelphia*, ran aground on a hidden reef in the harbor.
- The captain and crew were captured and held for ransom.
- Rather than let the pirates have the *Philadelphia*, a young naval officer named Stephen Decatur led a raiding party into the heavily guarded Tripoli harbor and set the ship afire.

- After a year of U.S. attacks and a blockade, Tripoli signed a peace treaty with the United States in 1805.
- Tripoli agreed to stop demanding tribute payments, in return the U.S. paid a \$60,000 ransom for the crew of the *Philadelphia*
- A bargain compared to the original \$3 million first demanded.

- Pirates from the other Barbary States continued to raid ships in the Mediterranean.
- In 1815, U.S. and European naval forces finally destroyed the pirate bases.
- Jefferson tried desperately to convince both France and Great Britain to leave American ships alone.
- All efforts failed.





Embargo Act

- Jefferson proposed an **Embargo**- a complete halt in trade with other nations.
- Under the Embargo Act passed by Congress in 1807, no foreign ships could enter U.S. ports and no American ships could leave, except those that trade at other US ports.
- Jefferson hoped that stopping trade would prove so painful to France and Great Britain that they would agree to leave American ships alone.

Back to “normal”

The background features a detailed illustration of a three-masted sailing ship, likely a frigate or a similar naval vessel, rendered in a sketchy, woodcut style. The ship is shown from a three-quarter perspective, sailing towards the right. The word "EMBARGO" is written in large, bold, capital letters across the side of the ship's hull. The overall color palette is a warm, orange-brown hue.

- The embargo, however ended up being more painful to Americans than to anyone in Europe.
- 55,000 sailors lost their jobs.
- Newspapers pointed out that *EMBARGO* spelled backwards says “*O GRAB ME*” which made sense to all those who were feeling its pinch.
- Congress repealed the unpopular Embargo Act in 1809.
- American ships returned to the seas, and French and British warships continued to attack them.