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From the Selected Works of Jeffrey J. Malanson

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"Pragmatism vs. Idealism in Jeffersonian
Statecraft: A Review of Francis D. Cogliano's
Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign
Policy

Jeffrey J. Malanson, *Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne*



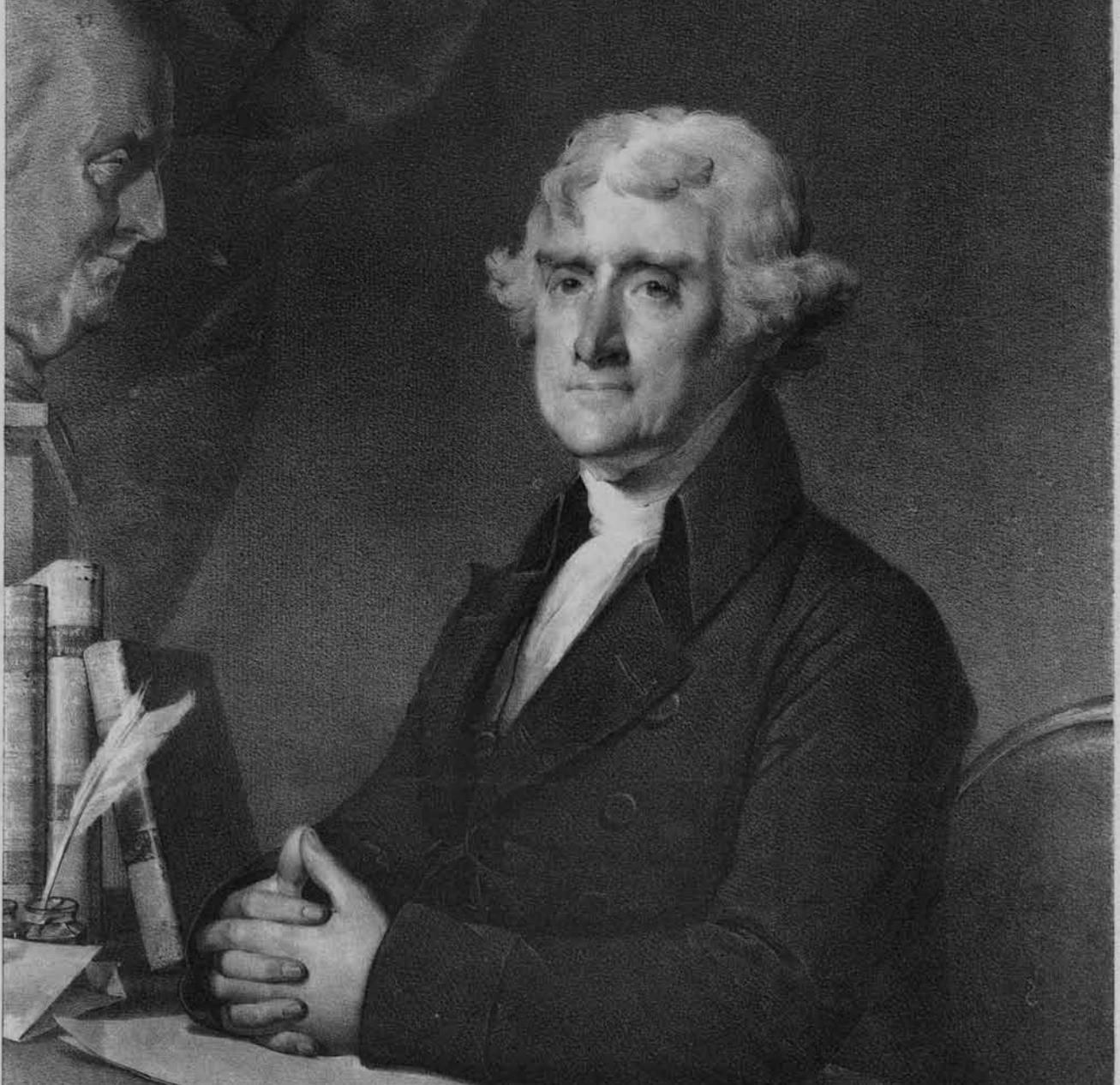
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A Roundtable on Francis D. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty:* *Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy*

Jay Sexton, Eliga H. Gould, Shannon E. Duffy, Robert J. Allison, Jeffrey J. Malanson,
and Francis D. Cogliano

Introduction

Jay Sexton

Few concepts in diplomatic historiography have had the staying power of the binaries of realism and idealism. This has been the case particularly in the literature on the foreign policy of the early republic. This persistent framework has had such pull that even those seeking to escape its grasp have found it difficult to avoid engaging with the labels.

Frank Cogliano's compelling and cogently argued *Emperor of Liberty* seeks to reframe rather than resolve the old idealist/realist binary. To be sure, Cogliano has much to say in response to the traditional argument that Jefferson was a starry-eyed idealist. "He was not a doctrinaire ideologue," Cogliano contends (10). But the book's principle objective is to avoid flattening Jefferson into either of these categories. Jefferson, Cogliano argues, was "an idealist when writing about the future but a realist when considering the world around him." This argument takes issue with the very categories of idealist and realist and focuses instead on the interface between abstract ideas and the practical contexts in which Jefferson operated. The reader is presented with a Jefferson who held firm convictions and had consistent objectives (namely, agrarian expansion and the promotion of open commerce abroad) but used a wide variety of means to achieve them that were dependent upon circumstances. In seven deeply researched case studies, Cogliano examines how Jefferson sought to square means with ends, restraints with opportunities, and interests with ideals.

The reviewers praise *Emperor of Liberty*, though each brings to the discussion distinctive views of the relationship between idealism and realism in Jefferson's foreign policy. Jeffrey Malanson finds much to like in the book but wonders if ideology played a more decisive role in Jefferson's embargo policy than Cogliano allows. Likewise, Shannon Duffy finds that the book convincingly explains how and why Jefferson could embark upon certain ventures, such as military action in Tripoli and the Louisiana Purchase, that appear on their face to violate his political principles. But she wonders how Jefferson's preconceived ideas dictated—indeed, distorted—his foreign policy. Eliga Gould's review helpfully places *Emperor of Liberty* into historiographical context and points toward further ways in which ideology and realism can be seen as "two sides of the same coin."

Another feature of *Emperor of Liberty* commented upon by the reviewers is its coverage. Rather than comprehensively examining Jefferson's role in foreign policy, Cogliano structures the book through seven chapters that explore specific episodes in Jefferson's career. One of the most interesting—and the one that will be the least familiar to non-specialists—is the first chapter, which focuses on Jefferson's unsuccessful tenure as governor of Virginia (the

lowlight of which was Jefferson falling from his horse while fleeing from a British advance on Monticello in 1781). This chapter is central to Cogliano's argument in that it enables him to flesh out how early career experiences conditioned Jefferson's views on the conduct of foreign policy and led this anti-statist republican to embrace strong executive leadership in moments of crisis.

Two of the seven chapters in *Emperor of Liberty* focus on the conflict with Tripoli in the Mediterranean. Cogliano demonstrates here both the significance of economic objectives to Jefferson's overseas agenda and how the Tripolitan War, far from being an irrelevant sideshow, lay at the center of Jefferson's foreign policy, not least in how it showed his willingness to use force. Robert Allison applauds these chapters, noting that Cogliano's close engagement with the primary evidence helps him to avoid the anachronism of recent works that interpret the Barbary conflicts through the prism of U.S. interventions in the Middle East.

Cogliano picks up on the issue of anachronism in his response. He acknowledges that all books, his included, are products of the time in which they are written, before making the case for the need to avoid the trap of presentism. He also points out that he lived and worked outside the United States at a time when many American commentators and statesmen were going to great lengths to present their nation's policies in ideological terms. Their work led many foreign observers to conclude rather simplistically that U.S. policy is the straightforward product of an exceptionalist, missionary ideology.

Cogliano shows how Jefferson's foreign policy portended and paved the way toward the global power established by his successors. "It might be said that Jefferson's vision for a capacious American empire outlived its author," he writes (246). Yet in this superb book he repeatedly (and rightly) stresses the limits of U.S. power in the early republic, thus avoiding the anachronism inherent in so much of the scholarship on the United States in the nineteenth century. Jefferson's "empire," Cogliano notes, remained "a weak state on the periphery of the Atlantic world" (203). Indeed, he refers to Jefferson as "the father of the first American empire," a qualification that illustrates the need to highlight the specific contexts of the United States in the world circa 1800, even as the historian looks toward the *longue durée* of rising U.S. power (6).

Between Is and Ought

Eliga H. Gould

Emperor of Liberty, Frank Cogliano's new book about Thomas Jefferson's foreign policy, opens with the story of a plaster bust of Tsar Alexander I that the president

received in 1804 from Levett Harris, the American consul at St. Petersburg. Although Jefferson usually did not accept such gifts, the likeness became one of his most treasured possessions and eventually found a home opposite a similar statue of Napoleon in the parlor at Monticello. To visitors, the sight of the European autocrats must have seemed odd. Jefferson, after all, was the popularly elected head of an “empire of liberty,” not a hereditary monarch or a self-appointed dictator. Then, as now, people associated him with the ideals of democratic republicanism. Yet in his approach to foreign policy, Jefferson was at heart a pragmatist. In this, writes Cogliano, he was “not unlike his contemporaries Napoleon and Alexander” (10).

As Cogliano notes, this is a contentious argument. Fans and detractors alike usually see Jefferson as an idealist and view his handling of foreign policy accordingly. In their influential 1990 study *Empire of Liberty*, Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson argue that the animating goal of Jefferson’s statecraft was to create a “new diplomacy” that eschewed traditional strategies based on war and balance-of-power politics and valorized peaceful negotiation and the recognition of universal rights. During the Louisiana Purchase, which doubled the territorial size of the United States without shedding a drop of American blood, the strategy appeared to work. (There was bloodshed, of course, but the blood that was shed belonged to the former slaves of Saint Domingue/Haiti and the hapless soldiers that Napoleon sent to subdue them.) On the other hand, during the maritime crisis with Britain, when Jefferson naïvely antagonized the world’s leading naval power, the strategy decimated the nation’s shipping and manufacturing sectors and brought the Union to the brink of collapse. Though sometimes the beneficiary of others’ *realpolitik* calculations, Jefferson thought (and acted) like a moral “crusader.”¹

According to Cogliano, such claims miss the mark. Taking particular aim at Tucker and Hendrickson—the co-authors are mentioned in four different places in the text—he maintains that what their book depicts as naïve idealism in fact partook of a good measure of hard-headed realism. In the case of the Louisiana negotiations, Cogliano writes that Jefferson knew, and was sure that the French and Spanish knew as well, that American forces would have little difficulty taking New Orleans, should a military operation prove necessary. Although he preferred to gain the colony through diplomacy, force was an option too. Force was also an option during the long conflict with Britain over maritime rights. Cogliano is under no illusions about the disastrous effects of Jefferson’s embargo on the American economy, and he concedes that the United States was fortunate to emerge unscathed from the War of 1812. “The embargo was flawed by design,” he says (241). Rather than seeing those shortcomings as the product of moralistic naïveté, however, Cogliano argues that the Union’s weakness and the difficulties that Americans would face in an open war with Britain meant that Jefferson had no alternative. He also maintains that Jefferson was well aware that the resort to economic warfare might lead to a shooting war. In late 1807 and 1808, writes Cogliano, “Jefferson had relatively few options available to him. He chose economic coercion, preparatory to war, as . . . the least bad” (240).

All in all, I find myself in broad sympathy with Cogliano’s argument. As the early chapters of his book show, Jefferson’s pragmatic foreign policy had deep roots. Three setbacks from his early career loomed especially large in this respect: his ineffective (and politically embarrassing) response to the British invasions of Virginia between 1779 and 1781; his failed attempt as U.S. minister

to France to form a coalition of lesser powers against the depredations of the Barbary pirates; and his inability as secretary of state to contain the French Republic’s free-lancing emissary, Edmond-Charles Genêt. All three left him with an appreciation of the need to combine the high-minded pursuit of republican ideals in matters of domestic governance—where Cogliano concedes that Jefferson was an idealist—with hard-headed pragmatism in relations with other governments. According to Cogliano, one of the clearest signs of Jefferson’s thinking was the Tripolitan War of 1801–1805, which he launched to protect American trade and with it the national interest in a rather narrow, *realpolitik* sense. By attacking Tripoli, Jefferson also demonstrated a willingness to use armed force rather than engage in the nonviolent (albeit craven) practice of buying the liberty of American seamen by paying off their North African captors. Chastising the Barbary states was many things, but peaceful it was not.

If Cogliano is right to insist on the pragmatism of Jefferson’s foreign policy, as I am persuaded he is, there are some questions that I would like to hear more about. One in particular is whether Jefferson’s foreign policy was quite as non-ideological as his critique of Tucker and Hendrickson makes it appear. Insofar as the question involves what motivated Jefferson to act, Cogliano has already said as much as he needs to. Even during the embargo, which practically everyone agrees was a failure, Jefferson maintained a clear sense of the national interest, and he was prepared to use a variety of means, including brute force and old-fashioned power politics, to protect it. Yet in order to be historically significant, moral principles do not necessarily have to be used as guides for political action or to be matters of firm conviction or ardent belief. Just as often, ideals serve as rhetorical screens and weapons to justify policies that may or may not have an ideological origin. If we think of moral principles in this way, it seems to me that there were times when Jefferson did play the role of the idealist, albeit in ways that were both calculating and nationally self-interested.

The strategy that Jefferson followed during the maritime crisis with Britain is instructive. By objecting to Britain’s encroachments on American trade and extolling the virtues of an international order based on respect for the rule of law and the recognition of universal rights, especially neutral rights in times of war, Jefferson employed a strategy first developed by Europe’s lesser maritime powers. That group included the Russia of Alexander I, as well as Denmark, Prussia, and the Dutch Republic. Although the rulers and governments that called for a new maritime diplomacy may have done so from moral conviction—Diderot famously included free trade in his vision of a “universal society”—they were just as clearly looking for *realpolitik* ways to protect their own interests without risking a naval war that they would probably lose. The most celebrated example, one with which Jefferson and his American contemporaries were familiar, was the League of Armed Neutrality that Catherine the Great formed in 1780 to protect the merchant shipping fleets of the Baltic powers from British warships.² Though undeniably idealistic and derided in some circles as an “armed nullity,” the league was also the product of clear-eyed political calculation. In both guises, it contributed to Britain’s growing diplomatic isolation during the final years of the War of American Independence, and it ultimately played an indirect role in the decision in 1782 to sue for peace.³ Twenty-five years later, Jefferson hoped for a similar outcome from his ill-fated boycott. Rather than standing at opposite ends of a moral spectrum, realism and idealism were two sides of the same coin.

In *Emperor of Liberty*, Frank Cogliano makes a persuasive case for the pragmatic underpinnings of Jefferson's foreign policy. The diplomat that emerges is both flexible and realistic. To say that this flexibility and realism included the ability to invoke the ideals of the new diplomacy without becoming a prisoner of those same ideals does not, I think, detract from either the man or this latest account of his accomplishments. *Emperor of Liberty* is an important book that diplomatic and political historians of the early American republic will need to address.

Notes:

1. Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (Oxford and New York, 1990), 256.
2. For the league's impact on American thinking about foreign policy, see Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776–1814* (Madison, 1993), 97, 202, 205–6.
3. Richard B. Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence* (New York, 1965), 165–8.

The Pragmatic Philosopher? Review of Francis D. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy*

Shannon E. Duffy

In *Emperor of Liberty*, Francis Cogliano—who has written a work on Thomas Jefferson's relationship to historical memory and edited a collection of Jefferson's writings—aims to show the basic consistency in Jefferson's thought about foreign policy and to rescue him from charges of being a starry-eyed idealist. The book is based on the author's extensive and deep knowledge of Jefferson's writings, as well as a thorough grounding in the recent historiography of events of the period. In contrast to historians who depict Jefferson as overly naïve and idealistic, Cogliano portrays him as a pragmatic realist who consistently approached foreign policy with a flexible, hardheaded recognition of the realm of the possible. Jefferson was “an idealist when writing about the future but a realist when considering the world around him” (10). For Cogliano, this realism was reflected in two key aspects of Jefferson's performance in office: his accurate recognition of America's military weakness on the world stage and his use of creative methods to attempt to compensate for it.

Cogliano builds his case for Jefferson as a pragmatic realist by systematically examining seven specific episodes in Jefferson's life, ranging from his time as governor of Virginia through his tenure as foreign minister, secretary of state, and finally, president. By starting with Jefferson's governorship of 1779–81, rather than in the 1780s or 1790s, Cogliano aims to show a fundamental consistency in Jefferson's thought and action. Historians generally pay little attention to Jefferson's governorship, aside from noting that it was not his finest hour, as the most notable event in it was Jefferson's rather frantic flight from the British, “scampering” away into seclusion after his capital was taken. Cogliano, however, stresses the serious constraints on Jefferson's action at the time, including the weak executive office he held as well as Virginia's general lack of military preparedness. While governor, Jefferson exerted executive authority beyond the stated limits of the office on several occasions during the invasion, trusting that his actions would be approved by his legislature retroactively. His wartime governorship taught him a basic (and very Roman) lesson: that the executive was morally justified in exercising an extraordinary amount of power in grave emergencies; but in order not to slide into despotism, he had subsequently to submit his actions to the judgment of his legislature. This lesson played a crucial role in shaping

Jefferson's future behavior as a political leader, especially in the realm of foreign affairs, teaching him the need for quick and decisive action and a certain flexibility in constitutional principles.

Jefferson's greatest priority throughout his public career was the preservation and expansion of his agrarian republic—through the protection of free trade. He may have envisioned America as an agricultural nation, but he did not see it as a pre-capitalist utopia. Overseas trade was a key component of his ideal. By exporting their agricultural surplus to foreign markets, Americans could continue to enjoy manufactures without having to undergo industrialization themselves, thus staving off the corruption that Jefferson believed inevitably followed a nation's turn to manufacturing. The twin goals of promoting expansion and protecting the trade that would make agriculture economically viable guided Jefferson throughout his career.

Cogliano's text also explains another seeming inconsistency in Jefferson's thought: his readiness to resort to military action against the Barbary nations of North Africa, as opposed to his apparently deep resistance to go to war with either Britain or France. The latter led to his most controversial decision, the Embargo of 1807. While Jefferson believed (erroneously) that the Barbary nations would be easily crushed, and he entertained the possibility of war with Spain over Florida, he strenuously resisted engaging the United States in war with either Britain or France because of the danger such a war would pose to the fragile republic. His alternative methods of dealing with French and British insults were, in essence, stalling mechanisms designed to give the United States time to better prepare for military conflict.

Cogliano convincingly explains how neither Jefferson's military action against Tripoli at the start of his administration nor the Louisiana Purchase violated his constitutional principles, as some historians have claimed. With regard to the Tripolitan War, Jefferson began military action without congressional approval because a state of war already existed (Tripoli being the one to declare war on the United States); he then went to Congress to seek approval of his actions. He followed the same procedure in the Louisiana Purchase, taking decisive action in a time-sensitive crisis but then obtaining retroactive legislative approval. While Jefferson had not instigated the Louisiana Purchase, his excellent sense of timing and adroit diplomacy ensured that the surprise opportunity to purchase the land was not wasted, leading to the greatest triumph of his presidency.

Cogliano makes a strong case that Jefferson as a public leader responded to events pragmatically and flexibly rather than as a stiff-backed ideologue hopelessly constrained by his principles. However, his own text shows a certain Aristotelian pattern in Jefferson's underlying beliefs. Jefferson's day-to-day actions might have been motivated by practical considerations, but his fundamental understandings of the problems that confronted him throughout his life seemed to be based mainly in his ideology and abstract ideals.

For example, it is well known that Jefferson centered his dreams for America's future around a nation of yeoman farmers who would be able to maintain their virtue longer because they were financially independent and did not have to rely on the whims of a patron or employer. This ideal is at the core of Jefferson's vision for the country, the prize that all Jefferson's actions were geared toward preserving. What should be noted as well, however, is that Jefferson's elevation of the virtues of agrarianism can go well beyond typical contemporary criticism of manufacturing societies, into the realm of the mystical. His attitude is clear in such statements as “Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people. . . . It is the focus in which he keeps alive that

sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example" (46). Jefferson's methods for sustaining an agrarian republic might be practical and pragmatic, but his reasons for *wanting* that agrarian republic ultimately seem to be emotional and irrational. That farmers were an inherently better, more moral people than manufacturers seems to be a basic, unquestioned premise derived not from life experience but from Jefferson's philosophy.

What is most striking throughout Cogliano's text, in fact, is the number of times that Cogliano proves that Jefferson acted pragmatically and decisively but at the same time failed in his actions because his basic assessment of the situation, which was derived from his tendency to arrive at premises beforehand, was in error. In the case of the Barbary conflict, Jefferson decided from the outset, while serving as foreign minister in the 1780s, that paying tribute was not an option. His ultimate reasoning does seem to be moralistic in nature: giving tribute to "pyratical states" was morally wrong. Jefferson saw it as a betrayal of American virtue to behave like the corrupted nations of Europe and submit to blackmail. He responded to the Barbary threat first by proposing an overly optimistic scheme to enlist other nations in a joint military venture (which never materialized) and then, as president, with overly rosy assessments of how much damage could be inflicted by U.S. military blockades. Jefferson's efforts to embargo the Barbary states, even at their most intensive, were hardly an unqualified success, particularly given their cost, and ultimately resulted in at most a significant discount on the ransom eventually paid for America's sailors.²

Jefferson's thought also seems to reveal a certain cold-blooded element at several points in his career, as when he chided U.S. diplomats for making personal funds available to the Barbary captives and thus revealing American concern for their well-being to their captors, or when he dismissed the murder victims of the French Revolution (some of whom Jefferson had known personally) as unfortunate casualties of the fight for liberty. His rather famous (or infamous) "Adam and Eve" quote concerning the Parisian prison massacres of 1792 is a classic case in point: "My own affections have been deeply wounded by some of the martyrs to this cause, but rather than it should have failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated. [W]ere there but an Adam and Eve left in every country, and left free, it would be better than as it now is" (96). Cogliano suggests that the extremity of this quotation shows the extent to which the French Revolution polarized American opinion. To me it also suggests something rather disturbing about Mr. Jefferson. Violence in fact often seems an abstract concept to him. While his fellow diplomat in France, the more conservatively minded Gouverneur Morris, was undoubtedly less inclined to admire the French revolutionary republic to begin with, Morris's experience of being caught up in a revolutionary mob in 1792, complete with heads on pikes, doubtless brought home to him the dangers of violent revolution in a visceral way. That was an experience his Republican colleague never had.³

Jefferson's gift for misreading underlying causation and his blithe dismissal of others' pain as necessary for the good of the republic both played key roles in the episode that Cogliano himself acknowledges was a debacle: the Embargo of 1807. Once again, there were several key misconceptions at the heart of Jefferson's policy. By

forbidding all export of American provisions, Jefferson hoped to starve both France and Britain into submission and force both governments to drop their restrictions on neutral trade. He failed to recognize, however, that both empires had other possible sources for raw materials. Jefferson also completely underestimated Britain's level of fear in the face of Napoleonic France, attributing British motives to a desire to squash the neutral shipping of the United States rather than true military desperation.⁴ Once popular resistance to the embargo began growing, Jefferson tended to attribute this resistance to declining virtue among his countrymen rather than the genuine economic pain caused by the embargo.

Cogliano defends the embargo by claiming that Jefferson had few other options. He maintains that Jefferson ultimately expected war; the embargo was a stalling mechanism designed to allow the United States time to get ready while preventing more British and French insults and attacks. The fifteen-month-long embargo ultimately had little to no effect on British and French trade, but it wreaked havoc on the American economy. U.S. exports fell from over a hundred million dollars in 1807 to around twenty million in 1808 (238). Jefferson's failure lay not merely in his initial conception of the embargo, but also in his stubborn refusal to acknowledge its failure over the next two years. Cogliano details the economic and diplomatic aspects of this failure but puts less stress on its long-term political effects within the United States.

It is unclear if Jefferson ever realized the extent of the damage his embargo did. It exacerbated regional tensions—precisely the danger Jefferson tried throughout his entire presidency to avoid—and created lasting ill will towards the Republican-led federal government that would haunt his successor's administration. Ironically, for a president long opposed to a powerful centralized government, enforcement of the embargo required a governmental power that in many ways was more intrusive than any customs decree passed by the British during the colonial period. American

ports were effectively closed by their country's own navy, and federal port authorities were allowed to seize the cargos of ships suspected of violating the act. Northeasterners, whose economies were especially hard hit, came to feel that the federal government was willing to use despotic measures against its own citizens and was unconcerned with their well-being. The Embargo of 1807 did keep the United States at peace for another five years, giving the country more time to prepare militarily. At the same time, it created such serious tensions within the nation that by 1812, President Madison was leading a profoundly divided people into war.

That Jefferson never seems to have recognized the extent of his mistake, attributing the embargo's failure to declining American virtue instead of recognizing, as Cogliano points out, that he as president had failed to "sell" the plan, seems to me to be one of the strongest examples of that ideological stubbornness that too often lurked at the core of Jefferson's thinking. There have been times, in fact, when I have wondered if Benjamin Franklin's famous description of John Adams—that he was "always an honest man, often a wise one, but sometimes and in some things, absolutely out of his senses"—could have been more aptly applied to Adams's colleague and rival, Thomas Jefferson.

Notes:

1. Betsy Ambler to Mildred Smith [June 1781], "An Old Virginia Correspondence," *Atlantic Monthly* 84 (July, 1899): 537–39, quoted on page 26 of *Emperor of Liberty*.
2. The correspondence of Commodore Edward Preble, who was in charge of the blockade during the part of the Tripolitan War, provides a detailed depiction of the geographical, military, and political difficulties inherent in trying to defeat the North Africans through blockade: "Edward Preble (1761–1807) Papers, 1680–1912," Library of Congress manuscripts, Washington, DC, volumes 5–14 (1803–1805).
3. Philippe Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution* (Charlottesville, VA, 2010), 50–54.
4. Jefferson was still maintaining that this was Britain's true goal in 1810: "At length Gr. Br. has been forced to pull off her mask and shew that her real object is the exclusive use of the ocean." Jefferson to Madison, June 27, 1810, in *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1776–1826*, ed. James Morton Smith (New York, 1995), 3: 1638.

Jefferson and Barbary

Robert J. Allison

Jefferson scholars, according to Francis Cogliano, have given too little attention to the Tripolitan War. Dumas Malone devotes five pages to the war in his six-volume biography; a dozen of Henry Adams's 437 pages on Jefferson's first term concern Tripoli; Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson's book on Jefferson's statecraft limits its discussion of the Tripolitan War to a footnote—though a five-page footnote. Cogliano devotes two of his seven chapters to Jefferson's engagement with the Barbary states and shows how this engagement was central to Jefferson's overall strategic vision for the American republic.

Jefferson had a clear ideological vision but was pragmatic about how to attain it. This is Cogliano's main theme—not that Jefferson was an idealistic ideologue or a philosophical visionary, but that his goals for the American republic were rooted in the practical. Jefferson's interest in the Mediterranean was economic, not ideological. The Mediterranean trade was worth \$10 million each year; by threatening that trade, Algiers presented an existential threat to the American republic (170–71).

In his *Report on the Mediterranean Trade* (1790), Secretary of State Jefferson calculated the value of American trade to the Mediterranean: one-sixth of the wheat and flour produced in the United States and one-quarter of the cod caught off the New England coast were sold in the Mediterranean. The cod trade alone employed 1200 men, on 80 to 100 boats. Algerian attacks on American merchant ships limited this trade; resolving the problem of Algiers could double it.

"We ought to begin a naval power, if we mean to carry on our own commerce," Jefferson wrote to James Monroe in November 1784. The Barbary states threatened American trade, and without outlets for American agricultural goods the republican experiment would fail. "Can we begin it on a more honourable occasion or with a weaker foe?" (51)? American commerce was essential to American agricultural production; a navy would be essential to protecting the trade in American grain and fish.

In the spring of 1785 Congress charged Jefferson and John Adams, the minister to London, with resolving the problem posed by the Barbary states and authorized them to spend up to \$80,000 for treaties. Algiers was threatening, and Morocco, which had recognized American independence in 1778, had grown tired of waiting for an American negotiator to make a treaty and had seized an American ship to get the United States' attention.

Morocco was easy. Thomas Barclay, an experienced merchant and diplomat, took six months to reach

Marrakech, but four days after he arrived he and Emperor Sidi Muhammad made a treaty. It cost \$20,000, but there would be no annual tribute. "Send your ships and trade with us," the emperor said, "and I will do everything you can desire" (54).

Algiers would be more difficult. Before Jefferson could send a negotiator, Algiers captured two ships and took twenty-one hostages. With no experienced agent at hand, Jefferson thought Congress meant him to send John Lamb, a Connecticut mule trader who carried Congress's dispatches to Paris. "He has followed for many years the Barbary trade," Jefferson told Adams, "and seems intimately acquainted with those states." Although Lamb also brought a reference from Connecticut's governor, Jefferson had "not seen enough of him to judge of his abilities" (55).

Lamb's abilities included neither haste nor discretion. After "maney little disappointments" in the seven months he took to trek from Paris to Algiers, Lamb clashed with everyone—American hostages, Spanish and French consuls, Algerian officials—except England's consul, who had been humiliatingly abusive to the American prisoners. Richard O'Brien, the captain of a captured vessel who had emerged as the leader and spokesman for the American hostages (and later would be American consul-general in Algiers) "could hardly believe Congress would [have] sent such a man to negotiate so important an affair as the making a peace with the Algerines where it required the most able Statesman and Politician" (58). But not even the most able statesman or politician could have made peace on the terms Lamb was authorized to offer: \$4,200 to ransom the 21 hostages. Muhammad V ben Othman, the dey of Algeria, demanded nearly \$60,000. Lamb left Algiers. A year later another correspondent reported to Jefferson that Lamb was "about to embark from Minorca with a load of Jack-asses for America. *Sic transit Gloria mundi!*"¹

Tripolitan envoy Abdurrahman's arrival in London raised Adams's hopes, and he urged Jefferson to London. "There is nothing to be done in Europe, of half the Importance of this, and I dare not communicate to Congress what has passed without your concurrence" (63). Abdurrahman could arrange peace with Tripoli for £30,000, and with all the Barbary states for £200,000. Of Abdurrahman Adams said, "This man is either a consummate politician in art and address, or he is a benevolent and wise man. Time will discover whether he disguises an interested character, or is indeed the philosopher he pretends to be" (63).

Jefferson was not very impressed. The cost of peace would be far beyond what Congress was willing to pay. He and Adams had "honestly and zealously" set out to buy a peace, as Congress directed, but Jefferson had "very early thought it would be best to effect a peace thro' the medium of war" (66). He estimated that it would cost £450,000 to build and man a fleet and £45,000 a year to maintain it. It would be more expensive than buying peace, but Jefferson believed that other nations would contribute funds: Portugal, Denmark, Rome, Venice, Sweden, the German states, and ports in Malta and Naples. He met with the consuls and ministers from the potential allies, proposing a "Convention Against the Barbary States." To bolster support in America, he had the Marquis de Lafayette propose it as his own idea to George Washington and Foreign Minister John Jay. Jay submitted it to Congress, where it slowly but quietly died.

Jefferson's Barbary Convention, Cogliano says, came out of his recognition of American weakness. He sought to use the country's limited power in collaboration with other nations. Together they could blockade the Barbary corsairs and force them individually to treaties. "I am of the opinion [John] Paul Jones with half a dozen frigates would totally destroy their commerce," he wrote to Monroe, "not by attempting bombardments as the Mediterranean states do . . . but by constant cruising and cutting them to peices

[sic]" (51).

Though his Barbary Convention came to naught, Jefferson held onto the idea of sending John Paul Jones to Algiers. When Congress opted to purchase peace rather than use military force in 1791, Secretary of State Jefferson commissioned Jones to be the American negotiator in Algiers. Jefferson did not expect a purchased peace to last, so he told Jones to study Algiers's defenses as "we look forward to the necessity of coercion."²

Unfortunately for Jefferson's strategy, Jones died before receiving those instructions, and years passed before the United States sent an agent to Algiers again. Meanwhile, Algiers resumed its attacks, and by the end of 1793 more than a hundred American sailors languished in captivity there. Jefferson now was in retirement in Monticello, and though his political allies opposed the move, the United States began to build a navy to fight Algiers. However, peace was purchased before the frigates were launched. The Barbary treaties cost the United States \$1.25 million (about 20 percent of the federal budget) and required annual tribute in the form of naval supplies, including ships and weapons. President Washington thought this "disagreeable" but saw no alternative "but to comply, or submit to the depredations of the Barbary Corsairs" (149).

Congress was not happy with the treaties, and by 1800 neither was Yusuf Karamanli, the pacha of Tripoli. The American tribute was always late, and the treaty treated Tripoli as an Algerian satellite. In October 1800 Karamanli gave the American consul six months to deliver \$250,000 plus \$20,000 in annual tribute. This demand reached the United States just as Jefferson was assuming the presidency. On May 15, his cabinet discussed Tripoli's threats to American commerce and unanimously agreed that the executive must protect American interests. Jefferson dispatched three frigates and a schooner to the Mediterranean to observe, to protect American commerce, and, if necessary, to blockade any states that declared war, if possible in collaboration with other powers. When Congress reconvened in December he would inform it of these developments. The cabinet did not know that on the previous day—May 14, 1801—Tripoli had declared war by cutting down the flagpole in front of the American consulate.

Jefferson would try to fight the Tripolitan War without expanding the federal budget. By 1803 this strategy's flaws were obvious. Three or four ships could not both blockade Tripoli and cruise the Mediterranean protecting American commerce. When one of the American frigates ran aground off Tripoli in October 1803, the war went from ineffective to disastrous.

Jefferson responded to this disaster—the loss of the second-largest ship and the taking of 300 prisoners—by sending six more frigates, five schooners, and a brig to the Mediterranean. Congress authorized a "Mediterranean Fund," created with an additional 2½ percent tariff to pay for the expanded war and build more ships. From William Eaton, the American consul in Tunis, the administration learned that the Tripolitans were "very discontented and ripe for revolt; they want nothing but confidence in the prospect of our success" (166). The administration authorized Eaton's plan to ally with Yusuf Karamanli's deposed brother Hamet and lead a force into Libya rallying the Tripolitan people to cast off Yusuf in favor of his brother. But Jefferson also gave the naval commanders discretion in their support for Eaton's venture, making it clear that American policy was to free American trade in the Mediterranean, not establish Hamet Karamanli in power in Tripoli. Eaton and Hamet Karamanli captured the city of Derna in April 1805, but the Tripolitan people failed to rise up for Hamet, and the naval officers negotiated a treaty with Yusuf that was favorable to American trade.

A deeply embittered Eaton recalled that Attorney General Levi Lincoln, before the venture to Libya, "amused

me with predictions of a political millennium which was about to happen in the United States. The millennium was to usher in upon us as the irresistible consequence of the goodness of heart, integrity of mind, and correctness of disposition of Mr. Jefferson. All nations, even pirates and savages, were to be moved by the influence of his persuasive virtue and masterly skill in diplomacy."³

Jefferson's policy in the Mediterranean was not to secure a political millennium, but to secure American trade. The policy was consistent with his overall strategic vision for the United States, as Cogliano makes clear in this study. The Tripolitan War was not a minor distraction; it was the major chord in Jeffersonian diplomacy. It was not an inconsistent use of force by a pacific chief executive, nor a stretching of constitutional strictures. Jefferson in the 1780s had advocated military force in the Mediterranean—a multinational alliance if possible, but a lone American venture if necessary. American commerce was the essential instrument for developing the American republic, and a navy would be required to protect trade in the world's oceans. Cogliano takes notice of the Jefferson books that have downplayed Tripoli; he also takes notice of the books written since 2001 that try to show Tripoli as a precursor to more recent engagements with the Middle East. All are anachronistic. Cogliano takes Jefferson on his own terms and by focusing on the primary documents recovers the world as Jefferson and his contemporaries understood it.

Notes:

1. Robert Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World* (Chicago, 2000), 16.
2. Allison, *Crescent Obscured*, 18.
3. Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1891), 2: 431.

Pragmatism vs. Idealism in Jeffersonian Statecraft: A Review of Francis D. Cogliano's *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy*

Jeffrey J. Malanson

The standard historical narrative presents Thomas Jefferson as the primary example of idealism in action in early American foreign policy. Rather than being a realist of the George Washington school, Jefferson believed in a set of principles (chief among them were free trade, western expansion, and the sanctity of American rights), and his desire to see those principles unwaveringly defended shaped his foreign policy, regardless of on-the-ground realities or other practical considerations.

Francis D. Cogliano skillfully and persuasively challenges this narrative in *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy*. At the heart of his investigation is an effort to confront the realist-idealist dichotomy: he argues that while "Jefferson proclaimed himself an idealist," he was not a "doctrinaire ideologue" when it came to foreign policy (9–10). Cogliano frames Jefferson's understanding of America's republican empire as being "premised on access to plentiful land and overseas trade," and he contends that the strength of this republican vision and its centrality to Jefferson's statecraft renders any realist-idealist assessment somewhat useless (5). He asserts that "Jefferson was an idealist when writing about the future but a realist when considering the world around him. . . . [A]lthough Jefferson was guided by a clear ideological vision for the American republic, he was pragmatic about the means he employed to protect the republic and advance its strategic interests." To phrase this slightly differently, "Jefferson's ends were consistent, yet he was flexible about the means he employed to achieve them" (10). Jefferson as pragmatist within a

larger idealist context is a new spin on the third president. The force of Cogliano's argument and evidence encourages serious engagement with and an honest reassessment of the concept of Jeffersonian idealism.

It appears that an early version of this project would have focused primarily on Jefferson's presidency as the time when he could most directly shape the direction of U.S. foreign policy, but Cogliano wisely (I would argue) broadened that focus to investigate a series of different episodes stretching across forty years of Jefferson's public career. "We can understand Jefferson's actions as president," Cogliano explains, "only if we appreciate how he came to understand power and international relations throughout his career as an office-holder: as governor of Virginia, minister to France, and as secretary of state, vice president, and president of the United States." This longer-term, episodic analysis serves to more completely "illuminate [Jefferson's] understanding of America's place in the world" (7). In seven chapters Cogliano examines Jefferson's conduct as governor during Great Britain's 1780–81 invasion of Virginia; negotiations with the Barbary states while he was stationed in France; his handling while secretary of state of the Nootka Sound crisis of 1790 and the French Revolution; his near powerlessness as vice president during the "Quasi-War" with France and his more aggressive response to the Alien and Sedition Acts; and finally, his presidential statecraft during the Tripolitan War, the Louisiana Purchase, the impressment crisis, the Monroe-Pinkney Treaty negotiations, and the embargo of 1807.

While much of this list represents the necessary "greatest hits" of Jefferson's foreign policy, the first three episodes in particular go a long way toward explaining the longer-term trajectory of Jefferson's views and illustrating Cogliano's argument about pragmatic means and idealistic ends. The chapter on Jefferson's term as governor demonstrates the development of Jefferson's views on the role of the executive. These views might run counter to what many would expect of Jefferson, especially given his later concerns about the powers of the president under the new Constitution. The events that occurred while Jefferson was governor, including the British invasion, the inquiry into his conduct, and Virginia's flirtation with giving the governor virtually dictatorial powers in times of crisis, fostered in him a belief, Cogliano concludes, that "an executive must act decisively in crisis. In so doing he might sometimes have to exceed constitutional limits, provided he did so for the public good and in the spirit of the constitution and, crucially, sought retrospective legislative approval for his actions" (34). Jefferson's gubernatorial experience might not have had much to do with foreign policy, but it gives the reader the right perspective from which to approach the rest of the book.

While minister to France from 1785 to 1789, Jefferson repeatedly pushed for the United States to build a navy and go to war against the Barbary states rather than relying on negotiation and annual tribute payments to preserve peace and safeguard American commerce. Jefferson's contention that the United States should not have to play by the same rules as Europe in dealing with the Barbary states contains a stronger idealist streak than Cogliano would allow, but it is an example that suggests how messy these assessments of idealism versus realism actually are. So much depends on the angle from which the episode is viewed. The call for a naval buildup and for war represents a more martial

version of Jefferson than we are accustomed to seeing.

Amongst all the events covered in *Emperor of Liberty*, I was especially glad to see Cogliano include the Nootka Sound crisis of 1790 as part of his analysis. Aside from the ongoing challenge posed by the Barbary states, the threat of an Anglo-Spanish war on the American frontier, along with the upheaval it might create in the balance of power in North America, was the first real foreign policy crisis faced by the United States under the Constitution. In the end the United States was not required to act, but the Washington administration's responses to the crisis revealed a great deal about international diplomacy and the role of the United States in the world at a critical juncture in the country's history. It was a formative experience for both Washington and Jefferson. Taken as a whole, these episodes contextualize Jefferson's worldview before the United States had to confront the extreme challenges posed by the French Revolution and two decades of Anglo-French war.

Emperor of Liberty is full of surprises. The Thomas Jefferson writing at the end of his governorship about executive power and a Virginia citizenry perhaps not entirely suited for republican government reads like a Federalist statesman in the making rather than the future founder of the Democratic-Republican party. Jefferson's flirtation with the overthrow of the government of Tripoli in 1804, while ultimately abandoned, foreshadowed a staple of America's twentieth-century foreign policy. Cogliano also embraces Jefferson's inconsistency in a way that is commendable. Jefferson has been criticized by some historians for his lack of consistency in many aspects of his life, but Cogliano views the inconsistency as a mark of Jefferson's blend of pragmatism and idealism: "[Jefferson] was not concerned about consistency in his methods so much as expediency in achieving his ends" (93).

Despite the complex image of Jefferson that *Emperor of Liberty* presents, this is a highly accessible book that will work extremely well in a wide variety of undergraduate classroom settings. Cogliano challenges our understanding of Jefferson and the differences between idealism and realism in U.S. foreign policy in ways that should yield thoughtful classroom discussions. The book also features one of the best summaries that I have

read of Jefferson's views on agrarian virtue, the corruptions of manufacturing, and the importance of commerce to the republican empire.

This is a book deserving of praise, but I do have to quibble with the subtitle—*Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy*—as it is too limiting a description of Cogliano's study. I think that the term Cogliano might have preferred to use is "statecraft," as he cites the concept repeatedly when discussing Jefferson's leadership and decision making. The opening chapter on Jefferson as governor of Virginia, the treatment of his response to the Alien and Sedition Acts, and even his handling of the Louisiana Purchase are not really concerned with foreign policy so much as Jefferson's conception of the powers of the state (and states) and the contours of republican empire. This is not a criticism; rather it is a commentary on the strength of Cogliano's vision of the elements of Jeffersonian statecraft, which exceeds the more narrow bounds of foreign policy. It is possible, of course, that Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson's *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (1990) made the use of "statecraft" impractical.

My main point of contention with *Emperor of Liberty* is that even though I found Cogliano's argument to be important and thought-provoking, I was ultimately not

convinced by it in every case. There were greater elements of pragmatism in Jefferson's worldview than I previously would have conceded, but I continue to believe that idealism played a larger role in determining Jefferson's foreign policy than Cogliano contends. The specific point of departure here is Jefferson's decision to reject the 1806 Monroe-Pinkney Treaty with Great Britain. Jefferson and his cabinet decided not to approve the treaty, which would have replaced the expired Jay Treaty and "won some significant concessions" from the British (224). They were troubled primarily by the treaty's failure to address concretely the impressment of American seamen into service in the British navy. Cogliano asserts that Jefferson believed "that it was politically and ethically impossible to compromise over the impressment question" and that his refusal to submit the treaty to the United States Senate for ratification was a "means to continue the negotiations [with Britain], not close them off." Cogliano concludes that "Jefferson's response to the Monroe-Pinkney treaty was grounded in a realistic assessment of the situation, not excessive idealism" (226–27). The ultimate result of the failed treaty negotiations was the embargo of 1807, which "historians often ascribe . . . to misguided Jeffersonian idealism." Cogliano rejects this assessment, as "this interpretation assumed that Jefferson had a range of options available to him but was blinded by his idealism or moralism. On the contrary, Jefferson had relatively few options available to him. He chose economic coercion, preparatory to war, as, he believed, the least bad of these" (240). In this isolated instance, Jefferson did not have many options open to him, but that was because he had severely limited his options by having rejected the Monroe-Pinkney treaty earlier that year.

James Monroe and William Pinkney pragmatically negotiated the best treaty that they could, given both the constraints under which Britain operated (Cogliano describes Britain as being engaged in a "death struggle against Napoleon") and the relative weakness of the United States (235). I would argue that the decision to reject the treaty because of impressment was not a decision grounded in pragmatism. Whether one wants to ascribe the rejection of the treaty to Jefferson's idealism about American rights, his inability to assess realistically America's weight in the world (a blind spot he frequently succumbed to throughout his life), or an impractical expectation that the British would give in to American demands in subsequent rounds of negotiation, the decision was not one based on a pragmatic assessment of likely outcomes. A dozen years earlier, the United States confronted a strikingly similar set of circumstances in its relations with Britain; the Jay Treaty preserved peace, secured important commercial concessions, but sacrificed larger principles on impressment and neutral trade. George Washington signed the treaty, believing that peace and commerce were more important for a weak United States than was taking a stand in defense of principles that could not be defended. Jefferson faced the same basic decision, and acknowledged the same basic weakness, but was unwilling to sacrifice principles, even temporarily. He effectively backed himself into a corner where his options were limited and had to choose between destroying American commerce with an embargo (another decision in part premised on an overestimation of America's weight in the world) or war.

Even if I was not fully convinced in every particular by Cogliano's argument, I cannot stress enough how worthwhile I found *Emperor of Liberty* to be. This is a highly

readable and highly valuable reconsideration of Thomas Jefferson and his foreign policy that forces its readers to approach with fresh eyes and a new understanding the statecraft of our third president.

The Lowest of the Diplomatic Tribe: Idealism, Realism, and the Perils of Presentism

Francis D. Cogliano

I would like to thank Andrew Johns and Jay Sexton for this opportunity to discuss *Emperor of Liberty*. I am very grateful to Robert J. Allison, Shannon E. Duffy, Eliga H. Gould, and Jeffrey J. Malanson for their careful and generous reading of my book. By way of a response, I would like to reflect on how I came to write the book while addressing some of the specific matters raised by the reviewers.

I was gratified that Robert Allison was invited to comment on my book. Allison's *Crescent Obscured* remains the definitive work on the early relations between the United States and the Islamic world.¹ I profited greatly from his work in writing my own chapters on Jefferson's attempts to solve the Barbary "problem." He is correct that my study devotes greater attention—two out of seven chapters—to U.S.-Barbary relations and the First Barbary War (1801–5) than previous studies of Jefferson's statecraft. To some extent the focus on that conflict places *Emperor of Liberty* in context. As I write this, and as I was writing those chapters, the United States is waging war in the Islamic world. As with the First Barbary War, the conflict (thus far confined to airstrikes in Syria and northern Iraq) has raised questions over whether the president or Congress has the ultimate authority to wage war and whether the United States should commit ground forces to the conflict.

These, of course, have been recurrent themes in American foreign policy since 2001. As I noted in *Emperor of Liberty*, a spate of books on the Barbary wars have appeared (or been republished) since 2001. Several of these seem to have been written and published with the "War on Terror" in mind and present the First Barbary War as the "First War on Terror." This type of presentism does little to help us understand contemporary conflicts and distorts our understanding of the past. We need to be aware of the context in which a particular book appears but, armed with that awareness, wary of allowing present-day concerns to distort our understanding of the past.

While one must avoid the perils of presentism, I believe *Emperor of Liberty* is, like all works of scholarship, a book of its time. As a scholar of the United States living outside of the United States, I have, for more than twenty years—a period that began when Francis Fukuyama anticipated the "end of history" and that includes the 9/11 attacks and their prolonged and bloody aftermath—witnessed the degree to which American foreign policy shapes the world beyond the United States. Meanwhile, the core constitutional and political questions arising from the policy decisions of the George W. Bush and Obama administrations—particularly concerning executive authority in making foreign policy and deploying force—couldn't help but inform the questions I asked when studying Jefferson's approach to statecraft.

Put another way, I devote much more attention to the Barbary War than Robert W. Tucker and David C.

Hendrickson do in their fine study of Jefferson's statecraft, as Robert Allison notes in his comments.² Writing, as they did, when the Cold War was coming to an end, Tucker and Hendrickson focused on the place of the United States in great power diplomacy and dismissed the Barbary War as the equivalent of a "police action" from the latter part of the twentieth century. By contrast, Jefferson's policy toward North Africa takes on different cast when a book is being written, as mine was, in an era of persistent (and seemingly permanent) American "small wars" in the Islamic world. This is not to say that *Emperor of Liberty* is "about" the "War on Terror" and its aftermath any more than Tucker and Hendrickson's book is "about" the Cold War. Rather, one must appreciate the context in which a work of scholarship appears. *Emperor of Liberty* seeks to examine the origins, development, and implementation of Jefferson's statecraft. It does so informed by a rich historiography. My hope is that the major themes the book addresses will transcend the current moment even as that moment informs some of the questions that I sought to address.

Jefferson has often been portrayed as a misguided idealist who failed to understand the diplomacy and statecraft of the great European powers and pursued an unrealistic foreign policy that resulted in the War of 1812, which was nearly catastrophic for the new American republic. This is certainly one of the themes of Tucker and Hendrickson's *Empire of Liberty*.

Eliga Gould interprets my critique of Tucker and Hendrickson as suggesting that Jefferson's foreign policy was "non-ideological." I think that interpretation overstates the case somewhat. While I don't feel that ideology was as important a driver of Jefferson's foreign policy as Tucker and Hendrickson do, I do believe it was important to Jefferson. My main argument in *Emperor of Liberty* is that "although Jefferson was guided by a clear ideological vision for the American republic, he was pragmatic about the means he employed to protect the republic and advance its strategic interests" (10). His ends may have been ideological, but his means were pragmatic. My view is that Jefferson was neither an idealist nor a realist in his pursuit of foreign policy. Moreover, I believe that the idealist/realist dichotomy, which is a product of the historiographical debates over American foreign policy during the twentieth century, is not appropriate for describing foreign policy during the early republic.

Jeffrey Malanson addresses Jefferson's idealism in his review. He argues that "Jefferson's contention that the United States should not have to play by the same rules as Europe in dealing with the Barbary states contains a stronger idealist streak than Cogliano would allow." I'm not sure that there is all that much between my view and Malanson's on this issue. In chapter 2 I discuss the debate between Jefferson and John Adams over the Barbary question during the 1780s, when they were both diplomats in Europe. I stress that Adams pursued a more pragmatic approach, arguing that the United States should pay tribute to the North Africans; while Jefferson took the position, which he believed was grounded in principle, that the United States should lead a coalition of lesser naval powers and wage war against the Barbary states.

Later in his review Malanson writes that he continues to believe "that idealism played a larger role in determining Jefferson's foreign policy than Cogliano contends." He cites my treatment of the negotiations over the Monroe-Pinkney Treaty and the subsequent embargo. My view

is that Jefferson decided not to submit the treaty to the senate for consideration because it failed to address the issue of impressment, arguably the most important point of contention in British-American relations. I argue that Jefferson's response to the treaty was grounded in realism in the sense that he appraised the situation, judged the treaty to be politically unacceptable, and sought to prolong the negotiations in the hope that Britain might relent on the impressment question. As Secretary of State James Madison wrote of the situation, "As long as the negotiation can be honorably protracted, it is a resource to be preferred, under existing circumstances, to the peremptory alternative of improper concessions or inevitable collisions" (quoted on p. 227). I don't agree with Malanson that Jefferson's rejection of the treaty arose from an "inability to realistically assess America's weight in the world." Rather, he rejected the treaty because he made an accurate assessment of America's relative weakness *vis-à-vis* Britain. As with the later embargo, I think Jefferson opted for the least bad of the limited options available to him.

Writing of Jefferson's approach to the Barbary states, Malanson states that "it is an example that suggests how messy these assessments of idealism versus realism actually are." I am in complete agreement with him here. Where Jefferson is concerned, the realist/idealist dichotomy obscures as much as it reveals and doesn't really help us to

As president Jefferson grounded his policies in an awareness of American weakness. I think he understood just how weak the United States was in geopolitical terms. His tenure as a diplomat in Europe provided almost daily reminders of American inconsequence. As he wrote to James Monroe in 1784, "we are the lowest and most obscure of the whole diplomatic tribe" at Versailles. This is perhaps the most important issue over which Malanson and I disagree, rather than where we place Jefferson on some imagined realist-idealist spectrum.

understand Jefferson's actions. I believe Jefferson was guided by an idealistic vision for both the United States and international relations, but his tenure as a diplomat exposed him to the realities of power politics and the limits of American influence. As president, Jefferson grounded his policies in an awareness of American weakness. I think he understood just how weak the United States was in geopolitical terms. His tenure as a diplomat in Europe provided almost daily reminders of American inconsequence. As he wrote to James Monroe in 1784, "we are the lowest and most obscure of the whole diplomatic tribe" at Versailles.³ This is perhaps the most important issue over which Malanson and I disagree, rather

than where we place Jefferson on some imagined realist-idealist spectrum.

Shannon E. Duffy seems more comfortable than Jeffrey Malanson with my argument that Jefferson's actions were pragmatic and that he interpreted events from an ideological perspective. She writes that "Jefferson's day-to-day actions might have been motivated by practical considerations, but his fundamental understandings of the problems that confronted him, throughout his life, seemed to be based mainly in his ideological and abstract ideals." In this I think Duffy and I agree. She argues, however, that Jefferson's idealism was frequently based on erroneous assumptions that led him astray in foreign relations. She attributes his failures to actions taken "because his basic assessment of the situation, which was derived from his tendency to arrive at premises beforehand, was in error," and she cites his mixed success in North Africa and the failure of the embargo.

Yet Jefferson felt vindicated by the Tripoli Treaty that brought the Barbary War to an end. While the United States committed to a one-off payment of \$60,000 to release the crew of the U.S.S. *Philadelphia*, it did not commit to annual tribute payments, which was the point of principle over which Jefferson had waged the war. Nonetheless, the Barbary War was expensive—so expensive that one might argue that it vindicated John Adams's 1786 view that the United States would have been better off paying tribute

than waging war. Jefferson, by contrast, felt that paying tribute would be more costly in the long-run. In addition to the annual payments, new, more expensive treaties would have to be negotiated periodically with all four Barbary states.

Although I feel that Jefferson may have had a surer understanding of the international situation than Duffy does, I agree with her that Jefferson could be callous and indifferent to the suffering of others. Violence, as Duffy notes astutely, often seemed like “an abstract concept to him.” Perhaps that shouldn’t surprise us. During the course of his long life Jefferson held approximately 600 persons in bondage—including his own children. His assumptions about the efficacy and the consequences of the embargo were faulty, and his leadership therefore seriously deficient, in part because he was indifferent to the suffering the embargo caused and didn’t appreciate its extent. It was, as I argue in the book, a failure and his greatest mistake as president, and it seems to me to be the strongest evidence for Duffy’s assertion that Jefferson made bad policy based on faulty premises. I don’t think that he did so quite as frequently as she does, however.⁴

Eliga Gould raises an important question regarding the relationship between idealism and realism. He writes that sometimes “ideals serve as rhetorical screens and weapons to justify policies that may or may not have an ideological origin. If we think of moral principles in this way, it seems to me that there were times when Jefferson did play the role of the idealist, albeit in ways that were both calculating and nationally self-interested.” Perhaps the best example of such behavior is Jefferson’s purchase of the Louisiana Territory. While it was undoubtedly in the strategic and economic self-interest of the United States, Jefferson sought to justify it in ideological terms. He did so in part, I believe, because he was uncertain about its constitutionality. He toyed with drafting a constitutional amendment to sanction the purchase during the summer of 1803 but gave up the idea when it became clear that delay might lead to the collapse of the deal. At the end of the year he authorized U.S. and state troops to attack the Spanish should they attempt to prevent the transfer of Louisiana from France to the United States.

After the formal acquisition of Louisiana, Jefferson played the primary role in drawing up the Breckinridge Bill, which vested considerable power in the unelected, presidentially appointed governor of the Territory of Orleans (the most populous part of the purchase territory). Despite the apparent “realism” underlying these actions, Jefferson saw the purchase as a triumph of republicanism and justified it as such. His efforts perfectly illustrate Gould’s apposite observation calling into question the (largely imagined) distinction that some historians draw between realism and idealism.

Curiously, none of my reviewers considers the Louisiana Purchase in detail. That omission might have surprised Jefferson and his contemporaries, who regarded the acquisition of Louisiana as one of the most important achievements of his presidency. It surprises me, because the Louisiana Purchase sits at the nexus between idealism and realism, which is such an important theme for my reviewers. I think Eliga Gould offers a timely reminder that, ultimately, it is impossible to categorize Jefferson’s motives and actions as strictly “idealistic” or “realistic.” Jefferson’s foreign policy fused elements of idealism and pragmatism with mixed results. I argue that those results were as much the product of factors beyond Jefferson’s control, such as luck and the relative weakness of United States, as his actions. The relative neglect of the Louisiana Purchase in this forum (and the consequent emphasis on the Barbary War) suggests that each generation can and should ask new questions of Jefferson and his time.

I am very grateful to my colleagues for their thoughtful

comments and observations on my book. They have given me much to ponder and have elevated our conversation on matters of war, peace, and statecraft with intelligence and generosity. Indeed, one might characterize their contributions as Jeffersonian in the best sense of the word.

Notes:

1. Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (1995; repr., Chicago, 2000).

2. Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (Oxford, UK, 1990). While I believe *Empire of Liberty* is the finest study of Jefferson’s statecraft since Henry Adams’s *History of the United States*, I disagree with Tucker and Hendrickson’s analysis of Jefferson’s foreign policy. See Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* (1889–1891; repr., 2 vols., New York, 1986).

3. Jefferson to James Monroe, Nov. 11, 1784, in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 7 (Princeton, 1953), 512.

4. Duffy writes that “Cogliano defends the embargo by claiming that Jefferson had few other options.” While I believe that Jefferson’s options were limited in 1807, I wouldn’t characterize that analysis as a defense of the policy. I think Jefferson scholarship needs to move beyond defending or attacking Jefferson, and I certainly don’t see myself or my book as a defense of (or an attack on) him.