

IN SEARCH OF A MORE REPUBLICAN NAVAL DEFENSE: THOMAS JEFFERSON,
CONGRESS, AND THE GUNBOAT DEBATE, 1802-1810

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I was introduced to Thomas Jefferson in 2003, the two hundredth anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition. I was a member of a high school group which traced the route of the Corps of Discovery across the United States; we read Jefferson's papers and considered themes like empire building and republicanism. That summer was my first encounter with his thought, and I was hooked.

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Introduction

The Foundations of the Debate

In the early years of the American republic, legislators and government leaders attempted to apply the vision of the Constitution. After Thomas Jefferson was elected President in the “Revolution of 1801,” he promoted the construction of gunboats and harbor fortifications instead of seagoing warships. “The gunboat itself,” wrote Jefferson, “is believed to be in use with every modern maritime nation, for the purposes of defense.”¹ While the gunboat program was Jefferson’s, Congress was responsible for appropriations; consequentially, gunboats were a frequent subject of debate during the Seventh through Tenth Congresses. Two Vermont representatives demonstrated in microcosm the intense debate over the Jefferson’s gunboats; Republican James Fisk supported Jefferson’s plan and stated, “[Gunboats] appeared to be peculiarly adapted to the United States, who had a large extent of seacoast and numbers of shoals, enabling them to act with effect.”² Federalist James Elliot, also from Vermont, had a different perspective. “Gunboats had been lately thought much of; what was the result?” he asked his colleagues. “That gunboats might be considered as a kind of vessel guarding a little deposit of national spirit, if any there was left to put on board! But as soon as they were assailed by the wind or waves, their maiden purity was gone. They were of no use whenever there was wind or tide, and could only float in a time of profound tranquility.”³

¹ The President of the United States, “Efficiency of Gunboats in Protecting Ports and Harbors, February 10, 1807,” *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 60:163.

² U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, February 5: National Defence,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 2nd session, 5 February, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 459.

³ *Annals of Congress*, 9th Cong., 2nd sess., 5 February, 1807, 462.

To better understand why gunboats became an issue, some background is helpful. United States politics quickly organized around two philosophies of government despite George Washington's warning, as he left office, of the divisive nature of political factions. Federalists, such as Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, favored a powerful federal government, central banks, and strong executive power. In contrast, the Republicans, including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe, favored weak central authority, state and individual rights, and, no doubt influenced by their experience of the American Revolution with the tyranny of the British Regulars, a weak national military. Therefore, President Jefferson committed to reducing the size of the Army and planned to replace the large sea-going naval force begun by Presidents Washington and Adams with lightly armed coastal defense gunboats manned by volunteer militia.

A strong navy, then as now, protected a country's coastline and commercial fleet and projected power internationally. Most navies of Jefferson's time were equipped with several types of warship. The largest were called ships-of-the-line or battleships. Battleships were large, sail-driven warships that mounted at least seventy-four guns in two or more gundecks and fired projectiles that weighed eighteen to thirty-six pounds. HMS *Victory*, a veteran of the Battle of Trafalgar preserved at Portsmouth, carried one hundred and four guns.⁴ While large navies like the British Royal Navy or the French Navy owned many battleships, the majority of both fleets were frigates, a smaller class of warship with only one gundeck. The U.S. Navy had a small force of frigates, built during the Adams administration, and inherited by President Jefferson. Frigates were armed with twenty to fifty guns, but most carried between twenty-eight

⁴ Ian W. Toll, *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2006), 48.

and thirty-eight.⁵ The frigate USS *Constitution*, the oldest commissioned warship in the U.S. Navy, was armed with forty-four cannon.

In contrast to large, heavily armed battleships and frigates, gunboats were small and lightly armed. Most of the boats built by the Jefferson administration were forty-five to seventy feet long and armed with one or two cannons. While rigged with masts and sails, gunboats could also be rowed with oars by the crew. They were designed to operate in coastal water, and to overwhelm larger warships by attacking from multiple directions in fleets. No floating examples of Jeffersonian gunboats remain. However, archeological excavation of the sunken USS *Allen*, a row galley gunboat which operated on Lake Champlain during the War of 1812, provides some insight into their construction. In his doctoral thesis, Eric B. Emery wrote that the *Allen* was “a hull design suited for operations in confined shoal waters,” and described a “double-ended” craft “[measuring] 75 feet, 4 inches (22.9 m) in length ...with a maximum breadth of 15 feet, 3 inches (4.6 m).”⁶ The *Allen* was armed with a twenty-four pound cannon in the stern and an eighteen-pound cannon in the bow, both mounted on sliding carriages in tracks.⁷

Unlike many defensive plans that are created and never used, Jefferson’s gunboats were tested by actual use. Unfortunately, the War of 1812 found the gunboats and Republican defense plans wanting. Gunboats were no match for the Royal Navy and were unable to prevent British landings. The small U.S. regular forces were too few to stop the British Regulars, and the militia was poorly trained and equipped. In contrast, the few frigates of U.S. Navy won incredible victories against British frigates. Gunboats were abandoned after the War of 1812 in favor of a

⁵ Toll, *Six Frigates*, 48.

⁶ Eric Brandon Emery. 2003. “The Last of Mr. Brown’s Mosquito Fleet: A History and Archaeology of the American Row Galley *Allen* on Lake Champlain, 1814-1825.” Doctoral thesis, Texas A & M University: 261.

⁷ Emery, “Mr. Brown’s Mosquito Fleet,” 69.

European-style navy of battleships and frigates. President Madison, with full Congressional approval, ultimately decommissioned and sold the gunboats that remained.

This thesis will trace the Congressional debate that surrounded the implementation of Jefferson's gunboat program. Spelling and "gunboat" have been standardized, with modern equivalents of words used; original spelling and "gun-boat" were retained in titles, and in a few other cases. Chapter one examines the historiography of the gunboat program since Jefferson's administration and shows the evolution in historical thought concerning early Republican naval appropriations. Chapter two considers Jefferson's policies and attitudes regarding naval defense and naval construction. While Congress is the primary focus of this thesis, Jefferson is a primary supporting character, and was heavily involved in crafting legislation. Jefferson's need to appease Congressional Republican leaders, avoid antagonizing powerful international rivals, and personal convictions left him with no other option for naval defense than gunboats and harbor fortifications. After discussing the program's beginning, chapter three outlines the Congressional gunboat debates and focuses especially on the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Congresses. Jefferson proposed major expansions of the gunboat program and Congressional debate reached its most acrimonious level between 1802 and 1808, and support for gunboats came predominantly from northern Republicans, rather than traditional southern agrarians. Chapter four discusses the final gunboat debate in the 10th Congress and examines the end of the gunboat program following the War of 1812. Following their inability to defend the American coast against the Royal Navy, President James Madison quietly and ingloriously retired gunboats in favor of a European-style navy of battleships and frigates with strong support from Congressional Republicans.

Over the past two centuries, historians have largely reduced the naval appropriations debates of the early-nineteenth century to a partisan affair between Republicans and Federalists, and portrayed Jefferson and his fellow Republicans as universally anti-navy, southern, and agriculturalists. The truth is more nuanced. Jefferson thought a large seagoing navy unnecessary and needlessly expensive and believed gunboats not only the most republican and effective option for coastal defense, but also a way to satisfy his political allies at home and not provoke international rivals; in Congress, while the Republican caucus included anti-navy Southern agrarians, northern Republicans dominated the gunboat debates and expressed a broad range of opinions that included strongly pro-navy, Federalist beliefs.

Chapter 1

Jeffersonian Ideals, Navalism, and Gunboats—a Literature Review

Since the days of the Congressional gunboat debates, historians and other interested parties have tried to understand Jefferson's gunboat program. Some have interpreted the gunboats through the popular issues of their day; others sought to use the program as ammunition for purposes of their own. Recent historians generally agree the gunboat program was not particularly successful but was a reasonable program under the conditions Jefferson and Congress experienced during the early-nineteenth century.

After the disappointing performance of Jefferson's gunboats during the War of 1812 many early histories carried a distinct "Federalist bias."⁸ Some attributed American progress to Federalist policy and portrayed Republican and Jeffersonian policy as an unfortunate historical dead end. An author with personal experience aboard gunboats wrote one of the first naval histories of the United States. Prior to writing *The Last of the Mohicans*, James Fenimore Cooper served as a junior officer aboard various U.S. Navy vessels including gunboats. His three-volume *History of the Navy of the United States*, published in 1856, does not hide his scorn; he argued that the gunboats "threatened destruction to the pride, discipline, tone, and even morals of the service."⁹ Jefferson did not escape censure; Cooper contended that Jefferson and his Republican colleagues "misdirected the resources of a great and growing country."¹⁰

⁸ Julia H. Macleod, "Jefferson and the Navy: A Defense," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (February 1945), 153

⁹ James Fenimore Cooper, *History of the Navy of the United States of America, Vol. 2* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Co., 1853), 23.

¹⁰ Cooper, *History of the Navy*, 23.

Furthermore, Jefferson's gunboats were "entirely unfitted to the moral character of the people, [and] to the natural formation of the coast."¹¹

Historian Henry Adams devoted considerable attention to Jefferson's naval policy in *History of the United States*, published between 1891 and 1896. Unlike Cooper, Adams was somewhat sympathetic, and wrote, "Their theory was reasonable. A coast like that of America could not be protected by fixed fortifications alone—only some system of movable batteries could answer the whole purpose."¹² However, Adams ultimately concluded "most seagoing people pronounced it a failure," and argued Jefferson's national defense policy was a poor fit for the circumstances of the time.¹³ While, "A policy of neglecting defense might be safe in peace, when foreign nations had every interest to avoid a war," he wrote Jefferson should have taken more aggressive action in light of that French and English attacks on American merchant vessels and the Spanish threats against New Orleans.¹⁴

Historians of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century drew heavily on Adam's work; unlike Adams, most were more nationalistic and less sympathetic. Many nationalists blamed the Republicans, including Congressional representatives, and especially Jefferson for leaving the United States undefended prior to the War of 1812. Perhaps the harshest words for Jefferson and his fellow Republicans came from twenty-sixth President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt critiqued Jefferson's naval policies in 1882 as an undergraduate in *The Naval War of 1812*. Roosevelt argued the gunboat system and Republican distrust for professional soldiers exposed the United States to foreign invasion. He wrote, "History has not yet done justice to the

¹¹ Cooper, *History of the Navy*, 23.

¹² Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America, During the Second Administration of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 3* (New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., 1962), 352.

¹³ Adams, *History of the United States*, 353.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 354.

ludicrous and painful folly and stupidity of which the government founded by Jefferson, and carried on by Madison, was guilty.”¹⁵

As Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt used the memory of the War of 1812 as leverage in his quest for a stronger navy. In a 1897 address delivered to the Naval War College, Roosevelt proclaimed, “The men who opposed the War of 1812, and prepared to have the nation humiliated by unresented insult from a foreign power rather than see her suffer the losses of an honorable conflict, occupied a position little short of contemptible.”¹⁶ Roosevelt suggested, “The visionary schemes for defending the country by gunboats, instead of by a fleet of seagoing battle ships” showed “the truth of Washington’s adage, that in time of peace it is necessary to prepare for war.”¹⁷

As an instructor at the U.S. Naval Academy, Alfred Thayer Mahan studied how navies function as instruments of foreign policy and prepared young naval officers to project American power internationally. Many naval officers and historians consider his books essential to any review of naval policy. In his best known text, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, Mahan argued, “In 1814, the occupation of the Chesapeake and the destruction of Washington gave a sharp lesson of the dangers incurred through the noblest water-ways, if their approaches be undefended.”¹⁸ In *Sea Power and its Relations to the War of 1812*, Mahan blamed the Jefferson administration for the lack of naval defense. He wrote, “[It] is

¹⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Naval War of 1812, or the History of the United States Navy During the Last War with Great Britain* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1902), 23.

¹⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, *Address of the Hon. Theodore Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Before the Naval War College, Newport, R.I., Wednesday, June 2, 1897* (Washington, DC: Navy Branch, Government Printing Office, 1897), 11.

¹⁷ Roosevelt, *Address*, 12.

¹⁸ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1898), 36.

impossible...to justify the Administration for refraining from adequate deeds, when the impotence of words had been fully and finally proved.”¹⁹

In the 1939 book *Rise of American Naval Power*, Harold and Margaret Sprout agreed that gunboats represented “an unsound line of naval development,” but unlike Mahan and Roosevelt blamed Jefferson’s cabinet and Congressional Republicans as well for their role in implementing Jefferson’s program.²⁰ Additionally, the Sprouts noted that while Jefferson and his advisors should have realized a gunboat navy could not answer a foreign blockade, “It is even stranger that prominent captains of the regular Navy, when consulted, should have failed to call this point to the President’s attention.”²¹

The Sprout’s opinions persisted despite the efforts of later historians who accused the Sprouts of not accounting for differences in opinion regarding the navy among Republicans.²² Jack K. Bauer, founder of the North American Society for Oceanic History, perpetuated the Sprout’s legacy. In 1965, he called the Jeffersonian gunboat program the “nadir of the navy’s construction programs.”²³ Bauer blamed Jefferson’s overriding concern for reducing government spending and “fear that an ocean-going navy would bring clashes with foreign powers” for his decision to turn the U.S. Navy into “an impotent local defense force.”²⁴

In the latter half of the twentieth century, historians turned from nationalistic interpretations of Jefferson’s policies to examine economic and political factors which may have influenced Republican naval and defense policies during Jefferson’s administration. The debate

¹⁹ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Sea Power and its Relations to the War of 1812* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1905), 138.

²⁰ Harold and Margaret Sprout, *Rise of American Naval Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 58.

²¹ Sprout, *Rise of American Naval Power*, 60.

²² Macleod, “Jefferson and the Navy,” 153.

²³ Jack K. Bauer, “Naval Shipbuilding Programs 1794-1860,” in *Military Affairs* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1965), 32.

²⁴ Bauer, “Naval Shipbuilding,” 32.

changed from whether gunboats or frigates were better policy choices to why gunboats were so attractive. In 1943, Charles Beard suggested Jefferson's policies were motivated by competing priorities between southern agrarians and northern merchants. Beard asserted that, "[Jefferson's] sympathies and affiliations were with the agrarian class."²⁵ While Jefferson would have liked to completely dispose of all vestiges of the preceding Federalist administrations, including the Navy, "The capitalistic interests...could not be suddenly overthrown. Compromise was therefore necessary."²⁶ None the less, Beard believed Jefferson was committed to the "fulfillment of the promises made to the farmers—particularly the pledge to reduce the burden of taxation and the public debt."²⁷ Therefore, according to Beard, Jefferson was motivated by his promises to Southern agrarian gentry to end construction of seagoing warships and concentrate on defensive gunboats.

Like Beard, Jeffersonian historian Merrill Peterson cited the influence of economic factors on Jefferson's policies in his 1970 book *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography*. Peterson noted Jefferson's decisions were consistent with traditional Republican beliefs and that, "In a country where peace was a moral commitment and the normal state of things, a regular army was as wasteful and unnecessary as it was dangerous."²⁸ Peterson argued Jefferson's decision to concentrate on defensive gunboats rather than sea-going warships was due to construction cost and the low probability of war. While Peterson argued Jefferson supported commerce, he "did not believe its defense warranted the expense of a large navy and the attendant risk of war."²⁹

²⁵ Charles A. Beard, *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), 435.

²⁶ Beard, *Economic Origins*, 437.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 567.

²⁹ Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation*, 568.

As historians considered the economic influences on Jefferson's administration, some pragmatist/revisionist historians concluded Republican Congressional and presidential policies of the time represented reasonable policies in light of the influences of the time. Claude Bowers took the forefront of the Jefferson revision with a series of books and articles that occasionally veered dangerously close to hero worship. In contrast to Roosevelt's interpretation of Jefferson as incompetent, Bowers depicted Jefferson as a consummate politician driven to preserve democracy. He argued in 1926 that Jefferson "was the politician of a cause, and that cause was one of liberty, humanity, and democracy."³⁰

Julia H. Macleod defended Jefferson, and challenged the Sprouts specifically, in 1945. Macleod argued the Sprouts overstated Jefferson's antagonism to the Navy, and claimed "much of the disparagement of Jefferson appears to be the result of misunderstanding and misrepresentation."³¹ She added, "There seem to be no grounds for the supposition that he ever thought [gunboats] would take the place of frigates."³² Furthermore, not only did Macleod believe Jefferson's program was misunderstood by many historians, she argued the gunboats were never used as Jefferson intended by contemporary naval officers.³³

In 1955 J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton took specific aim at Roosevelt and suggested that Roosevelt's criticism reflected his own hawkish nature. Hamilton wrote, "No one familiar with the mental and emotional processes of Theodore Roosevelt would find cause for surprise in his dislike of Jefferson."³⁴ He also addressed Roosevelt's attack on Jefferson's pacifism and conceded that, "Peace to [Jefferson] was the only assurance of the happiness of mankind, and

³⁰ Claude G. Bowers, "Jefferson, Master Politician," in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 2, no. 3 (July 1926), 321.

³¹ Macleod, "Jefferson and the Navy," 153.

³² *Ibid.*, 176.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "The Pacifism of Thomas Jefferson," in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 1955), 608.

passionately he extolled its blessings and sought to preserve it.”³⁵ However, Hamilton argued that Jefferson was willing to use force when it was needed, and cited Jefferson’s naval action against the Barbary states. Further, Hamilton believed Jefferson’s interest in gunboats and fortifications for American harbors showed the value he placed on defending trade.

Other historians studied Jefferson’s advisors. Alexander S. Balinky explored Jefferson’s Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin’s role in setting naval policy. Balinky argued Gallatin was motivated by Republican political ideals and reducing Federal debt, and shared equal responsibility with Jefferson, Madison, and the Republican Congress for the naval policies they enacted. “The triumvirate of Jefferson, Madison, and Gallatin,” he wrote, “Strove to reduce the total role of government—and its costs in terms of the tax burden—to the barest possible minimum.”³⁶

Naval historian Craig L. Symonds was among the first to examine the Congressional debates over naval appropriations. He provided a comprehensive overview of the gunboat program in his 1980 book *Navalists and Antinavalists: The Naval Policy Debate in the United States*. Close examination of the *Annals of Congress* allowed him to analyze other, previously unconsidered, perspectives beyond Jefferson and Gallatin, and show Congressional debate was not over whether or not to build a navy, but rather what sort to build. Therefore, “The common judgement of naval historians regarding this period of United States naval policy—that Republican opponents of the navy were irresponsible ideologues—falls apart when the full meaning of the naval policy debate is appreciated.”³⁷ Symonds turned the argument that

³⁵ Hamilton, “The Pacifism of Thomas Jefferson,” 611.

³⁶ Alexander S. Balinky, “Albert Gallatin, Naval Foe,” in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 82, no. 3 (July 1958), 293.

³⁷ Craig L. Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists: The Naval Policy Debate in the United States* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980), 13. Symonds used “Navalist” to describe the faction in favor of constructing a sea-going navy, as opposed to “Antinavalists” to describe those who wished a smaller naval appropriations or no naval construction.

Jefferson irresponsibly failed to defend American seagoing commerce and coastlines upside down and translated the debate into more historically accurate terms. Symonds suggested instead, “It was the Navalists...who were promoting irresponsible national programs at a time when the United States had all it could do to hold the western Indians in check.”³⁸

In his 1992 article titled “The Influence of History Upon Seapower: The Navalist Reinterpretation of the War of 1812,” Mark Russell Shulman noted many pro-navy authors of the nationalist school used Jefferson’s gunboats and the War of 1812 as ammunition in the larger naval policy debate. He contended, “The historical debate about the previously obscure Anglo-American war of 1812-15 became an intellectual forum used by “Blue Water” navalist historians in the United States to support their contemporary political agenda.”³⁹ Therefore, he urged caution in the use of Mahan and Roosevelt. In 1997 Peter Kastor agreed with Shulman that the classic histories should be reevaluated. He suggested historians typically align with Mahan and Roosevelt without consideration of Jefferson’s surrounding context or the surroundings of Mahan and Roosevelt.⁴⁰ Instead, Kastor argued that early 19th century naval policy was not just anti-naval feeling, but was rather an “example of the intersection of military strategy, political economy, and political process.”⁴¹

In their 2010 analysis of Jefferson and Madison’s successive Republican administrations, Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg agreed with Hamilton and Symonds that the Republicans were not opposed to all naval defense. Rather, the Republicans opposed a naval fleet with offensive capabilities. As evidence of his interest in defensive measures, Burstein and Isenberg

³⁸ Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 13.

³⁹ Mark Russell Shulman, “The Influence of History Upon Sea Power: The Navalist Reinterpretation of the War of 1812” in *The Journal of Military History* 56, no. 2 (April 1992), 183. “Blue Water” generally used to refer to sea-going ships. In contrast, “Brown Water” refers to craft that operate in coastal or riverine environments.

⁴⁰ Peter J. Kastor, “Toward ‘the Maritime War Only’: The Question of Naval Mobilization, 1811-1812,” in *The Journal of Military History* 61, no. 3 (July 1997), 456.

⁴¹ Kastor, “Toward ‘the Maritime War Only,’” 457.

reminded their readers Jefferson believed American harbor defenses to be so deficient that he requested more. They also wrote, “Jefferson called for a better organized militia, ready for any ‘sudden emergency,’” and “asked Congress for gunboats to meet the dangers posed by the European belligerents.”⁴²

Revisionists and pragmatists forced historians to look deeper into Jefferson’s personality and personal beliefs and to examine the role played by Jefferson’s advisors and fellow Republicans. Some scholars shifted their focus still further to explore how republicanism contributed to Jeffersonian naval policy. In 1990, Lynton K. Caldwell argued Jefferson’s ideals and vision of American democracy contributed to his advocacy for a citizen’s gunboat navy. Caldwell wrote Jefferson’s theories about national defense were grounded in his belief in “a highly decentralized, participatory democracy in which every citizen, personally, would have a part in the administration of public affairs.”⁴³ Therefore, Jefferson believed American citizens should participate in their own defense in the same way they participated in their own governance.

In his 1998 political biography *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, author Joseph J. Ellis also alluded to Jefferson’s belief in participatory government and defense. Ellis argued, however, what Jefferson truly sought was “the recovery of ‘pure republicanism,’” which meant the protection of individual rights and self-government through respect for the will of the American majority.⁴⁴ Regardless, Jefferson’s republicanism influenced his view that the citizen-soldier or sailor was the most democratic means of national defense.

⁴² Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010), 438.

⁴³ Lynton K. Caldwell, “The Administrative Republic: The Contrasting Legacies of Hamilton and Jefferson,” in *Public Administration Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Winter, 1990), 482.

⁴⁴ Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 202.

In 2007, Peter Onuf wrote in *The Mind of Thomas Jefferson* that, “Jefferson’s image of the citizen-soldier represented the ultimate convergence of state and society.”⁴⁵ Onuf took analysis of Jefferson’s republicanism a step further, however, and argued Jefferson not only believed standing militaries were dangerous to the Republic, but the militia would allow the government to “[exercise] conventional military power” and also protect citizens from government “encroaching on their rights and violating the fundamental principle of consent.”⁴⁶

Jerry Mashaw arrived at a similar conclusion. He wrote Jefferson feared military control of the government, and “viewed the Army, commanded by the President, as a threat to democracy itself.”⁴⁷ Mashaw also believed partisan rancor motivated some Republican’s anti-navy convictions; “Convinced that the ascendancy of the Republican Party had saved the Republic,” he wrote, “Jefferson and his supporters subscribed to a ‘Republican’ ideology that was anti-Federalist at almost every major point.”⁴⁸

As historians examined the larger context of Jefferson’s government and realized the role played by the Republican Congress, some moved away from the interpretations of Roosevelt *et. al.* as well as the sympathetic interpretations of Macleod and Hamilton in favor of a more balanced position. They sought to show why the gunboat system was not successful, and simultaneously explain why it was so popular with the Republicans.

The Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy, written by Spencer Tucker in 1993, provided a comprehensive examination of the gunboats themselves, with little attention given to the program’s political background. Spencer wrote, “The Jeffersonian gunboats do not represent the

⁴⁵ Peter S. Onuf, *The Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 195.

⁴⁶ Onuf, *The Mind of Thomas Jefferson*, 195.

⁴⁷ Jerry L. Mashaw, “Reluctant Nationalists: Federal Administration and Administrative Law in the Republican Era, 1801-1829,” in *The Yale Law Journal* 116, no. 8 (June, 2007), 1640.

⁴⁸ Mashaw, “Reluctant Nationalists,” 1640.

triumph of a weapons system, nor were they a total failure.”⁴⁹ While he noted the small American navy benefitted the British during the War of 1812, he also wrote the gunboats were not a product of Jefferson alone, but that “Republican majorities in Congress as well as public opinion strongly supported it. Given the public attitude, there could have been no significant expansion of the seagoing navy prior to the War of 1812.”⁵⁰

Gene A. Smith provided a more complete treatment of the political background of Jefferson’s gunboat plan in his 1995 book *For the Purposes of Defense: The Politics of the Jeffersonian Gunboat Program*. Smith argued Jefferson was not totally anti-navy and “did desire a modest blue-water force to complement coastal fortifications, gunboats, and other defensive works.”⁵¹ However, he also noted Jefferson was a realist who recognized the United States enjoyed significant natural defense in the form of the Atlantic Ocean. He wrote, “Thus, a small naval force served double duty: it satisfied Republican opposition to large permanent establishments and helped reduce the national debt.”⁵² Finally, rather than blame the gunboat’s failure during the War of 1812 on Jefferson’s faulty understanding of naval tactics, Smith believed the program was ultimately mishandled by the naval officers tasked with its operation, and fell victim to the politics of the day.⁵³

In 2001, E. M. Halliday echoed earlier historians including Claude Bowers on Jefferson’s belief in individual liberty, and argued, “Jefferson’s dream focused above all on a free society...with individuals guaranteed the right to think as they pleased.”⁵⁴ Therefore, Bowers

⁴⁹ Spencer C. Tucker, *The Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 177.

⁵⁰ Tucker, *The Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy*, 178.

⁵¹ Gene A. Smith, *For the Purposes of Defense: The Politics of the Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 8.

⁵² Smith, *For the Purposes*, 7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁴ E. M. Halliday, *Understanding Thomas Jefferson*. (New York: Perennial, 2001), 129.

argued the gunboat program grew out of Jefferson's desire to protect individual liberty from military depredations; Halliday also suggested Jeffersonian politics were a precursor to the contest between the political right and left.⁵⁵

Ian Toll devoted his 2006 book *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* to the early history of the US Navy and the naval appropriation debates. Toll echoed Onuf, Mashaw, and others with his argument that Republicans approved of the gunboat navy because it transferred the militia system, "[their] cherished archetype of national defense," to naval warfare.⁵⁶ However, Toll noted that ultimately, the gunboats were unsuccessful weapons. They were difficult to sail in stormy conditions and could not absorb battle damage without sinking. Further, "They were nearly impossible to man. Of the 278 gunboats authorized by Congress between 1805 and 1807, only 176 were actually built, and fewer placed into service."⁵⁷

With so many divergent opinions to navigate, making sense of the gunboat program and early naval appropriation debates is a daunting task. The context of the time and the theories which undergirded the debates is highly relevant, and any new examination, therefore, should start with a consideration of Thomas Jefferson.

⁵⁵ Halliday, *Understanding*, 139.

⁵⁶ Toll, *Six Frigates*, 285.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 286

Chapter 2

Thomas Jefferson's Naval Policy

At the root of the American gunboat program was third President of the United States, author of *The Declaration of Independence*, Virginia-planter, and founder of the University of Virginia Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson believed his election as president in 1801 was an opportunity to recapture the “spirit of revolution” that animated the earliest days of the American nation, and he sought to return to a “spirit of true republicanism.” His naval policies, especially the gunboat program, are a controversial component of his legacy. Jefferson’s true beliefs remain elusive, despite the vast amount of his writing which survives, due to the nuances of his opinions and the evolution of his thought over time. Merrill D. Peterson, author of several books that examined Jefferson’s life and legacy, noted, “The tributaries of [Jefferson’s] mind ran in all directions,” and admitted “It is a mortifying confession but he remains for me, finally, an impenetrable man.”⁵⁸ As noted in the literature review, a wide array of opinions regarding Jefferson’s naval policies muddy the water further and increase the struggle to interpret the man; readers may be forgiven for doubts about the productivity of further contributions on the subject. Even Joseph J. Ellis, author of *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, admitted doubts at the beginning of his study of Jefferson, and suggested, “The publication of all new books about that man from Monticello [should] be accompanied by a formal declaration of the causes that have impelled the author to undertake the effort.”⁵⁹ No easy answer exists, and the risk of misinterpreting Jefferson is ever present. However, Gene A. Smith, author of the most recent examination of Jefferson’s naval policy, wrote, “Just as Jefferson’s life demands

⁵⁸ Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation*, viii.

⁵⁹ Ellis, *American Sphinx*, xiii.

reevaluation, so do his views on gunboats, defense, and the navy's role in national security.”⁶⁰ Twenty-four years have passed since Smith re-evaluated Jefferson's gunboat program. Despite contrary claims, Jefferson was not totally against the navy. Rather, Jefferson asked for the construction of a small naval squadron and coastal defense gunboats after demonstrations of their strategic usefulness, as part of a larger, multi-part maritime defense plan consistent with his and his fellow Republican's political principles and designed to protect the fledgling United States from international repercussions.

Jefferson's naval policies and gunboat program were heavily influenced by the surrounding political and social milieu. Interested citizens and politicians shared their views with the President in frequent letters. Jefferson, ever the savvy politician, seemed to appreciate the advice. He wrote it was “useful that the executive should hear all things and hold fast that which is good.”⁶¹ Fellow Republicans, many outright antinavalists and opposed to any attempt to establish a navy, were especially vocal about their desire to reduce military's size.

Jefferson was not the only gunboat advocate. Author of *Common Sense* Thomas Paine contributed to Jefferson's thought on gunboats starting in 1801. Paine lived in France at the time. Prior to writing Jefferson, he wrote Napoleon Bonaparte to propose the French Government build a flotilla of gunboats, each mounting one or two cannons, for an attack across the English Channel on Great Britain. “The only relief that France could have given,” he argued to Jefferson, “Would have been to have kept a strong fleet of gunboats on the [Belgian] Coast, to be rowed by oars, and capable of transporting an hundred thousand Men over to the English

⁶⁰ Smith, *For the Purposes of Defense*, 1.

⁶¹ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Henry Dearborn, 3 January 1805,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-0938>.

Coast on the North Sea.” When Napoleon showed no interest, he sent a copy of his proposal to Jefferson.⁶² It was not the last letter from Paine on the subject.

In 1807, as Jefferson’s gunboat program moved ahead, Paine designed an improved gunboat and sent Jefferson a model. The new design was armed with two cannons in the bow. Paine wrote his design “will increase the power of a gunboat in nearly the proportion of 20 to 12.”⁶³ Jefferson acknowledged receipt of the model, and while he admitted he was unqualified to judge the merits of the design, he sent Paine’s model to the Secretary of the Navy.⁶⁴ He was delighted with Paine’s model. “Believing myself that gunboats are the only *water* defence which can be useful to us, and protect us from the ruinous folly of a navy,” he wrote, “I am pleased with everything which promises to improve them.”⁶⁵

Jefferson’s cabinet members were also influential. Former Pennsylvania Congressman and Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin was an especially vocal source of antinaval rhetoric in Jefferson’s political orbit. Gallatin was motivated by his desire to pay off the national debt, and viewed naval spending as inherently “unproductive, wasteful, and destructive.”⁶⁶ In Congress, he earned a reputation as a staunch critic of military spending. He argued against building 74-gun battleships during Congressional debate in 1799. “The conclusion must be most forcible,” he announced, “That it is improper at present to build a navy, especially since there is

⁶² Thomas Paine, “To Thomas Jefferson from Thomas Paine, 9 June 1801,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-34-02-0238>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 34, 1 May–31 July 1801, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 281–286.

⁶³ Thomas Paine, “To Thomas Jefferson from Thomas Paine, 29 August 1807,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-6275>.

⁶⁴ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Paine, 6 September 1807,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-6339>.

⁶⁵ Jefferson to Paine, 6 September 1807, *Founders Online*.

⁶⁶ Balinky, “Albert Gallatin,” 296.

no immediate demand for it.”⁶⁷ Jefferson took notice and enclosed a copy of Gallatin’s speech with a letter to fellow Virginia lawyer Edmund Pendleton. He wrote, “The views he takes of our finances and of the policy of our undertaking to establish a great navy may furnish some hints” for correcting the Federalists’ “ruinous principles and practices.”⁶⁸

Once in office, Jefferson sought Gallatin’s opinions on naval expenditures and policy frequently. On March 14, 1801, a mere two weeks after Jefferson’s inauguration, Gallatin sent Jefferson his recommendations for trimming federal spending. The military did not escape his notice. Gallatin drew attention to Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert’s budget, and wrote that he “took the liberty of suggesting in what manner the reduction took place,” but stressed that his thoughts were for illustrative purposes only.⁶⁹ Gallatin wrote that his point was to “impress...the necessity of a great reduction” in military spending.⁷⁰

Gallatin also vetted several of Jefferson’s yearly Congressional addresses.⁷¹ For Jefferson’s first State of the Union address to the Seventh Congress, Gallatin suggested Jefferson highlight the positive effect on trade caused by deployment of warships to the Mediterranean to fight the Barbary corsairs.⁷² Gallatin also supported Jefferson’s desire to maintain peace with Europe instead of build additional warships. He wrote, “The greater increase of wealth is due in part to our natural situation, but principally to our *neutrality* [emphasis original] during the war;

⁶⁷ Albert Gallatin, *The Substance of Two Speeches of Mr. G., on the Bill for Augmenting the Navy Establishment of the United States, in the House of Representatives, on the 7th and 11th of Feb., 1799* (Philadelphia: Joseph Gales, 1799), 11.

⁶⁸ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Edmund Pendleton, 14 February 1799,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-31-02-0024>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 31, 1 February 1799–31 May 1800, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, 36–39.

⁶⁹ Albert Gallatin, “Gallatin to Jefferson, Washington, 14th March, 1801,” in *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, Vol. I, Henry Adams, ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1879), 25.

⁷⁰ Gallatin and Adams, *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, 25.

⁷¹ Thomas Jefferson, “Jefferson to Gallatin. November 14, 1801,” in *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, Vol. I, Henry Adams, ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1879), 62.

⁷² Albert Gallatin, “Gallatin to Jefferson: Notes on the President’s Message. November, 1801,” in *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, Vol. I, Henry Adams, ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1879), 63.

an evident proof of the advantages of peace notwithstanding the depredations of the belligerent powers.”⁷³

Gallatin was comfortable respectfully expressing his dissent with Jefferson’s policies. In 1805, distressed by the amount of money spent by the Navy despite his requests it reduce expenditures, Gallatin wrote he was forced to conclude, “Either the [Department of] War is better organized than the Navy Department, or that naval business cannot be conducted on reasonable terms.”⁷⁴ He concluded sourly, “On this subject, the expense of the navy... I have, for the sake of preserving perfect harmony in your [Jefferson’s] councils, however grating to my feelings, been almost uniformly silent.”⁷⁵

Gallatin was a key supporter of Jefferson’s gunboat plan because of the lower cost of construction for gunboats compared to frigates and battleships. Jefferson asked Gallatin to critique his State of the Union address, which included a request for gunboat appropriations, again in 1804. Gallatin wrote he supported Jefferson’s plan, as long as “the expenditures shall be kept within due bounds.”⁷⁶ Despite his fiscally conservative nature, even Gallatin would spend money on the navy when necessary. On June 22, 1807 the British frigate HMS *Leopard* attacked and captured the American frigate USS *Chesapeake* in the Chesapeake Bay.⁷⁷ The embarrassing incident convinced Jefferson more gunboats were needed. The apparent British threat overcame Gallatin’s usual unwillingness to spend federal funds and he advised Jefferson, “We ought to build now all those [gunboats] that are wanted for the Mississippi, and also that number which it

⁷³ Gallatin and Adams, *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, 63.

⁷⁴ Albert Gallatin, “Gallatin to Jefferson. Department of Treasury, 30th May, 1805,” in *The Writings of Albert Gallatin, Vol. I*, Henry Adams, ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1879), 234.

⁷⁵ Gallatin and Adams, *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, 234.

⁷⁶ Albert Gallatin, “Gallatin to Jefferson: Remarks on President’s Message. October, 1804,” in *The Writings of Albert Gallatin, Vol. I*, Henry Adams, ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1879), 214.

⁷⁷ Toll, *Six Frigates*, 298.

may be thought proper to keep afloat in time of European war in the other ports.”⁷⁸ He also sent Jefferson a *Memorandum of Preparatory Measures*, “Which may be adopted by the Executive in relation to war, defensive and offensive.”⁷⁹ Under the heading “Gunboats and water defenses,” Gallatin recommended that money be appropriated to complete all gunboats under construction and to buy materials to build more.⁸⁰

Republicans in Congress also influenced Jefferson’s naval policies. North Carolina representative, Speaker of the House, and staunch antinavalist Nathaniel Macon bluntly expressed his belief “that the people expect” the army to be made smaller and “the navy might also be reduced” in an April 1801 letter to Jefferson, sent less than two months after his inauguration.⁸¹ Jefferson responded several days later, and reported the ongoing “chaste reformation” of the Army. He also pledged to return the Navy “to the legal establishment by the last of this month.”⁸²

Jefferson distrusted large “blue-water” navies for myriad reasons, but especially on philosophical grounds. While Jefferson primarily feared the Army was dangerous to the Republic, his interest in naval militia suggests some of this distrust may have transferred to the Navy as well. Jefferson’s desire to establish a government based on the principle of “pure republicanism” was especially important, and these considerations contributed to Jefferson’s

⁷⁸ Albert Gallatin, “Gallatin to Jefferson: Notes—Message Respecting Gunboats. 8th February, 1807,” in *The Writings of Albert Gallatin, Vol. I*, Henry Adams, ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1879), 330.

⁷⁹ Albert Gallatin, “Gallatin to Jefferson. July 25, 1807,” in *The Writings of Albert Gallatin, Vol. I*, Henry Adams, ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1879), 341.

⁸⁰ Gallatin and Adams, *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, 344.

⁸¹ Nathaniel Macon, “To Thomas Jefferson from Nathaniel Macon, 20 April 1801,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-33-02-0539>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 33, 17 February–30 April 1801*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 620–621.

⁸² Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Macon, 14 May 1801,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-34-02-0083>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 34, 1 May–31 July 1801*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 109–110.

interest in gunboats.⁸³ Joseph J. Ellis considered Jefferson's motivations in *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, and suggested Jefferson believed "[His] elevation to the presidency did not symbolize the ascendance of the ordinary so much as the restoration of revolutionary austerity."⁸⁴ Jefferson hinted at what republicanism was for him in his first inaugural address, which bears reproduction in some length:

What more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people? Still one thing more, fellow-citizens—a wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.⁸⁵

Additionally, Jefferson pledged his absolute belief in democratic self-government. He cited his faith in “absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority, the vital principle of republics, from which is no appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism.”⁸⁶ The final clause is telling. Jefferson believed adherence to the will of the governed was the most vital part of a republican society; in contrast, he saw reliance on force as antithetical to a republic and linked inextricably to tyranny. Therefore, in Jefferson's opinion the maintenance of professional armies and navies during peacetime smacked of despotism, and was to be avoided.

Jefferson's republicanism was heavily influenced by English Whigs, who resisted government attempts to curtail personal liberty and peace-time armies throughout British history. British Inspector-General Argus Centoculi proclaimed in 1751, “The detestable policies of the

⁸³ The term “blue water” is typically used to describe sea-going navies or warships, compared to “brown-water” navies and warships which operate in coastal or riverine environments.

⁸⁴ Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 202.

⁸⁵ Thomas Jefferson, *First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801*. Accessed October 6, 2019, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jefinau1.asp.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

last Reigns were...to disarm the People, and make the *Militia* useless” and simultaneously maintain an army “in order to bring in Popery and Slavery.”⁸⁷ In 1802 English Whig, political essayist, and Anglican priest Vicesimus Knox wrote, “Standing armies are...the glory and delight of all who are actuated by the spirit of despotism.”⁸⁸ In the United States in 1799, Thomas Cooper called standing armies “the grand engine, the most useful instrument of despotic ambition.” He argued they “[render] a Militia idle, and therefore useless and contemptible.”⁸⁹ Even more damning for Cooper was the use of professional armies by European monarchs “against the friends and principles of liberty” within their own countries.⁹⁰

Jefferson and other Republicans believed a standing military would cause the end of personal liberty and their way of life; not afraid to publish their views for the general public, many roundly criticized generally pro-military Federalists in the press. William Cobbett argued in 1801 against “that ‘*cheap* defense of nations,’ a navy!” established by Federalist and former President John Adams. Cobbett stated, “These can never be contemplated by the Republican *Rush-Light*.”⁹¹ Adams was not the only prominent Federalist ridiculed by Republican anti-military literature. In response to Massachusetts Federalist Fisher Ames, Benjamin Austin accused Federalists of seeking a war establishment to allow them “to riot in luxury amid the general distress, and impoverishment of the country.” He argued a standing army, under

⁸⁷ Argus Centoculi, *Old England, July 1747-March 1751*, no. 358 (Feb. 02, 1751), 1812.

⁸⁸ Vicesimus Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism* (Trenton: Wilson and Blackwell, 1802), 350.

⁸⁹ Thomas Cooper, “Address to the Readers of the Sunbury and Northumberland Gazette, June 29, 1799,” in *Political Essays, Originally Inserted in the Northumberland Gazette, with Additions by Thomas Cooper, Esq.* (Northumberland: Andrew Kennedy, 1799), 35-36.

⁹⁰ Cooper, “Address to the Readers,” 36.

⁹¹ William Cobbett, *The Republican Rush-Light, No. VII—Being the First Number of Volume II* (New York: 1801), 19. A “rush light” was a primitive oil lamp; in this case, Cobbett is saying his publication (*The Republican Rush-Light*) would not consider the construction of a navy.

Federalist control, would be a tool “to force the people into compliance with their arbitrary mandates.”⁹²

Prior to its adoption, Jefferson wrote freely he was disappointed the U.S. Constitution lacked a bill of rights to protect American citizens from standing armies. He was also disturbed by no guarantee of “freedom of religion, freedom of the press, protection against standing armies, restriction against monopolies, the eternal and unremitting force of the habeas corpus laws, and trials by jury,” and expressed his trepidation in letters to various correspondents including James Madison, New York representative William Stephens Smith, Scottish entrepreneur Alexander Donald, and diplomat C.W.F. Dumas.⁹³ His letter to Smith was particularly indignant. He wrote, “I own it astonishes me” to find that many Americans did not share his fear of a government with unlimited power.⁹⁴

In 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte, supported by the French army, took power in France following a coup. Napoleon’s coup was a graphic example for Jefferson of the danger posed to a republican nation by a standing army, “without which, it is evident Bonaparte could not have accomplished it, nor could not maintain it.”⁹⁵ While the situation in France distressed Jefferson, it did not diminish his confidence in the principle of self-governance. He wrote to Samuel

⁹² Benjamin Austin, “On Mr. Ames’s Oration,” in *Constitutional Republicanism* (Boston: Adams and Rhoades, 1803), 47.

⁹³ Thomas Jefferson, “To James Madison from Thomas Jefferson, 20 December 1787,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-10-02-0210>. Original source: *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 10, 27 May 1787–3 March 1788, ed. Robert A. Rutland, Charles F. Hobson, William M. E. Rachal, and Frederika J. Teute. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 335–339.

⁹⁴ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to C. W. F. Dumas, 12 February 1788,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0618>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 12, 7 August 1787 – 31 March 1788, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955, 583–584.

⁹⁵ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Everard Meade, 8 April 1800,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-31-02-0423>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 31, 1 February 1799 – 31 May 1800, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, 488–489.

Adams in 1800 that while some “will use this as a lesson against the impracticability of republican government...I read it as a lesson against the danger of standing armies.”⁹⁶

In contrast, gunboats manned by volunteer militia were far more acceptable to Jefferson’s republicanism. Jefferson believed the militia would mitigate the danger of professional militaries and be adequate for national defense. Jefferson biographer Peter Onuf argued Jefferson viewed the “citizen-solder” as an essential guardian of republicanism and a critical defence against tyranny. Onuf wrote, “Jefferson looked forward to a time when the army would be so thoroughly identified with a self-governing people that civil-military conflict would be unthinkable.”⁹⁷ As President, Jefferson sought assistance from state governors to form the militia into an adequate defense force. He encouraged state leaders to “carry into effect the militia system adopted by the national legislature, agreeably to the powers reserved to the states respectively, by the constitution of the U.S.”⁹⁸ Jefferson shared his defense policy with Elbridge Gerry in a letter prior to his inauguration and wrote he supported “such a naval force only as may protect our coasts and harbours from such depredations as we have experienced,” rather than commit to a large naval fleet “which by its own expenses and the eternal wars in which it will implicate us, will grind us with public burthens, and sink us under them.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Adams, 26 February [1800],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-31-02-0338>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 31, 1 February 1799 – 31 May 1800, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, 395.

⁹⁷ Onuf, *The Mind of Thomas Jefferson*, 195.

⁹⁸ Thomas Jefferson, “Circular to the Governors of the States, 25 February 1803,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-39-02-0488>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 39, 13 November 1802–3 March 1803, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012, 579–580.

⁹⁹ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 26 January 1799,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-30-02-0451>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 30, 1 January 1798 – 31 January 1799, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, 645–653.

Jefferson's gunboat plan extended the militia concept to the water. Naval historian Ian Toll wrote, "Just as the infantry militia was the Republican alternative to a standing army, gunboats offered an alternative to a standing navy."¹⁰⁰ To this end, Jefferson envisioned a gunboat force that lay dormant until needed. To crew the gunboats, Jefferson hoped to establish a nucleus of professional naval officers and supplement them with a naval militia of merchant sailors. In 1805, Jefferson proposed legislation titled "A Bill for Establishing a Naval Militia" which required, "Every free, able-bodied white male citizen of the United States, of the age of 18 years, and under the age of 45, whose principal occupation is on the high sea or on the tide-waters within the United States, shall be of the militia for the naval service of the United States."¹⁰¹ The program emphasized economy, and attempted to minimize replacement and repair of boats and equipment. Like the muskets and other equipment of the land militia, which were stored in armories when not in the field, the gunboats themselves were to be stored out of the water in large sheds when not in use. When a threat materialized and the gunboats were activated, they would return to service "by prepar[ed] ways and [capstans] proper for it, and always ready to let her down again" into the water.¹⁰²

While Jefferson was always a farmer at heart, and despite his self-proclaimed belief that "cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens," Jefferson's letters demonstrate willingness to defend maritime trade.¹⁰³ Indeed, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, written in 1781-2, Jefferson wrote that the United States should engage in seaborne commerce despite his

¹⁰⁰ Toll, *Six Frigates*, 285.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Jefferson, "Jefferson to Gallatin. November, 1805," in *The Writings of Albert Gallatin, Vol. I*, Henry Adams, ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1879), 273.

¹⁰² Thomas Jefferson, "From Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, 9 February 1807," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-5056>.

¹⁰³ Jefferson, Thomas. "From Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 23 August 1785," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-08-02-0333>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 8, 25 February–31 October 1785*, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, 426–428.

fear that “wars then must sometimes be our lot.”¹⁰⁴ He echoed this belief in a letter to John Jay, and added American constituents expected their elected public servants to preserve access to the ocean for commercial purposes. Elected officials, in turn, should pursue “that line of policy...which will render the use of that element as great as possible to them...and that therefore we should in every instance preserve an equality of right to them in the transportation of commodities, in the right of fishing, and in the other uses of the sea.”¹⁰⁵ Jefferson believed the answer was to establish a naval force sufficient to “punish” foreign naval depredation. “Weakness provokes insult and injury, while a condition to punish it often prevents it,” he wrote to Jay. “This reasoning leads to the necessity of some naval force, that being the only weapo[n] with which we can reach an enemy.”¹⁰⁶

Jefferson abhorred war in general and was inclined toward mutually beneficial trade. He wrote in 1782, “With such a country before us to fill with people and happiness, we should point in that direction the whole generative force of nature, wasting none of it in efforts of mutual destruction.”¹⁰⁷ Despite his personal tendencies Jefferson did not hesitate to exert naval force when appropriate, and his willingness to meet force with force was evident prior to his presidency. When the British navy threatened the New England coast in 1779, Jefferson suggested the colonies create a small naval force to meet the threat. He wrote to Richard Henry

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in *The Portable Jefferson*, Merrill D. Peterson, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 227.

¹⁰⁵ Jefferson, Thomas. “From Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 23 August 1785,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-08-02-0333>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 8, 25 February–31 October 1785, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, 426–428.

¹⁰⁶ Jefferson to Jay, 23 August, 1785, *Founders Online*.

¹⁰⁷ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 226.

Lee such efforts “must be small and would probably be unsuccessful;” nevertheless, he believed an adequate naval defense “must have a beginning and the sooner the better.”¹⁰⁸

Twenty-two years later, an international crisis allowed Jefferson to again advocate for naval force and proved a defining event of his presidency. In the Mediterranean, pirates sponsored by the kingdoms of Tripoli, Algiers, Tunis, and Morocco (collectively the Barbary States) preyed upon American merchant shipping and sailors. North African piracy was not new, but American shipping was newly vulnerable due to an increase in piracy and lack of tribute; while Barbary coast piracy declined during the 1750s, piracy expanded in the 1780s, and continued to do so during Jefferson administration.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, European powers paid yearly tribute, essentially bribes, to protect their ships and crews from capture and enslavement rather than continuously deploy warships to fight the Barbary corsairs. Prior to the American Revolution, American ships and crews were protected by British tribute. Under this protection American merchants had developed a thriving, lucrative trade network in southern Europe and northern Africa.¹¹⁰ Following American independence, and subsequent loss of British naval protection, Alan G. Jamieson wrote, “As the USA had no navy it was in a particularly vulnerable position in the 1780s...By the end of 1793 the Algerines had taken a dozen American prizes and held over 100 Americans as captives.”¹¹¹ Jefferson, in his first year as president, was forced to consider how best to manage the threat in the Mediterranean.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Richard Henry Lee, 17 July 1779,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-03-02-0047>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 3, 18 June 1779 – 30 September 1780, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, 39–40.

¹⁰⁹ Alan G. Jamieson, *Lords of the Sea: A History of the Barbary Corsairs* (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 2012), 167.

¹¹⁰ Joshua London, *Victory in Tripoli: How America’s War with the Barbary Pirates Established the U.S. Navy and Shaped a Nation*, 20.

¹¹¹ Jamieson, *Lords of the Sea*, 198.

Prior to his inauguration, Jefferson advocated a strong naval response to the Barbary states. In a December 13, 1784 letter to former Revolutionary War general Horatio Gates, Jefferson noted the capture of a Virginia merchant vessel by Moroccan corsairs. Frustrated by Barbary infringement on American trade, he stated, “Tribute or war is the usual alternative of these pirates.”¹¹² Due to the excessive sum required to bribe the pirates, Jefferson argued, “Why not begin a navy then and decide on war? We cannot begin in a better cause nor against a weaker foe.”¹¹³ Jefferson expressed similar ideas in a letter to James Monroe in February 1785 and called the “pyratical [sic]” situation faced by American merchants in the Mediterranean “distressing.”¹¹⁴ Jefferson called again for a naval response to the corsairs, and wrote, “The motives pleading for war rather than tribute are numerous and honorable, those opposing them are mean and shortsighted.”¹¹⁵ Despite Jefferson’s suggestions, the U.S. Government elected to negotiate with the Barbary powers and ultimately established treaties which required large sums in tribute to temporarily buy protection for the merchant fleet.¹¹⁶

After he became Commander in Chief, Jefferson took military action. Within his first year as president, Jefferson dispatched a small “squadron of observation” consisting of three frigates and several smaller warships to blockade Tripoli, pursue pirate ships and crews, and protect American commercial interests in the region.¹¹⁷ The U.S. Navy maintained an almost

¹¹² Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Horatio Gates, 13 December 1784,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-07-02-0411>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 7, 2 March 1784 – 25 February 1785, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, 571.

¹¹³ Jefferson to Gates, 13 December 1784, *Founders Online*.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, [6 February 1785],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed Sept. 17, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-07-02-0467>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 7, 2 March 1784 – 25 February 1785, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, 637–641.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ London, *Victory in Tripoli*, 36.

¹¹⁷ Craig L. Symonds, *The U.S. Navy: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18.

constant presence in the Mediterranean for the next four years. Jefferson also approved legislation which allowed him to take further action against piracy. Most notably, “An Act for the Protection of the Commerce and Seamen of the United States, Against the Tripolitan Cruisers” empowered him, “To equip, officer, man, and employ such of the armed vessels of the United States as may be judged requisite by the President of the United States, for protecting effectually the commerce and seamen thereof on the Atlantic ocean, the Mediterranean and adjoining seas.”¹¹⁸ In accordance with the law, on February 18, 1802 Jefferson informed commanders of American warships, “You are hereby authorized and directed to subdue, seize, and make prize, of all vessels, goods, and effects, belonging to the Bey of Tripoli, or to his subjects, and to bring or send the same into port, to be proceeded against and distributed according to law.”¹¹⁹ Jefferson’s efforts ultimately ended American tribute payments, and resulted in a treaty with the rulers of Tripoli which Congress ratified in 1805; despite his success, Jefferson’s measures were temporary, and conflicts in the region with corsairs continued until 1815.

Ironically, the First Barbary War anticipated the “gunboat diplomacy” which Roosevelt and Mahan, perhaps Jefferson’s most vocal critics with regard to naval policy, espoused so strongly. Jefferson’s actions were not unusual; many nineteenth-century European governments used their navies to project power and protect international interests. The key difference, however, was that Jefferson only used naval force when he believed the situation warranted intervention.

¹¹⁸ U.S. Congress, “An Act for the Protection of the Commerce and Seamen of the United States, Against the Tripolitan Cruisers,” in *United States Statutes at Large*, 2 Stat., 130.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Jefferson, “Circular to Naval Commanders, 18 February 1802,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-36-02-0394>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 36, 1 December 1801–3 March 1802, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, 605.

Economic considerations also influenced Jefferson's interest in gunboats. Reduction of the Federal debt and distrust of taxation were core principles for Jefferson and his fellow Republicans. As Secretary of State, Jefferson disagreed vehemently with Federalist Alexander Hamilton, who thought the Federal debt necessary for the nation's financial prosperity. Jefferson complained to James Monroe, "We are ruined, Sir, if we do not over-rule the principles that 'the more we owe, the more prosperous we shall be,' 'that a public debt furnishes the means of enterprise,' 'that if ours should be once paid off, we should incur another by any means however extravagant' etc. etc."¹²⁰ Jefferson even claimed, in a letter to George Washington, Hamilton's program "flowed from principles adverse to liberty, and was calculated to undermine and demolish the republic."¹²¹ In contrast, Jefferson proclaimed his belief in "a government rigorously frugal and simple, applying all the possible savings of the public revenue to the discharge of the national debt."¹²²

Even if Jefferson was not committed to reducing Federal spending, he believed the United States lacked the financial means to build, equip, and maintain a navy of battleships. Therefore, Jefferson opposed calls for a large, European-style navy. In the past, he had called a navy, "A foolish and wicked waste of the energies of our countrymen."¹²³ Gunboats were cheap, however, and many could be built for the same cost as a frigate or battleship. Jefferson found

¹²⁰ Thomas Jefferson, "From Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 17 April 1791," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-20-02-0051>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 20, 1 April–4 August 1791, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, 234–236.

¹²¹ Thomas Jefferson, "To George Washington from Thomas Jefferson, 9 September 1792," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-11-02-0049>. Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, vol. 11, 16 August 1792 – 15 January 1793, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002, 96–106.

¹²² Thomas Jefferson, "From Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 26 January 1799," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-30-02-0451>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 30, 1 January 1798 – 31 January 1799, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, 645–653.

¹²³ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 228.

this compelling. In his third request for gunboats, communicated to the House of Representatives on February 10, 1807, Jefferson estimated building 127 additional gunboats would “cost from five to six hundred thousand dollars,” or under five thousand dollars each.¹²⁴ In contrast, Congressional documents show building the original six frigates of the U.S. Navy cost an average of \$276,000 each.¹²⁵ Jefferson argued during times of peace, the maintenance costs would be kept low as “no more than six or eight” gunboats would remain in service; “It would only be when the United States should themselves be at war,” he continued, “That the whole number would be brought into active service.”¹²⁶ Until such a time, a skeleton crew would maintain the gunboats, stored in sheds out of the water.

Jefferson was comfortable consigning America’s coastal defense to a few small boats because he believed the best maritime defense for the United States was the Atlantic Ocean. Jefferson recognized the strategic advantages of the Atlantic Ocean as a barrier to European attack as early as 1782. Should a European power attempt to attack the American coast Jefferson was sure, “A small part only of their naval force will ever be risked across the Atlantic.” Jefferson argued crossing the ocean was dangerous for most European navies and exposed the homeland to attack during the fleet’s absence.¹²⁷ He concluded the threat of naval attack was minimal, and European powers would “attack us by detachment only,” the United States needed only enough naval force “to make ourselves equal to what they may detach.”¹²⁸

¹²⁴Thomas Jefferson, “To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, Communicated to Congress, February 10, 1807,” in “Naval Affairs No. 60: Efficiency of Gunboats in Protecting Ports and Harbors.” *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, Vol. I*, Walter Lowrie and Walter S. Franklin, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 163.

¹²⁵ U.S. Congress, “Naval Affairs #52: Expenditures of the Navy and Navy Yards for Eight Years,” in *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, Vol. I*, Walter Lowrie and Walter S. Franklin, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 149.

¹²⁶ Jefferson, “To the Senate,” 163.

¹²⁷ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 228.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Despite the protection of the Atlantic, Jefferson still distrusted European politics. He believed strongly the United States should not “meddle” or take part in European “broils” beyond trade and commerce. As he explained to French philosopher and politician Constantin François de Chassebœuf, Comte de Volney, too much interaction with Europe risked turning the United States into “a spiteful unhappy nation.”¹²⁹ His beliefs stemmed from nearly continuous warfare between France and Great Britain during the 1790s and early 1800s, during which American trade ships were seized by warships of both nations. As Washington’s Secretary of State, Jefferson protested attacks on America’s trade, vessels, and sailors. He believed such attacks would draw the United States into a European war it could not afford. In a 1793 letter to Thomas Pinckney, the American Minister to Great Britain, Jefferson argued neutral powers retained the right to trade without restriction, even with opposing combatants.¹³⁰ Should French and British depredations on American shipping continue, “We should see ourselves plunged...into a war, with which we meddle not, and which we wish to avoid if justice to all parties, and from all parties, will enable us to avoid it.”¹³¹ When, to Jefferson’s chagrin, Great Britain and France continued to harass American shipping, Jefferson expressed displeasure to his friend and law pupil Archibald Stuart but noted that there was little the United States could do; “Our great expense will be in equipping a navy to be lost as fast as equipped,” he wrote, “Or to be maintained at an expense which will sink us with itself.”¹³²

¹²⁹ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Volney, 6 February 1803,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-39-02-0400>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 39, 13 November 1802–3 March 1803, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012, 466–467.

¹³⁰ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Pinckney, 7 September 1793,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-27-02-0054>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 27, 1 September–31 December 1793, ed. John Catanzariti. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, 55–59.

¹³¹ Jefferson to Pinckney, 7 September 1793, *Founders Online*.

¹³² Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Archibald Stuart, 8 June 1798,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-30-02-0286>.

While the French navy was strong, the British Royal Navy was Jefferson's primary concern. The British depended on their navy, the most powerful in the world, for defense and to maintain power abroad. Historian of the early United States Denver Brunsman argued the Royal Navy was an international representation of British power and, for the Jeffersonians, tyranny.¹³³ Jefferson took the danger of challenging the Royal Navy seriously, and calculated gunboats would provide coastal protection without offending British naval supremacy.

The Battle of Copenhagen, on April 2, 1801, was a case study for Jefferson and his compatriots that illustrated the consequences of challenging Great Britain at sea. The kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Prussia, and Russia used the same arguments as the U.S. Government in the late 1790s and Jefferson himself as early as 1793 and asserted their right as neutral powers to trade freely with France and Great Britain. They also argued their vessels had the right, "To freely navigate from one harbor to another, and on the coast of the Belligerent Nations."¹³⁴ To enforce their claims, the neutral powers formed the "League of Armed Neutrality," demanded the British stop searching neutral vessels for "contraband," and organized merchant vessels into convoys escorted by warships.¹³⁵ The League also united the Russian, Danish, and Norwegian navies in a combined fleet under Russian leadership, and based a large percentage of the fleet's warships at Copenhagen.

The League of Armed Neutrality challenged the British on both economic and strategic fronts. Previously, the British government pursued a lenient policy in the region as it was

Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 30, 1 January 1798 – 31 January 1799, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, 396–398.

¹³³ Denver Brunsman, "De-Anglicization: The Jeffersonian Attack on an American Naval Establishment," in *Anglicizing America: Empire, Revolution, Republic*. Gallup-Diaz, Ignacio, Andrew Shankman, and David J. Silverman, eds. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, 207.

¹³⁴ Curt von Stedinck, "Convention of the Northern Powers," in *State Papers: The European Magazine, and London Review* 39, (March 1801), British Periodicals, 216.

¹³⁵ John D. Grainger, *The British Navy in the Baltic*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014, 145.

imperative the Baltic nations remain neutral and not unite with France. For instance, *National Affairs for December 1784*, a 1794 periodical stated, “We held high and peremptory language to Denmark, Sweden, and other powers; to whom we are now obliged to give good words, and to make some concessions, in order to keep them neutral at least, if not obtain their good offices at Paris.”¹³⁶ Now, with Baltic shipping necessary for the Britain’s continued ability to fight and trade, especially due to the heavy demands of the Royal Navy’s blockade of continental Europe, the British government was forced to weigh diplomacy against survival. Naval historian John D. Grainger wrote Great Britain depended on Scandinavian ships to carry wood for masts and hulls, hemp for ropes, and tar and pitch used for sealant, all produced in Denmark and Norway and used for warship and merchant vessel construction.¹³⁷

The strategic threat was twofold. First, strategic common sense demanded the British not allow war materials to reach France, even on neutral ships. Therefore, the British Government found the League’s demand they cease stopping and searching neutral merchant vessels for weapons and other contraband, a measure they believed “reasonable,” was impossible to agree to.¹³⁸ Second, the combined Russian, Danish, and Norwegian fleet created by the “League of Armed Neutrality” presented a naval threat the British, an island nation, could not ignore. British naval historian William James wrote the treaty placed a large naval force of “Russia 82, Denmark 23, and Sweden 18 sail of the line, besides, between them all, about 89 frigates, corvettes, and brigs, and nearly twice the number of armed small-craft” in the Baltic.¹³⁹ This

¹³⁶ “National Affairs for December 1794,” in *English Review, or, An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature* 24, 1783-1795; (Dec 1794), 479.

¹³⁷ Grainger, *The British Navy*, 146.

¹³⁸ William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain: A New Edition, with Additions and Notes, and an Account of the Burmese War and the Battle of Navarino, Vol. 3*, Frederick Chamier, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 41.

¹³⁹ James and Chamier, *The Naval History of Great Britain*, 43. “Sail-of-the-line” refers to a large warship, sometimes called a battleship or a “Man o’War” with two or more gundecks that mounted between 74 and 100 guns. Naval combat doctrine of the day called for enemy fleets to sail “in line,” or in two parallel rows, as they fired on

naval force represented a significant strategic challenge to the Royal Navy, especially since it was located a mere two or three-day voyage from the British Isles.¹⁴⁰

As tensions in the Baltic rose, the British government sent ambassador Nicholas Vansittart to Copenhagen “with full powers to treat,” and attempted to defuse the situation with diplomacy.¹⁴¹ When negotiations failed, the British government dispatched Admiral Sir Hyde Parker and the future hero of Trafalgar, then Vice-Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson, in command of “Twenty line-of-battle ships...plus seven frigates and twenty-three smaller vessels, including eight bombs,” and ordered them to subdue the combined fleet at Copenhagen and force the Dutch to comply with British demands.¹⁴² Eyewitness accounts indicate the Dutch “made very obstinate resistance, and fought like brave men.” However, during a five-hour engagement the British fleet destroyed a number of Dutch and Norwegian warships, shelled Copenhagen, inflicted around 3,000 casualties while suffering 1,000 killed and wounded in turn, and ultimately forced Copenhagen to surrender.¹⁴³

Nothing projected “His Britannic Majesty’s” power as clearly as the Royal Navy. The preemptive raid on Copenhagen made Great Britain’s point eloquently. By the end of April, the Russian government requested Admiral Parker “desist from all further hostilities against the flags of the three United Powers,” and declared their intent to negotiate.¹⁴⁴ Parker agreed, and

each other. Only ships with armed with 74 or more guns were considered capable of holding their own in the line of battle.

¹⁴⁰ Grainger, *The British Navy*, 146.

¹⁴¹ James and Chamier, *The Naval History of Great Britain*, 44.

¹⁴² Grainger, *The British Navy*, 148. “Bombs” is short for “bomb ships” or “bomb ketches,” and were small auxiliary vessels armed with one or more mortars which fired an explosive shell on a steep, arching trajectory. They were used to bombard shore fortifications and troop placements.

¹⁴³ T. P. Asperne, “Copy of a Letter from an Officer On-Board His Majesty’s Ship *Jamaica*, Captain Rose, Dated Before Copenhagen, April 6, 1801,” in *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, Jan. 1736-Dec. 1833 (Apr 1801), 366.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Ludwig von der Pahlen, “Russian Imperial Declaration, Transmitted to Admiral Parker in the Baltic,” in “State Papers,” *The European Magazine, and London Review* 39, (June 1801), 462.

expressed his hope, “That Russia and Great Britain will again be united, as formerly, by the ties of friendship and harmony.”¹⁴⁵ While the British were willing to consider minimizing the number of neutral ships searched, as negotiations between British ambassador Lord St. Helens and representatives of the Northern Powers progressed the British government refused to surrender its naval advantage. In the May 1801 edition, the *Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronical* noted the continued presence of the British fleet in force at Copenhagen should the Northern Powers “persevere in insisting on our abandoning the *practice* [of searching neutral vessels] altogether.” Should negotiations break down, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* wrote the navy, “Will recommence operations calculated effectually to overpower all further argument on that head.”¹⁴⁶ In the end, Nelson’s naval force was not required. Great Britain and the Baltic powers signed a treaty at St. Petersburg at the end of April 1801, and preserved trade in the Baltic on British terms. In August 1801 the *Monthly Magazine* observed, despite “our late differences with the nations on the Baltic...Our *Baltic Trade* [emphasis original] has been beginning to revive.”¹⁴⁷

Jefferson was well aware of events in the Baltic Sea. He received frequent updates from European envoys and cabinet members as the situation progressed. Attorney General Levi Lincoln Sr. sent him information from Ambassador Rufus King in Great Britain, in an April 16, 1801 letter (after the British bombardment of Copenhagen). Rufus reported, “The situation of [Great Britain] is critical and full of difficulties” and predicted, “England must and would resist

¹⁴⁵ Adm. Sir Hyde Parker, “Admiral Parker’s Answer: On Board His Majesty’s Ship *London*, at Sea, April 22,” in “State Papers,” *The European Magazine, and London Review* 39, (June 1801), 462.

¹⁴⁶ “Monthly Retrospect of Foreign Affairs,” in *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, (May 1801), Jan. 1736-Dec. 1833, 474.

¹⁴⁷ “Monthly Commercial Report,” in *Monthly magazine, or, British Register* 12, no. 76 (August 1801), Feb. 1800-June 1836, 86.

the claims of the northern powers.”¹⁴⁸ The American ambassador to Spain, David Humphreys, also appraised Jefferson of the situation in the Baltic and forwarded Danish ambassador Baron de Shubart’s account of the British attack. Humphreys wrote, “The undisguised observations of a Man versed in politics, tho’ expressed in haste, on the spot, will frequently bring one better acquainted with the real situation of affairs, than the most elaborate Diplomatic dissertations when intended for the public eye.”¹⁴⁹ Thomas Paine, who observed the situation from France, provided the most terse assessment of the situation when he wrote Jefferson in August, 1801, and announced, “The coalition of the North has vanished almost to nothing.”¹⁵⁰

The lessons taught by the Royal Navy to the Northern Powers were not lost upon Jefferson and his fellow Republicans. Great Britain would punish challenges to British policy and British naval superiority harshly, and Jefferson knew the Royal Navy maintained strong naval squadrons at Halifax and Bermuda. Naval historian Craig L. Symonds wrote Jefferson feared Great Britain would view the construction of additional sea-going warships for the U.S. Navy as a threat to the balance of power in the Atlantic.¹⁵¹ The British would likely have increased the number of ships assigned to their North American squadrons at least. The worst-case scenario for Jefferson was the possibility of a preemptive attack on the U.S. fleet.¹⁵² As a strictly defensive measure gunboats were less likely to result in confrontation with the British

¹⁴⁸ Levi Lincoln, “To Thomas Jefferson from Levi Lincoln, 16 April 1801,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-33-02-0517>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 33, 17 February–30 April 1801, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 596–599.

¹⁴⁹ David Humphreys, “To Thomas Jefferson from David Humphreys, 8 May 1801,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-34-02-0044>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 34, 1 May–31 July 1801, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 58–62.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Paine, “To Thomas Jefferson from Thomas Paine, [August 1801],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-35-02-0148>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 35, 1 August–30 November 1801, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 191–194.

¹⁵¹ Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 88.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 108.

and would both preserve the balance of power in the Atlantic Ocean and protect the American coast.

In addition to political and financial considerations, the widespread use of gunboats by European navies convinced Jefferson gunboats would be effective weapons for coastal defense. Ever the student of world affairs, Jefferson eagerly absorbed lessons from gunboat battles like the Battle of the Liman, fought between the Russian and Turkish fleets in June 1788.

The entrance to the Liman, a tributary of the Dnieper River, was controlled by a Turkish fort. Russian infantry needed naval artillery support from the river to successfully attack and capture the fort; meanwhile the Turks used the river to supply their army in the field.¹⁵³ Whichever side controlled the water, therefore, enjoyed a distinct strategic advantage. On June 7, a Russian fleet of small warships and gunboats commanded by American Revolutionary War hero John Paul Jones and European adventurer Karl Heinrich von Nassau-Siegen met a force of fifty-seven larger Turkish warships in the Liman.¹⁵⁴ The shallow, brackish water laced with sandbars prevented the larger, deeper-draft, sail-driven Turkish warships from maneuvering freely, but was ideal for the shallow-draft, oar-driven Russian gunboats. Jones and Nassau-Siegen trapped the Turkish ships in a pincher maneuver and sank two. The rest were forced to retreat. The Turkish fleet moved into the Liman again on the night of June 16. Once again, many Turkish warships grounded on sandbars during the advance. In the morning, Jones and Nassau-Siegen's fleets attacked and burned the trapped Turkish ships and forced the rest to retreat back to the protection of the fort.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Scott Martelle, *The Admiral and the Ambassador: One Man's Obsessive Search for the Body of John Paul Jones* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014), 103.

¹⁵⁴ Martelle, *The Admiral*, 104.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

Jefferson was fascinated by the engagement, and included accounts of the battle in letters to James Monroe, John Jay, and John Brown Cutting.¹⁵⁶ In his letter to Cutting, he noted the disproportionate tactical effect of the smaller Russian gunboats, and how fifty-seven Turkish vessels and their commander were compelled to retreat after “obstinate action.”¹⁵⁷ He was also impressed by the efficacy of the shallow-draft gunboats in the shallow, coastal environment of the Liman. To Jay, he wrote the larger “ships of the line, frigates etc.,” after becoming “so engaged in the mud that they could not maneuver,” were easy prey for the small, lightly armed gunboats.¹⁵⁸

Jefferson was not the only Republican who noticed the events in the Liman. Gallatin reminded Jefferson of the Battle of the Liman as the President prepared a request for more gunboats in 1807. Gallatin wrote, “The most splendid achievement by gunboats was the destruction...of a great part of the Turkish fleet, under their celebrated Captain Pacha Hassan Aly, in the Liman, or mouth of the Dnieper, by the Russian flotilla under Prince of Nassau.”¹⁵⁹ Jefferson had forgotten about the battle; he thanked Gallatin for reminding him and wrote back, “I thank you for the case in the Liman sea, which escaped my recollection, it was indeed a very favorable one.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 9 August 1788,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-13-02-0369>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 13, March–7 October 1788, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956, 488–490.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to John Brown Cutting, 24 July 1788,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-13-02-0294>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 13, March–7 October 1788, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956, 403–407.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 3 August 1788,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-13-02-0346>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 13, March–7 October 1788, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956, 463–469.

¹⁵⁹ Gallatin and Adams, *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, 329.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, 9 February 1807,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, Accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-5056>.

The experience of the U.S. Navy in the Mediterranean also convinced Jefferson of the merit of his gunboat proposals. The American naval squadron at Tripoli found themselves unable to pursue small pirate vessels or approach the harbor in their large warships due to the many shoals and sandbars that made the water too shallow. The squadron's commander, Commodore Edward Preble, observed the wide-spread use of gunboats among the surrounding Mediterranean navies, and borrowed eight gunboats and two bomb vessels from the King of Naples.¹⁶¹ American officers and sailors used the smaller, shallow-draft boats to pursue Barbary gunboats into water too shallow for the larger frigates. Commodore Preble's use of gunboats against the Barbary corsairs was continued by his replacement, Commodore John Rodgers, when he arrived and took command in May 1805.

The borrowed Mediterranean gunboats proved the efficacy of the system and served as a training ground for gunboat commanders and crews. Several of the first American gunboats, built in 1804 with a small Congressional appropriation at Jefferson's request, saw service in the Mediterranean after Preble asked for additional gunboats. Jefferson was pleased with the result. When a gunboat arrived in Washington, he wrote to Massachusetts Congressman and Republican Jacob Crowninshield, "The gunboat here far exceeds expectation, in her sailing and is really a fine sea-boat...We expect hourly one from Norfolk, much lighter and said to be a model of beauty."¹⁶² The gunboat's success in the coastal waters of the Mediterranean convinced Jefferson to build enough gunboats "to compel obedience in every sea-port."¹⁶³ He therefore requested additional funds for gunboats in 1805, 1806, and 1807. As gunboats returned from the

¹⁶¹ Phillip R. Cuccia, "Coalition of the Willing Fighting the Terrorists of 1804; or, King of Naples, Please Lend Us Some Ships," in *Consortium on Revolutionary Europe: Selected Papers, 1750-1850* (2005), 156.

¹⁶² Thomas Jefferson, "From Thomas Jefferson to Jacob Crowninshield, 21 July 1804," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-0120>.

¹⁶³ Jefferson to Crowninshield, 21 July 1804, *Founders Online*.

Mediterranean, Jefferson ordered them to major American ports as coastal defense vessels. New York, the largest port in the United States, particularly needed protection, and Jefferson notified Attorney General Morgan Lewis that a majority of the gunboats were “destined to be stationed at New York as soon as they can be got there.”¹⁶⁴

Since the end of Jefferson’s presidency in 1809, historians have attempted to explain why Jefferson endorsed gunboats so enthusiastically. Some reduced Jefferson’s motivations to simplistic, pithy statements like Roosevelt’s “Jefferson was anti-navy,” or Beard’s “Jefferson did not value commerce.” The evidence suggests a more subtle answer. Gunboats were Jefferson’s best option for naval defense under the circumstances at the time. When Jefferson’s loyalties to his fellow Republicans, political philosophies (especially his preoccupation with republicanism), and commitment to financial economy are considered along with the political environment that prevailed in Europe and throughout the Atlantic region, it is clear that Jefferson could not have constructed a European-style navy of sea-going battleships. Had Jefferson done so, he would have compromised the trust of the Republican party, infringed on his own guiding principles, bankrupted the U.S. government, and possibly provoked the wrath of the most powerful navy on earth. Therefore, gunboats were not simply a reasonable choice; in Jefferson’s circumstances, they were the only option left.

For Jefferson’s coastal defense plan to be implemented, however, Jefferson had to convince Congress to appropriate money for gunboat construction. As shall be seen, Republican naval policy was not as universally defined as some historians have suggested; Congressional Republicans expressed a variety of opinions and beliefs about what sort of navy should defend the United States and its interests abroad.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Morgan Lewis, 2 May 1806,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-3679>.

Chapter 3

The Congressional Gunboat Appropriation Debates, 1802-1807

In the final days of his presidency, George Washington used his Farewell Address to warn against political factions. Washington argued interparty rancor “[agitated] the community with ill founded jealousies and false alarms” and cultivated “the animosity of one part against another.”¹⁶⁵ Despite Washington’s efforts, political division developed quickly in American politics, especially between what came to be known as Federalists and Republicans. Washington viewed the break between Federalists and Republicans with despair. Thomas Jefferson, however, saw his election to executive office in 1800 as the first Republican President as a second American Revolution. His party’s philosophy vindicated by the American electorate and bent on returning the United States to its founding ideals, Jefferson made reducing the national debt, military reform, and maintaining international neutrality cornerstones of his presidency. As a defensive measure for the American coast that required a minimum of financial expense, sought to avoid antagonizing the Royal Navy, and simultaneously appeased committed antinavalists, gunboats were an important component of Jefferson’s policy. Congress, however, was responsible for the gunboat program’s approval and funding. Therefore, a study of the Jeffersonian gunboat plan must explore the Congressional gunboat debate. Despite the Republican Congressional caucus’s traditional portrayal as southern agrarians universally in-line with Jefferson and opposed to naval spending, many of the most vocal Republicans during the gunboat debates were from northern states, and Congressional Republicans of the Seventh,

¹⁶⁵ George Washington, “Farewell Address,” in *The Writings of George Washington Vol. XIII (1794-1798)*, Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1892), 304.

Eighth, and Ninth Congresses held a wider range of opinions on naval and gunboat appropriations than traditionally thought.

It is difficult to compare early American political factions to the current political landscape. As noted by political historian Lance Banning, neither the Federalists nor the Republicans represented the political left or right neatly as “both parties were a bit of each.”¹⁶⁶ Federalists and Republicans did, however, represent different visions of the United States’ future, with different ideas of how the American government should function and who should govern. Partisan sparring between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton captured in microcosm the divide that gripped the country.

A leading disagreement was over whom should govern. Historian of the early republic Gordon Wood wrote the Federalists, “Were strongly committed to the traditional view of society as a hierarchy of degrees and ranks with people held together with vertical ties.”¹⁶⁷ Consequentially many Federalists embraced a vision of a society ruled by an elite class of wealthy and capable men via a powerful federal government. In contrast many Republicans sought to minimize federal power. Hiram Catton, an expert on early Republican politics, argued Republicans distrusted Federalist emphasis on a governing class in favor of “participatory democracy.”¹⁶⁸ Hence, Jefferson emphasized “absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority,” which he called “the vital principle of republics,” in his 1801 inaugural address.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Lance Banning, “Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the American Republic,” in *Founding Visions: The Ideas, Individuals, and Intersections that Created America*, Todd Estes, ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 46.

¹⁶⁷ Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105.

¹⁶⁸ Hiram Catton, “The Second American Revolution,” in *The Eighteenth Century* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1987), 72.

¹⁶⁹ Thomas Jefferson, *First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801*, accessed October 6, 2019, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jefinau1.asp.

Differences between Federalist and Republican vision animated debate on many policy issues, especially taxes, the federal debt, and defense.

The question of what, if any, navy the United States should build became a particularly divisive political issue long before Jefferson's presidency. Convinced the United States should both have the means to defend itself against European attack and establish itself as a power worthy of respect, many Federalists "advocate[d] military and naval preparedness."¹⁷⁰ Few were more outspoken in their desire to establish an American navy than Alexander Hamilton, whose prolific letters and articles show the naval vision of an elite Federalist. As Washington's Treasury Secretary, Hamilton was concerned by Barbary attacks on American shipping and urged Washington to consider "the commencement of a Navy."¹⁷¹ He was dismayed others in Washington's cabinet, including Jefferson, sought instead to reduce the army and navy "on pecuniary considerations."¹⁷² In contrast, Hamilton believed the Government should rather, within the law as it stood at the time, "Complete the Navy to the contemplated extent—say Six Ships of the line, Twelve frigates and twenty four Sloops of War."¹⁷³

Jefferson's 1800 election as President disturbed Hamilton profoundly, as it represented the triumph of a political philosophy he distrusted deeply. Thus Hamilton wrote to Rufus King, Federalist and U.S. Minister to Great Britain, "At headquarters a most visionary theory presides," and predicted a country ruled by Jefferson with, "No army, no navy, no *active*

¹⁷⁰ Donald R. Hickey, "Federalist Defense Policy in the Age of Jefferson, 1801-1812," in *Military Affairs* 45, no. 2 (April, 1981), 64.

¹⁷¹ Alexander Hamilton, "To George Washington, New York, November 19, 1796," in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton Digital Edition*, Harold C. Syre, ed., (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), <http://rotunda-upress-virginia-edu.ezproxy.liberty.edu/founders/ARHN-01-20-02-0269>, accessed October 20, 2019.

¹⁷² Alexander Hamilton, "To Rufus King, New York, January 5, 1800," in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton Digital Edition*, Harold C. Syre, ed., (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), <http://rotunda-upress-virginia-edu.ezproxy.liberty.edu/founders/ARHN-01-24-02-0127>, Accessed Oct. 30, 2019.

¹⁷³ Hamilton to King, January 5, 1800. A "Sloop of War" generally referred to a warship armed with less than twenty guns.

commerce...these are the pernicious dreams which as far and as fast as possible will be attempted to be realized.”¹⁷⁴ Hamilton was so concerned he wrote James McHenry, naval advocate and former Secretary of War, of the need for “assurances from Mr. Jefferson as the motive of our cooperation in him.” That “the preservation and gradual increase of the navy” was one of the conditions Hamilton set as the price of Federalist cooperation showed how much he valued a navy compared to other military forces.¹⁷⁵

In contrast, Jefferson and many other Republicans believed a large, European-style navy of sea-going warships was unnecessary, overly expensive, and would involve the United States in destructive European wars. Jefferson believed the Atlantic Ocean shielded the American coastline from naval attack and rendered a large navy unneeded. In the event a European power attempted to attack the American coast Jefferson was sure, “A small part only of their naval force will ever be risked across the Atlantic.” The minimal threat of large-scale naval attack meant the United States required only enough naval force, “To make ourselves equal to what they may detach.”¹⁷⁶ Jefferson distrusted European politics and sought to prevent American involvement in European “broils” beyond trade and commerce and, as a careful watcher of international affairs, Jefferson knew the consequences of challenging the Royal Navy’s seaborne dominance after the preemptive destruction of the fleets of the Netherlands, Russia, and Denmark at the Battle of Copenhagen.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Alexander Hamilton, “To Rufus King, New York, June 3, 1800,” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton Digital Edition*, Harold C. Syre, ed., (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2011), <http://rotunda-upress-virginia-edu.ezproxy.liberty.edu/founders/ARHN-01-26-02-0001-0011>, Accessed Oct. 30, 2019.

¹⁷⁵ Alexander Hamilton, “To James McHenry, New York, January 4, 1801,” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton Digital Edition*, Harold C. Syre, ed., (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), <http://rotunda-upress-virginia-edu.ezproxy.liberty.edu/founders/ARHN-01-25-02-0155>, Accessed Oct. 30, 2019.

¹⁷⁶ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 228.

¹⁷⁷ Grainger, *The British Navy*, 148. For a more complete discussion of Jefferson’s thought, refer to Chapter Two.

This was particularly welcome news for fiscally conservative Republicans who strongly opposed Federal spending on defense like North Carolina Congressman and Speaker of the House of Representatives Nathaniel Macon. While Jefferson was granted significant power as President, it fell to Congressional Republicans to translate the President's policy suggestions into bills and legislation. Debates over gunboat appropriations occurred on almost a yearly basis during Jefferson's administration, and resulted in a series of laws that permitted a gradually larger fleet of coastal defense gunboats. Gunboat construction was a popular cause during the Republican-led Seventh and Eighth Congresses, in power between March 4, 1801 and March 4, 1805.

On December 15, 1802 Jefferson conveyed his State of the Union Address to the House of Representatives and the Senate via his secretary, Mr. Lewis.¹⁷⁸ Overall, Jefferson was pleased, and proclaimed the impending new year, "Finds us still blessed with peace and friendship abroad [and] law, order, and religion, at home."¹⁷⁹ He used the occasion to update Congress on the progress of his naval campaign against the Barbary States, and wrote a small number of warships would remain in the Mediterranean to protect American interests from Tripoli and the other Barbary states.¹⁸⁰ Jefferson noted the coastal environment prevented the larger, deep-draft ships in the American fleet from effectively stopping the escape of smaller pirate vessels, and requested a number of smaller warships be built to fix the deficiency.¹⁸¹

On December 17, the House of Representatives convened to act upon Jefferson's message and requests. After a short debate, the House resolved, "That so much of the

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Congress, "Wednesday, December 15," *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 7th Congress, 2nd Session, 15 December, 1802 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 279. The "Mr. Lewis" was Meriwether Lewis, later leader of the Corps of Discovery that explored the Louisiana Territory.

¹⁷⁹ *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 7th Cong., 2nd Sess., 15 December, 1802, 12.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

President's message as refers to the warfare with, and to the relation with the other Barbary Powers, be referred to a select Committee."¹⁸² Massachusetts Republican William Eustis was duly assigned to chair a committee of four other congressmen; Republicans Lucas Elmendorf from New York, Thomas Tillinghast from Rhode Island, John Taliaferro from Virginia, and Federalist Elias Perkins from Connecticut.¹⁸³ After a week of deliberation Congressman Eustis rose on January 25 with his committee's report, which was ordered "to a Committee of the whole House" on January 26.¹⁸⁴ The House resolved, first, "That provision ought to be made, by law, for building or purchasing four vessels of war, to carry not exceeding sixteen guns each." Second, the House ordered Eustis, Perkins, and Elmendorf to prepare "a bill or bills...pursuant to the said resolution."¹⁸⁵ Eustis duly returned on January 28 with H.R. 23, "A Bill to Provide an Additional Armament for the Protection of the Seamen and Commerce of the United States," which appropriated \$96,000 for the construction of four, sixteen-gun warships "to be armed, manned, and fitted out for the protection of the seamen and commerce of the United States, in the Mediterranean and adjacent seas, and for other purposes, as the public service may require."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² U.S. Congress, "Thursday, December 17," *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 7th Congress, 2nd Session, 17 December, 1802 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 279.

¹⁸³ *Annals of Congress*, H.R., 7th Cong., 2nd Sess., 17 December, 1802, 280.

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Congress, "Tuesday, January 25," *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 7th Congress, 2nd Session, 25 January, 1803 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 420.

¹⁸⁵ U.S. Congress, "Wednesday, January 26," *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 7th Congress, 2nd Session, 26 January, 1803 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 423. While later years in the *Annals of Congress* include the full speeches of Congressmen and record significant details of Congressional debate, earlier Congressional sessions are not as well documented. No details of the January 26th, 1803 debate remain, except for "after some time spent therin [sic]" (*Annals of Congress*, H.R., 7th Cong., 2nd Sess., 26 January, 1803, 423).

¹⁸⁶ U.S. Congress, "H.R. 23," *Bills and Resolutions of the House and Senate*, 7th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1803).

After several days of debate the House passed Eustis's bill without amendment on February 10, 1803.¹⁸⁷ The bill was read in the Senate on February 11.¹⁸⁸ On February 14, Senator DeWitt Clinton of New York, Joseph Anderson from Tennessee, and James Jackson from Georgia, all Republicans, received the bill in committee.¹⁸⁹ Three days later, February 17, Senator Clinton rose with an amendment for a further appropriation. In addition to the four sixteen-gun sloops-of-war, Clinton added \$50,000 to build up to fifteen gunboats, "To be armed, manned, and fitted out, and employed for such purposes as...the public service may require."¹⁹⁰ The Senate passed the bill as amended on February 18, 1803; no debate was recorded.

Gunboats entered Congressional debate again after Jefferson's November 8, 1804 State of the Union. Preoccupied by war between Great Britain and Napoleon's France, Jefferson's communication was muted in tone compared to his previous communications to Congress. Nonetheless, the President reported, "The war which was lighted up in Europe a little before our last meeting, has not yet extended its flames to other nations, nor been marked by the calamities which sometimes stain the footsteps of war."¹⁹¹ The United States maintained good relationships with France and Great Britain, and Jefferson reiterated faith in "honest neutrality," through which he believed the United States would maintain mutually beneficial relationships with European trade partners.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ U.S. Congress, "Thursday, February 10," *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 7th Congress, 2nd Session, 10 February, 1803 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 507.

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Congress, "Friday, February 11," *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 7th Congress, 2nd Session, 11 February, 1803 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 82.

¹⁸⁹ U.S. Congress, "Monday, February 14," *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 7th Congress, 2nd Session, 14 February, 1803 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 82.

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Congress, "An Act to Provide an Additional Armament for the Protection of the Seamen and Commerce of the United States," in *United States Statutes at Large*, 2 Stat., 206.

¹⁹¹ U.S. Congress, "Thursday, November 8," *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 8th Congress, 2nd Session, 8 November, 1804 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 11.

¹⁹² *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 8th Cong., 2nd Sess., 8 November, 1804, 12.

Congress passed “An Act to Provide an Additional Armament for the Protection of the Seamen and Commerce of the United States” in February 1803, and authorized Jefferson to build fifteen gunboats. Jefferson reported the gunboat building program was “now in a course of execution to the extent...provided for.”¹⁹³ Inspired by the performance of U.S. Navy gunboats in the shallow waters of the Mediterranean and their use by other countries, Jefferson requested more of the small warships to defend the American coast. He argued gunboats would enforce American sovereignty within coastal waters and form an “obstacle to naval enterprise” against coastal towns and cities. The gunboats would be crewed by local militia so they could easily gather and attack enemy warships. Finally, Jefferson cited, “The economy of their maintenance and preservation from decay when not in actual service; and the competence of our finances to this defensive provision.”¹⁹⁴

On November 12, the House approved Virginian John Randolph’s resolution that Jefferson’s requests regarding, “The defence and security of our ports and harbors, and supporting within our waters the authority of our laws” be considered by a committee chaired by Maryland Republican Joseph Hopper Nicholson.¹⁹⁵ Four other Republicans, Robert Brown of Pennsylvania, Samuel Riker from New York, Ebenezer Seaver from Massachusetts, and Gideon Odin from Vermont, with Federalists Thomas Griffen from Virginia and Samuel Hunt of New Hampshire completed Nicholson’s committee.¹⁹⁶

Nicholson desired to follow Jefferson’s vision as closely as possible and provide American harbor protection, coastal defense, and law enforcement within American waters. He

¹⁹³ *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 8th Cong., 2nd Sess., 8 November, 1804, 13.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹⁵ U.S. Congress, “Monday, November 12,” in *Annals of Congress*, 8th Congress, 2nd Session, 12 November, 1804 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 684.

¹⁹⁶ *Annals of Congress*, 8th Cong., 2nd Sess., 12 November, 1804, 684.

was unsure if harbor defense and law enforcement could be covered by one bill with provisions for both or should be separate bills. He wrote to the President on November 19, 1804 and requested Jefferson tell him, “The Number of Boats wanted, the manner in which they are to be disposed of, how to be officered, mannd and equipt [sic]; in fine such Information as well enable me to meet your Wishes.”¹⁹⁷ With the British attack on Copenhagen likely in mind Jefferson urged Nicholson to tread carefully lest his legislation “[collide] with the pride of [Great] Britain,” and suggested, “It is better to avoid giving unnecessary umbrage where the same effect can be produced without doing it.”¹⁹⁸ In an effort to appear as harmless as possible to Great Britain, Jefferson suggested the gunboats be a separate act, and “be considered merely as a continuation of the views of the former act on the same subject.”¹⁹⁹

Nicholson therefore introduced two bills. On November 22, 1804 Nicholson presented “An Act for the More Effectual Preservation of Peace in the Ports and Harbors of the United States, and in the Waters Under Their Jurisdiction,” which authorized judges to arrest and try anyone suspected of breaking U.S. laws within American harbors and territorial waters, even when aboard foreign warships.²⁰⁰ The law also ordered “any officer having command of militia, or any officer having command of regular troops, or of armed vessels of the United States, in the Vicinity” to assist with the arrest if needed.²⁰¹ The bill was made law on March 3, 1805.

¹⁹⁷ Joseph H. Nicholson, “To Thomas Jefferson from Joseph H. Nicholson, 19 November 1804,” in *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-0679>.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Joseph H. Nicholson, 20 November, 1804,” in *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-0687>.

¹⁹⁹ Jefferson to Nicholson, 20 November, 1804, *Founders Online*.

²⁰⁰ U.S. Congress, “An Act for the More Effectual Preservation of Peace in the Ports and Harbors of the United States, and in the Waters under their Jurisdiction,” in *United States Statutes at Large*, 2 Stat., 339.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 340.

Nicholson's committee turned to the provision of military defense. Nicholson wrote Jefferson again on January 28, 1805 and asked how many gunboats Jefferson sought. He also requested advice on how the appropriations request should be presented; "Permit me also to ask whether you think it will be better to make a detailed Report to the House," he wrote, "or whether a Bill making the Appropriation, and pointing to the Object, will be sufficient."²⁰² Jefferson provided a broad overview of his coastal defense philosophy in his January 29 reply. His goal was not to fortify American harbors against all enemy warships, as this was impossibly expensive. Instead Jefferson argued, "If we cannot hinder vessels from entering our harbours, we should turn our attention to the putting it out of their power to lie...before a town to injure it."²⁰³ To this end, he recommended a combination of shore artillery batteries and gunboats. Jefferson noted ten gunboats were being constructed under the 1803 authorization and cited his belief that "15. more would enable us to put every harbour under our view into a respectable condition;" at an estimated cost of \$4,000 per gunboat, Jefferson recommended a total appropriation of \$60,000.²⁰⁴ Ever the shrewd politician, Jefferson counseled against sharing too many details with the rest of Congress. If the law were limited by the amount of money appropriated rather than the amount of gunboats to be built, "Perhaps that sum would build more" than the expected fifteen; therefore, Jefferson suggested it would be prudent "not to give a detailed report, which exposes our policy too much."²⁰⁵

²⁰² Joseph H. Nicholson, "To Thomas Jefferson from Joseph H. Nicholson, 28 January 1805," in *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-1059>.

²⁰³ Thomas Jefferson, "From Thomas Jefferson to Joseph H. Nicholson, 29 January 1805," in *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-1073>.

²⁰⁴ Jefferson to Nicholson, 29 January 1805, *Founders Online*.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Nicholson and his committee presented their proposal for gunboat appropriations to Congress on January 31, 1805. “A Bill to Appropriate a Sum of Money for the Purpose of Building Gun-Boats” incorporated Jefferson’s suggestions, and appropriated \$60,000, “For the purpose of enabling the President to cause to be built, a number of gunboats, not exceeding twenty five, for the better protection of the ports and harbors of the United States.”²⁰⁶ The House voted to debate Nicholson’s bill the following day, but did not consider the bill again until February 7 due to other business. Nicholson’s bill passed the House without amendment on February 8.²⁰⁷

Nicholson’s bill was assigned to another Marylander, Republican Senator Samuel Smith, along with Federalist Jonathan Dayton from New Jersey and New York Republican Samuel L. Mitchill, upon arrival at the Senate.²⁰⁸ The bill sailed through its second reading without amendment; on February 28, the Senate passed the bill as submitted following a third reading.²⁰⁹ “An Act to Appropriate a Sum of Money for the Purpose of Building Gun Boats” was enacted as law on March 2, 1805.²¹⁰

Historians traditionally viewed the early-nineteenth century Congressional debate on naval appropriations as a struggle between Republican southern farmers and Federalist northern industrialists. Charles Beard noted Jefferson’s “sympathies and affiliations were with the agrarian class,” and even more importantly, suggested Jefferson “recognized the agricultural

²⁰⁶ U.S. Congress, “H.R. 129,” *Bills and Resolutions of the House and Senate*, 8th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1805).

²⁰⁷ U.S. Congress, “Thursday, February 7,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 8th Congress, 2nd Session, 12 November, 1804 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 1184. No record of Congressional debate over Nicholson’s bill is recorded.

²⁰⁸ U.S. Congress, “Saturday, February 9,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 8th Congress, 2nd Session, 9 February, 1804 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 53. Senator Smith’s brother, Robert Smith, was Jefferson’s Secretary of the Navy.

²⁰⁹ U.S. Congress, “Thursday, February 28,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 8th Congress, 2nd Session, 9 February, 1804 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 67.

²¹⁰ U.S. Congress, “An Act to Appropriate a Sum of Money for the Purpose of Building Gun Boats,” in *United States Statutes at Large*, 2 Stat., 330.

interest as the main body of his party.”²¹¹ Jefferson biographer Merrill Peterson added northern merchants supported increased naval construction as protection for their shipping interests. In contrast he argued Southern, agricultural Republicans “objected both on grounds of costly discrimination and the inability, practically, of a national fleet to defend the long, exposed coastline from the Chesapeake southward.”²¹²

The first two gunboat appropriations illustrate the problems with the traditional depiction of the gunboat debate. In contrast to Beard and Peterson’s hypothesis, none of the Congressional committees that drafted “A Bill to Provide an Additional Armament for the Protection of the Seamen and Commerce of the United States” in 1803 or “An Act to appropriate a Sum of Money for the Purpose of Building Gun Boats” in 1805 fit the traditional “Southern Agriculturalist” model, especially with regard to the legislator’s states of origin.

Congressman Eustis’s 1802-3 House committee consisted of three northern Republicans, and Taliaferro from Virginia. Additionally, the 1803 Senate committee was chaired by New York Republican DeWitt Clinton, with Southerners Joseph Anderson from Tennessee and James Jackson of Georgia. Northern states were also well represented in 1804-5. Maryland Republicans exerted considerable influence on gunboat legislation; Congressman Nicholson wrote the bill, and Senator Samuel Smith navigated it through the Senate. Other than Nicholson, no other committee member hailed from below the Mason-Dixon line. In the Senate, the other Republican senator on Smith’s committee was from New York.

Therefore, northern Republicans played a large role in shaping naval policy during Jefferson’s administration. While Southern Republicans Taliaferro, Jackson, and Anderson sat

²¹¹ Beard, *Economic Origins*, 435.

²¹² Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation*, 568.

on gunboat committees, they were outnumbered by northern Republican Congressmen Eustis, Elmendorf, Tillinghast, Nicholson, Brown, Riker, Seaver, and Odin, and Senators Clinton, Mitchill, and Smith.

Had Republicans wanted to scuttle the U.S. Navy, the committees responsible for naval appropriations would have had ample opportunity to do so. Despite the overwhelming presence of Republicans on all gunboat committees, however, the laws they passed granted significant appropriations to naval construction programs. Eustis's committee recommended \$90,000 be spent on four additional sea-going warships, and Clinton added an additional \$50,000 for gunboats. Nicholson and Smith granted another \$60,000 for gunboats in 1805, a total of \$200,000 over four years. Further, while Jefferson requested smaller craft for the U.S. fleet deployed to the Mediterranean in 1803, he left Congress the decision of what ships to build; therefore, Clinton's amendment which funded fifteen gunboats originated with Congressional Republicans, not the President. Appropriations totaling \$200,000 to fund a building program of four "blue-water" warships and up to thirty-nine coastal defense gunboats are hardly the actions of committed enemies of the Navy.

The Seventh and Eighth Congresses passed gunboat appropriations at Jefferson's request with seemingly little discussion and few amendments. In contrast, gunboat legislation was introduced twice during the Ninth Congress, in session between March 4, 1805 and March 4, 1807, and generated acrimonious debate. During the first session, Republicans generally supported Jefferson but expressed a wider range of opinions about gunboat and naval appropriations than in other sessions. In the second session, gunboat legislation proved unpopular, and Congress did not approve additional money for gunboat construction.

Jefferson shared his policy goals with Congress again in his 1805 State of the Union message. With war between France and Great Britain becoming more widespread, Jefferson was glad Congress had reconvened.²¹³ While the United States remained neutral, Jefferson warned, “The aspect of our foreign relations has considerably changed” and informed Congress, “Our coasts have been infested, and our harbors watched, by private armed vessels...committing piratical acts.”²¹⁴ British and French warships prowled the American coast and stopped American merchant vessels, seized cargo, and impressed sailors, “To the great annoyance and oppression of our commerce,” even though they claimed to be in search of enemy combatants.²¹⁵ While Jefferson believed diplomacy would resolve the situation, he recognized more defensive measures were desperately needed at the coast and the United States may need to resort to war. Therefore, Jefferson urged Congress to take prudent action in preparation for war. To “place our seaport towns out of the danger of insult,” Jefferson suggested harbor fortifications and gunboats be constructed.²¹⁶ Jefferson also asked for money to build seventy-four-gun battleships.²¹⁷

On December 4, 1805, the House assigned the President’s proposals to committees.²¹⁸ While some congressmen argued the House Committee on Ways and Means should consider Jefferson’s proposals regarding gunboats, harbor fortifications, and warships, a “select” committee, chaired by Virginia Republican John Dawson was ultimately appointed. Six other congressmen joined Dawson; Republicans Nathan Williams from New York, Thomas Blount from North Carolina, James Fisk of Vermont, Ezra Darby from New Jersey, and Joseph Clay of

²¹³ U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, December 3,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 9th Congress, 1st Session, 3 December, 1805 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 11.

²¹⁴ *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 3 December, 1805, 12.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

²¹⁶ *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 3 December, 1805, 13.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹⁸ U.S. Congress, “Wednesday, December 4: President’s Message,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 1st Session, 4 December, 1805 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 258.

Pennsylvania (who replaced John Hamilton from Pennsylvania), and Federalist William Ely of Massachusetts.

After almost three weeks of deliberation, Dawson presented documents from Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith that reported enough building material for six seventy-four-gun warships was stored at shipyards on the East coast. Smith reported, “A seventy-four gun ship will cost, \$328,888.89” while, “The average cost of building gunboats, will be, each, \$4,625.00.”²¹⁹ Smith also explained Congress must remember the time necessary to construct ships-of-the-line; “It may be proper here to subjoin,” he wrote, “That, from the time Congress shall authorize the building of seventy-four-gun ships, it will require three years to prepare one for launching; but we could, in the same period of time, build six.”²²⁰ In light of Smith’s information, Dawson brought three resolutions for Congress to consider. To implement Jefferson’s multi-faceted coastal defense plan Dawson requested \$150,000, “To cause our ports and harbors to be better fortified and protected against any insult or injury” and \$250,000 more for, “A number of gunboats, not exceeding fifty, for the better protection to the harbors, coasts, and commerce, of the United States.”²²¹ Finally, Dawson asked for \$650,000 for six line-of-battle ships of seventy-four guns each.²²²

When the House met a month later to debate Dawson’s resolutions, Dawson reminded his fellow congressmen of Jefferson’s December 3 State of the Union address. He said Jefferson’s

²¹⁹ Robert Smith, “To J. Dawson, Esq., Navy Department, December 21, 1805,” in “Naval Affairs No. 48: Increase of the Navy, and Statement of Materials on Hand.” *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, Vol. I*, Walter Lowrie and Walter S. Franklin, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 142. Jefferson’s letters to Joseph H. Nicholson in 1805 cite an estimated cost of \$2,000 per gunboat; Jefferson suggested Nicholson request \$4,000 per gunboat in case of overages when he calculated the appropriation.

²²⁰ Smith, “To J. Dawson, Esq.,” 142.

²²¹ U.S. Congress, “Naval Affairs No. 48: Increase of the Navy, and Statement of Materials on Hand,” in *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, Vol. I*, Walter Lowrie and Walter S. Franklin, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 141.

²²² *Ibid.*

report of foreign predation on American commercial shipping “excited the honest indignation of all who heard it.”²²³ Therefore, Dawson exhorted the House to stand with the President and enact the legislation he sought. He argued, “It now becomes our duty...to adopt those measures, and to provide those means, best calculated to meet the state of things.”²²⁴ During three days of debate (January 23, 28, and March 25), concerns about cost, disagreements over the importance of commerce, and regional interests separated House Republicans into factions which competed for influence.

The first group was composed of Dawson and other advocates for more harbor defenses and a stronger navy to defend maritime commerce. They viewed the proposed appropriations as a starting point to be increased if required; in fact, Dawson stated the \$150,000 for fortifications was designed to be replaced with a larger appropriation. Nathan Williams of New York, a member of Dawson’s committee, explained the committee’s goal was not to create a comprehensive defense system, but rather repair previously constructed fortifications and supply them with more artillery.²²⁵

John Jackson of Virginia agreed with Dawson and Williams, and he said it was “high time that the representatives of the nation should deliberate on the subject” because, “The cries of our impressed seamen join in the general murmur; our commerce, subject to lawless condemnation under admiralty decisions, calls aloud for our attention.”²²⁶ Jackson urged Congress to not be distracted by the amounts requested. The resolutions were to “[fix] the principle” and allow Congress to decide to construct defensive measures or not, rather than

²²³ U.S. Congress, “Thursday, January 23: Defence of Ports and Harbors,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 1st Session, 23 January, 1806 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and gSeaton, 1851), 377.

²²⁴ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 23 January, 1806, 378.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 379

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 382.

determine how much to spend.²²⁷ While Congress lacked information about which harbors would be fortified, or how many soldiers and guns were needed to man and arm them, Jackson believed it “not necessary now to have that detailed information which it may be necessary to have when this business assumes the shape of a bill.”²²⁸

Representative Orchard Cook took Dawson’s position a step further, and argued Dawson’s resolutions did not provide enough fortifications, artillery batteries, and warships. Cook, a merchant and Republican from Massachusetts, was a particularly vocal supporter of commercial interests and increased naval spending and believed all Americans “equally entitled to the protection of your Government.”²²⁹ He challenged his fellow Republican’s partiality to farmers head-on; “Merchants and your mariners,” he thundered, “Are as much entitled to protection in their pursuits, as are those whose pursuits are agricultural!”²³⁰ From his perspective as a businessman, Cook argued that the U.S. Navy was inadequate to protect American commerce and demanded a powerful navy like other nations. In Cook’s opinion, the United States needed a powerful fleet of “thirty ships-of-the-line and seventy frigates.”²³¹

Local interests also played a significant role, and as their state had the largest harbor in the United States, New York Republicans were particularly strident in their desire for more defenses. George Clinton, Jr. rose and called Dawson’s appropriations for harbor fortifications “altogether inadequate,” especially for a city of New York’s size.²³² The amount requested wouldn’t complete defensive works around New York harbor alone, let alone other, additional American ports. Therefore, Clinton announced he would “rather not appropriate a cent, than

²²⁷ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 23 January, 1806, 382.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ U.S. Congress, “Friday, February 28: Defence of Ports and Harbors,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 1st Session, 28 February, 1806 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 525.

²³⁰ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 28 February, 1806, 525.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 527.

²³² *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess. Sess., 23 January, 1806, 378.

agree to such a sum as would be a burlesque on the subject.”²³³ Clinton’s fellow New York Republican David Thomas added “granting it appeared nearly equivalent to doing nothing.”²³⁴ Instead of asking for specific dollar amounts in the resolution, Thomas suggested replacing them with blanks so, “After principles were decided...a bill brought in to carry them to effect.”²³⁵

Dawson, in turn, argued Clinton and Thomas misstated the situation. The resolutions were not to be the only money spent on New York fortifications, but were instead intended as a starting point and would be augmented with additional money from other sources. Dawson reminded his colleagues of the “one million of dollars...already been applied to the defence of New York, provided that State agrees to appropriate the money,” and the additional “many millions...applied to the defence of our harbors” by prior Congressional acts.²³⁶

Finally, a third group of congressmen asked for more information, and argued Congress should not spend money on fortifications and ships without assurance the appropriations were adequate. Few suggested halting spending on naval defense, but many expressed their caution, or were displeased with the resolutions. Peter Early, a Republican from Georgia, was another outspoken critic of Dawson’s resolutions and argued Congress was “not possessed of sufficient detailed information on which to found a correct decision” especially in light of the system’s complexity.²³⁷ Early’s caution earned Dawson’s ire; in frustration, Dawson exclaimed, “I know of no way in which [Early] can get information, except by converting a committee of this House into a corps of engineers, to go from one end of this country to the other!”²³⁸ Despite Dawson’s outburst, Republican and Speaker of the House Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina agreed

²³³ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 1st Sess. Sess., 23 January, 1806, 379.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 380.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 381.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 379.

Congress did not have enough information, and thought Early's request reasonable.²³⁹ Macon supported the construction of gunboats and believed they were "better adapted to the defence of our harbors than any other" defensive means.²⁴⁰ He also believed, however, the United States could not afford adequate harbor fortifications or enough seventy-four-gun warships to ensure national security as, "You must have a fleet equal to Great Britain if you expect defence in this way."²⁴¹

Other representatives were less polite. In response to Connecticut Federalist Samuel W. Dana's statement scolding Congress for not protecting "the violated rights of their citizens" after seven weeks in session, Maryland Republican Roger Nelson responded even if Congress, "Had been in session seventy-seven weeks," he should rather "vote against coming to a decision on any question, however important" than vote without information in hand.²⁴² He believed Dawson's appropriations for gunboats and harbor fortifications excessive, and but announced, "If the thing can be effected by the expenditure of a moderate sum, I may agree to it." He warned however, "If the sum required shall be so enormous as not only to eat up our existing revenue, but to require new burdens, I will not vote for a dollar."²⁴³

On March 25, 1806, the House voted on Dawson's resolutions. The appropriation of \$150,000 for harbor fortifications passed narrowly with sixty-three in favor and sixty against.²⁴⁴ Dawson unsuccessfully attempted to amend the second resolution and replace the \$250,000 requested for gunboats with a blank, "With the view of filling it with a larger sum in case the third resolution should be disagreed to." His concern was misplaced, and the gunboat resolution

²³⁹ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 1nd Sess., 23 January, 1806, 386.

²⁴⁰ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 28 February 1806, 525.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 524.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 384.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, "Tuesday, March 25: Defence of Ports and Harbors," in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 1st Session, 25 March, 1806 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 842

passed with seventy-two votes in favor.²⁴⁵ The third appropriation of \$660,000 for six seventy-four-gun warships encountered last-minute debate. Most Republicans were willing to build gunboats, but seagoing warships were still unpopular. Despite the support of New York Republican Josiah Masters, who argued, “The Government ought to protect and encourage the merchant to pursue his own lawful interest, according to his own judgement,” the measure failed with only thirty votes in favor.²⁴⁶

Congress duly ordered Dawson’s committee was to draft, “A bill, or bills...pursuant to the first and second of the said resolutions.”²⁴⁷ On March 28, 1806 Dawson produced “A Bill for Fortifying the Ports and Harbors of the United States, and for Building Gunboats,” which was debated by the House April 16 and 18, 1806. Republicans attempted to alter the bill several times at the last minute. The \$150,000 appropriation for harbor fortifications endured two motions which called for it to be deleted, the first by David R. Williams, Republican from South Carolina, and the second by Joseph Clay, Republican from Pennsylvania and a member of Dawson’s original committee.²⁴⁸ Both were voted down. Other Republicans attempted to add appropriations for additional warships to the bill. Maryland Republican William McCreery reminded his colleagues of the revenue maritime commerce earned and argued European war and, “The great and growing importance of our commerce, and the defenseless state it is in” should induce Congress to spend more on defense.²⁴⁹ He therefore moved to add an appropriation of \$500,000 for three additional frigates to the bill. Dawson supported McCreery’s motion, especially since the recent loss of several frigates had created a “deficiency in the Naval

²⁴⁵ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 25 March, 1806, 842.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 844.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 848.

²⁴⁸ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 15 April, 1806, 1051.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Establishment;” therefore, Dawson “offered a new section appropriating a sum not exceeding \$500,000, to enable the President to cause three additional frigates to be built.”²⁵⁰ Kentucky Republican Matthew Lyon agreed American commercial shipping required protection, and suggested an additional amendment, “To enable the President to cause three additional frigates or two seventy-fours to be built.”²⁵¹ Both amendments were voted down.

“A Bill for Fortifying the Ports and Harbors of the United States, and for Building Gunboats” passed on April 16, 1806. Upon arrival in the Senate, “The bill was read the first and second time by unanimous consent,” ordered to a third reading, and assigned to Senator Uriah Tracy’s committee for review.²⁵² Tracy, a Connecticut Federalist, was joined by two Republican Senators experienced in gunboat appropriations. Joseph Anderson of Tennessee had been a member of DeWitt Clinton’s 1803 committee, and Samuel L. Mitchill from New York had sat on Samuel Smith’s 1805 committee.²⁵³ Tracy’s committee submitted an amendment on April 18, 1806 that authorized the President, “To officer, man and equip any part, or all of said gun boats” and appropriated an additional \$20,000, “To defray any expense which may be incurred by officering, manning and equipping gun boats.”²⁵⁴ The bill passed the Senate on April 18 and went into effect April 21, 1806.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁰ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 15 April, 1806., 1042. The USS *Philadelphia*, a 36-gun frigate, ran aground in the Mediterranean while in pursuit of a smaller Tripoline ship on October 31, 1803. After her capture by the Bashaw of Tripoli, a daring raid by U.S. Navy Lt. Stephen Decatur and a small unit of sailors ultimately blew up and sank her. The USS *Boston* (a 32-gun frigate) and the USS *General Greene* (a 30-gun frigate) were in ordinary (storage) at the Washington Navy Yard since 1802 and 1801, respectively. Both ships had deteriorated past the point of repair.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² U.S. Congress, “Wednesday, April 16,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 9th Congress, 1st Sess., 16 April, 1806, 240.

²⁵³ U.S. Congress, “Thursday, April 17,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 9th Congress, 1st Session, 17 April, 1806 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 243.

²⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, “An Act for Fortifying the Ports and Harbors of the United States, and for Building Gun Boats,” in *United States Statutes At Large, Vol. VIII*, Richard Peters, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1867), 402.

²⁵⁵ U.S. Congress, “Friday, April 18,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 9th Congress, 1st Session, 18 April, 1806 (Gales and Seaton, 1851), 245.

The Ninth Congress considered gunboats again during the second session. In his December 2, 1806 State of the Union message Jefferson reported construction of the gunboats authorized in 1805 was proceeding on schedule. Despite minor delays, “To allow the time necessary for their more solid construction,” Jefferson announced the small warships would be ready for service in the spring.²⁵⁶ In light of the increased tensions between Great Britain and the United States, however, Jefferson wanted more gunboats, “To place our seaport towns and waters in that state of defence to which we are competent.”²⁵⁷ Therefore Jefferson requested another appropriation for gunboats with additional money for, “Repairing fortifications already established, and the erection of such other works as may have real effect in obstructing the approach of an enemy to our seaport towns, or their remaining before them.”²⁵⁸ Following Jefferson’s message, Maryland Republican Roger Nelson was assigned the question of how best to protect the harbors and coastline of the United States, with Republicans Philip R. Thompson of Virginia, John Rea of Pennsylvania, David Thomas of New York, and Thomas Wynns from North Carolina, and Federalists Benjamin Tallmadge of Connecticut and James Elliot of Vermont.²⁵⁹

Previous Congresses allowed committee chairs to return with legislation prior to debate, and committee members generally refrained from addressing Congress before the committee chair. Due to recent events the second session did not follow earlier precedent. The previous April, while ostensibly in search of two French warships off Sandy Hook, New Jersey, a squadron of Royal Navy frigates began to stop and search merchant vessels. On April 25, 1806,

²⁵⁶ U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, December 2: Annual Message,” *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 2 December, 1806 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton: 1851), 12.

²⁵⁷ *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2 December, 1806, 12.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵⁹ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 3 December, 1806, 114.

HMS *Leander*, commanded by Captains William Lyall and Henry Whitby, killed an American sailor named John Pierce with a misplaced warning shot, and caused riots in New York.²⁶⁰

Several British officers caught ashore were imprisoned briefly for their own safety before they could be smuggled back to their ships.

On December 15, unable to contain his anger over “The *Leander* Affair” any longer, Vermont Federalist James Elliot rose to address Congress. Elliot announced he was sure “but one sentiment has pervaded and agitated the American mind” regarding “the atrocious murder of our fellow citizen, John Pierce, while in the peaceable pursuit of his honest occupation.”²⁶¹

Elliot argued the U.S. Navy was entirely inadequate against British aggression, and asked Congress to consider whether it would not be prudent, “To augment, in some small degree, that establishment,” or to “organize and manage it in a different manner from what has been heretofore practiced; to give it more efficiency and more energy?”²⁶² Finally, Elliot reminded his colleagues Congress was responsible for adequate funding for defensive measures, and decried “the miserly but convulsive grasp” with which they held “the purse-strings of the nation.”²⁶³

Despite Elliot’s efforts, Nelson did not produce resolutions until January 12, 1807. As in the previous session, Nelson’s resolutions sought appropriations to repair and improve existing harbor fortifications, and to build additional gunboats.²⁶⁴ Nelson evidently learned from Dawson’s experience; rather than include suggested appropriation sums, his resolutions included blanks to be filled-in after the resolutions were passed. To bolster his case and show Congress

²⁶⁰ George C. Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 14.

²⁶¹ U.S. Congress, “Monday, December 15: National Defence,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 15 December, 1806 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 160.

²⁶² *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 15 December, 1806, 161.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ U.S. Congress, “Monday, January 12,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 12 January, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 290.

how much money was needed, Nelson submitted several letters from Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith. Smith reported thirteen gunboats and four bomb vessels in service and fifty-six gunboats under construction.²⁶⁵ Smith also wrote he had been instructed, by President Jefferson, no less, to request \$300,000 to build an additional sixty gunboats.²⁶⁶

The House of Representatives debated Nelson's bill intermittently between January 23 and February 24, 1807. Gurdon S. Mumford, a Republican from New York, argued the U.S. Navy must be allowed to defend the American coastline, especially in the wake of the *Leander* Affair. He therefore moved to amend Nelson's first resolution so to, "Enable the President of the United States to equip, man, and maintain so much of the present naval force of the United States as he may judge proper."²⁶⁷ He asked if Congress would allow, "The humiliating degradation of having its own citizens murdered within its own limits, without making an effort and taking such strong ground as will prevent in future the repetition of the like crimes?"²⁶⁸ George Clinton, Jr., Mumford's fellow New York Republican, supported the amendment despite his distaste for "expensive navies or standing armies." Nevertheless, Clinton said, "If we must have a navy—small as it is—let us employ it for its true design."²⁶⁹ Nelson wasn't opposed to Mumford's amendment, but suggested it would fit better in the gunboat resolution. Despite Nelson's support, the amendment failed forty-six to fifty.²⁷⁰

Harbor fortifications caused vigorous debate and divided the Republican caucus again. One faction argued the appropriation for coastal fortifications should be higher. In contrast, Nelson and his supporters claimed fortifications were unable to adequately defend ports from

²⁶⁵ Smith, "To Roger Nelson, Esq.," 161.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁶⁷ U.S. Congress, "Friday, January 23: National Defence," in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 23 January, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 385.

²⁶⁸ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 23 January, 1807, 384.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 386.

naval attack and supported a smaller appropriation. Massachusetts Republican Orchard Cook suggested the largest appropriation when he moved one-million-dollars be spent on fortifications. His motion was immediately voted down with only twelve votes in favor.²⁷¹

Debate focused on New York despite Nelson's intention to provide fortifications at several American harbors. New York Republicans again supported a larger appropriation. Mumford proposed an appropriation of \$500,000 because he was unaware "of any nation in the annals of history that ever neglected to protect their ports and harbors, especially when in a similar defenceless situation we now find our own."²⁷² Republican Uri Tracy, also from New York, supported Mumford's motion of \$500,000 and called for "some amendment...by which the President will be enabled to arm, equip, and keep in actual service, if necessary, all the gunboats and frigates."²⁷³ His request for one million dollars dismissed, Orchard Cook also supported Mumford's idea, and called for Congress to "fill the blank with a liberal sum—with the sum of \$500,000."²⁷⁴ Matthew Lyon, a Republican from landlocked Kentucky, also threw his support behind "a liberal appropriation" for harbor defense.²⁷⁵

In contrast, other representatives doubted the utility of fortifications and opposed large appropriations for their construction. Nelson proposed a mere \$20,000 against Mumford and Tracy's calls for \$500,000. Nelson reported the Department of War had no need of additional money for harbor fortifications, as \$110,000 remained of the \$150,000 appropriated the year before and was more than could be spent in a year.²⁷⁶ Further, Nelson believed, "Ten millions of dollars would not make [New York] invulnerable to the attack of eight or ten ships-of-the-

²⁷¹ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 23 January, 1807, 386.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 391.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 390.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 399.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 385.

line.”²⁷⁷ Therefore, Nelson believed Mumford’s proposed \$500,000 appropriation impractical and inadequate.

Finally, Nelson reminded his colleagues of European countries that spent vast sums on port fortifications only to condemn their own people to poverty. He concluded, “Rather than see the people of this country placed in the same calamitous condition, I would prefer beholding all the towns in the United States prostrate!”²⁷⁸ John Smilie, a Pennsylvania Republican, agreed. Despite the *Leander* Affair, Smilie believed the United States was “not at present threatened with war,” and reminded Congress of the treaty between the United States and Great Britain.²⁷⁹ Convinced the United States was not in danger, Smilie believed it “unwise to arrest the discharge of the national debt, and apply large funds to this object, without any evidence of its utility.”²⁸⁰

His blasé attitude toward national defence horrified more militant colleagues like Nathan Williams of New York, who exclaimed, “From the course the business before us has taken, sir, I apprehend that we shall never rise into action, until roused by some dreadful disaster!”²⁸¹ Nonetheless, Smilie believed, “Money granted for the fortifications of ports on the present plan would be so much money thrown away.”²⁸² Opinions were so divided, motions and countermotions took the form of a bidding war over the amount to be earmarked for harbor defense. The *Annals of Congress* record:

[Mumford’s motion for \$500,000] was disagreed to—39 to 65. Mr. Mumford then moved to fill the blank with ‘\$400,000.’ This motion was disagreed to—37 to 66. Mr. Mumford then proposed ‘\$300,000’—Disagreed to, ayes 36, noes 58. Mr. Cook proposed ‘\$250,000’...The question was then taken on filling the blank with ‘250,000,’ which was disagreed to—ayes 37, noes 69.²⁸³

²⁷⁷ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 23 January, 1807, 386.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 389.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 394.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 389.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 393.

Ultimately, Nelson's original appropriation of \$20,000 was adopted with fifty-seven votes in favor.²⁸⁴

The gunboat resolution also caused strenuous debate. Unlike prior gunboat appropriations, which were generally popular and passed easily, gunboats were decidedly less popular during the second session of the Ninth Congress. House Republicans divided into a pro-gunboat faction and a harbor fortification faction. Roger Nelson led the pro-gunboat faction and supported Jefferson and Smith's request for \$300,000 to build sixty gunboats. Not an expert in naval affairs—he confessed himself “wholly ignorant of the utility of gunboats”—Nelson argued, “If gunboats are built, we ought to build enough to answer the purpose intended...the proper department has informed us that \$300,000 will be necessary for the purpose.”²⁸⁵

Republican Philip Van Cortlandt of New York supported Nelson's cause because he doubted harbor fortifications were sufficient defense against naval attack. Rather, he noted the U.S. Navy “had a number of vessels of war, which he thought might be advantageously used as circumstances might require.”²⁸⁶ He suggested \$300,000 be appropriated and proposed to “let the President use it as he pleases, either in gunboats or fortifications.”²⁸⁷ Tennessee Republican George W. Campbell concurred; “As he understood the subject,” he stated, “Gunboats were intended to supply the deficiency existing in other fortifications [as]...some of our ports could not be defended by batteries.”²⁸⁸ James Fisk, a Vermont Republican, supported gunboats because of lessons learned during the First Barbary War. He reminded Congress the U.S. fleet, “Had been obliged to borrow a number of [gunboats], which had proved not only an instrument

²⁸⁴ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 23 January, 1807, 400.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ U.S. Congress, “Wednesday, February 4,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 4 February, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 449.

²⁸⁷ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 4 February, 1807, 449.

²⁸⁸ U.S. Congress, “Thursday, February 5: National Defence,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 5 February, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 462.

of defence, but likewise of offence” in the shallow waters off the Tripoline coast.²⁸⁹ He believed the gunboats “to be peculiarly adapted to the United States, who had a large extent of seacoast and numbers of shoals, enabling them to act with effect.”²⁹⁰ Rhode Island Republican Joseph Stanton, Jr. also appealed to history, and recalled, “In the last French war, a system of this kind had been adopted.” He understood, “In a calm, two gunboats would sink a frigate.”²⁹¹

In contrast, anti-gunboat congressmen argued harbor fortifications were better for defense and the Navy did not need more gunboats. New York Representative Mumford believed gunboats, “Inadequate to any useful purpose of defence in the Northern States, where the waters are rough.”²⁹² During debate on February 5, 1807, he hoped the House would “agree to strike out the whole resolution respecting gunboats, with a view to appropriate that money to solid and durable fortifications;” in the first storm, he pessimistically predicted gunboats would “sink at their mooring at the entrance of either of the harbors of Portsmouth, Salem, Plymouth, Newport, or New York.”²⁹³

Others argued gunboats were unproven or too experimental to trust. Republican Edward Lloyd of Maryland flatly opposed spending more money on gunboats, in his opinion, “An experiment not yet tried.” He believed the sixty already funded, “Are a sufficient number with which to try the experiment. Let us first determine their utility before we appropriate large sums of money.”²⁹⁴ Virginia Republican John Randolph agreed. He called gunboats a “matter of experiment,” and warned, “If they should eventually turn out good for nothing, the House would

²⁸⁹ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 5 February, 1807, 460.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 459.

²⁹² *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 23 January, 1807., 400.

²⁹³ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 5 February, 1807, 457.

²⁹⁴ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 4 February, 1807, 438.

be of opinion that they had vested as large a capital in a worthless project as would be deemed necessary.”²⁹⁵

Because the United States and Great Britain were at peace, several Republicans believed preparation for war unnecessary. Republican Andrew Gregg of Pennsylvania asked his colleagues, “What reason, then, is there for apprehending a greater danger at this period than existed several years ago?”²⁹⁶ Not only did Gregg’s fellow Pennsylvanian, Congressman Smilie, agree, he thought gunboats would push the United States toward war. Smilie argued had gunboats been on hand during the *Leander* Affair, they would have precipitated war with Great Britain by firing back.²⁹⁷ Smilie later changed his mind. On February 5 he announced his support for the gunboat appropriation, and told Congress, “Whether the President or the Secretary of the Navy was competent to a correct decision on this point, he did not know...He did know, however, that it was [Congress’s] duty to provide the necessary means.”²⁹⁸

After several days of debate, the House was at an impasse and could not agree on how much money to provide for gunboat construction. House leadership brokered a compromise to break the deadlock; first, the House ordered Republican David Thomas of New York and a small committee to produce, “A bill, or bills...pursuant to the first of the said resolutions” for harbor fortification construction and repair.²⁹⁹ Second, the House adopted Georgia Republican Peter Early’s resolution that Jefferson be asked to defend “the efficacy of gunboats in the protection and defence of ports and harbors.”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 4 February, 1807, 458.

²⁹⁶ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 23 January, 1807., 439.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 440.

²⁹⁸ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 5 February, 1807, 459.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 469.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 470.

Jefferson's replied on February 10, 1807. "In compliance with the House of Representatives," wrote Jefferson, "I proceed to give such information as is possessed of the effect of gunboats in the protection and defense of harbors, of the numbers thought necessary, and of the proposed distribution of them among the ports and harbors of the United States."³⁰¹ Once again, Jefferson described his multi-part coastal defense plan of fortified artillery, mobile artillery batteries, and gunboats, integrated for the better defense of towns and harbors.³⁰² Jefferson also defended the efficacy of gunboats, and cited their use in the Mediterranean during the First Barbary War, by the British in various actions around Gibraltar, and by the Russian fleet commanded by John Paul Jones at the Battle of the Liman.³⁰³ Finally, Jefferson suggested the gunboats be distributed along the American coastline; he planned to deploy fifty at New York, fifty more to Boston and Cape Cod, twenty to the Chesapeake bay, twenty-five to Savannah and Charleston, fifteen to the Delaware Bay, and forty to the Mississippi delta.³⁰⁴

Following Jefferson's answer, debate over harbor fortifications and gunboats resumed on February 21. The end of the second session approached quickly, and Congress appeared infused with purpose. When David Thomas presented a harbor fortification bill, Virginia Republican Thomas Newton, Jr. moved to increase the appropriation to \$150,000.³⁰⁵ The measure passed, yeas fifty-six, nays forty-seven. With harbor fortifications funded, Thomas amended his bill to appropriate \$150,000 more for thirty gunboats. Against Congressman Williams's argument that the United States had enough gunboats, the amendment passed, yeas sixty-eight, nays thirty-

³⁰¹ POTUS, "Efficiency of Gunboats," 163.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ U.S. Congress, "Saturday, February 21: National Defence," in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 21 February, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 607.

six.³⁰⁶ “An act making further appropriations for fortifying the ports and harbors of the United States, and for building gunboats” passed by the House and was transmitted to the Senate on February 24 with eight days remaining in the session.³⁰⁷

Vermont Senator and Republican Stephen R. Bradley and his committee, Pennsylvania Republican Samuel Maclay and Connecticut Federalist Uriah Tracy, reviewed the bill.³⁰⁸ Bradley’s committee struck Newton’s \$150,000 for harbor fortifications and reverted to Nelson’s original \$20,000 appropriation. They also deleted the \$150,000 appropriation for thirty gunboats from the bill entirely.³⁰⁹ On March 3, the second session’s final day, “An act making further appropriations for fortifying the ports and harbors of the United States” passed the Senate. The House narrowly approved the bill as amended, “By a majority of three—ayes 39, noes 36.”³¹⁰

Jefferson’s 1805 requests for naval appropriations prove again Jefferson’s opinion of the Navy was more positive than usually suggested. Jefferson’s writings show he distrusted a European style navy, and worried the American navy would both antagonize Great Britain and involve the United States in European conflicts. Despite his concerns, Jefferson’s December 3, 1804 State of the Union message showed he was not opposed to using naval force if necessary. As tensions with Great Britain increased, not only did Jefferson request money for harbor defenses and gunboats, but also for ships-of-the-line.

Congressional Republicans once again did not show the antinavalism some historians have accused them of. The Republican-controlled House of Representatives and Senate

³⁰⁶ U.S. Congress, “Monday, February 23: National Defence,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 23 February, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 618.

³⁰⁷ U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, February 24,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 24 February, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 620.

³⁰⁸ U.S. Congress, “Wednesday, February 25,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 9th Congress, 2nd Session, 25 February, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 87.

³⁰⁹ U.S. Congress, “S. 55,” *Bills and Resolutions of the House and Senate*, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1807).

³¹⁰ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 9th Cong., 2nd Sess., 24 February, 1807, 619.

ultimately passed a two-part coastal defense plan, and granted \$420,000 in total appropriations for coastal fortifications, and gunboat construction, crews, and maintenance. Further, northern Republicans were the most vocal supporters of increased naval and defensive construction. The Republicans were not primarily southern, nor were the Republicans as single-minded with regard to policy as previously suggested. Republicans held opinions about the U.S. Navy and gunboats that ranged from traditionally cited anti-navalism to manifestly pro-naval beliefs. Several Republicans used Federalist arguments in favor of increased naval appropriations; others were even willing to authorize sea-going, seventy-four-gun warships. While gunboats were popular during the first session of the Ninth Congress, the anti-naval faction retained enough power to sink proposed appropriations for larger warships.

In contrast, by the second session of the Ninth Congress gunboats lost popularity. Republicans still controlled Congress, but most did not favor constructing more gunboats. Gunboats were seen as wasteful, ineffective, and a poor substitute for harbor fortifications. The disappointing failure of Nelson's 1807 "An act making further appropriations for fortifying the ports and harbors of the United States, and for building gunboats" demonstrated that by 1807 Jefferson's hold was slipping on his fellow Republicans. It also demonstrated northern Republican voices, who did not believe gunboats were an effective weapon for northern ports, were effectively in control of naval policy at the time.

The diversity of opinions expressed within the Republican caucus during the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Congresses and the prominence of northern Republicans in naval debates show no monolithic Republican naval philosophy existed. However, a national emergency that occurred in 1807 after Congress went into recess united congressional Republicans behind Jefferson's naval policy once again.

Chapter 4

“They Must Have Recourse to Gunboats:” The Gunboat Debate in the Tenth Congress

Unexpected national emergencies have exerted a galvanizing effect on American politics throughout U.S. history. The bombardment of Fort Sumter caused President Lincoln’s call for volunteers and led to the American Civil War. In more recent memory the bombing of the U.S. Navy destroyer USS *Cole* on October 12, 2000 unified the country and launched a Federal investigation into its causes. Not long after, the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001 had a similar effect. Several acts of legislation passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in the wake of September 11 including “An Act to Deter and Punish Terrorist Acts in the United States and Around the World, to Enhance Law Enforcement Investigatory Tools, and for Other Purposes,” commonly called the “USA Patriot Act.” During Jefferson’s presidency the attack on the American frigate USS *Chesapeake* by the British ship-of-war HMS *Leopard* had a similar unifying effect. While it was not the first British attack on an American ship during peacetime—HMS *Leander* had killed an American sailor while attempting to stop a merchant vessel off New York Harbor in 1806, and American seamen were frequently impressed into the Royal Navy from the decks of their merchant ships—it infuriated the American general population and the U.S. Government. The attack also led to the final gunboat debate of Jefferson’s presidency during the Tenth Congress’s first session. Previous debates were framed as preparation for potential attacks on the American coast. In contrast, the 1807 gunboat appropriation debate was instigated by British aggression and showed the potential for unification caused by national emergency, the decrease in influence enjoyed by Northeastern

congressional Republicans, and resulted in the largest appropriation for gunboat construction passed by Congress.

On June 22, 1807, the USS *Chesapeake* weighed anchor in Hampton Roads, Virginia at the start of a long voyage to the Mediterranean. Commanded by Commodore James Barron and crewed by three-hundred and seventy men and boys, the *Chesapeake* mounted thirty-eight cannon and was one of the original six frigates built by the U.S. Navy in 1794.

As the *Chesapeake* sailed toward the outlet of the Chesapeake Bay, she was seen by a British naval squadron anchored at Lynnhaven Bay, near Norfolk. The Royal Navy maintained a strong presence off the Virginia coast and frequently resupplied their warships in Virginia ports. Before *Chesapeake* sailed, British officers accused four men of her crew of deserting from British warships in the previous year. At Barron's court martial, witnesses testified Barron was aware the men in question were aboard his ship, but as the crewmen had "not been ordered to be delivered up" they were still aboard when the *Chesapeake* left port.³¹¹ From various of the Royal Navy officers ashore in Virginia ports, Barron learned that the captain of HMS *Malampus* intended to "take these men from the *Chesapeake*."³¹² Despite these risks, Barron only drilled the crew on handling the ship's artillery battery twice prior to leaving port, and kept the ship's guns and munitions stowed.

Barron and his officers noticed the British warships signal each other, then saw the British fifty-gun frigate HMS *Leopard* haul up her anchor and sail towards the ocean. Barron was evidently unconcerned, "There was not any vessel in sight, or any other object to induce her

³¹¹ U.S. Navy, *Proceedings of the General Court Martial Convened for the Trial of Commodore James Barron, Captain Charles Gordon, Mr. William Hook, and Captain John Hall, of the United States Ship Chesapeake, in the Month of January, 1808* (Washington, D.C.: Jacob Gideon, Junior, 1822), 17.

³¹² U.S. Navy, *Proceedings*, 17.

to go to sea, but the *Chesapeake*.”³¹³ As the *Leopard* approached the *Chesapeake*, she took a tactically advantageous position upwind with the covers, or tompions, removed from her guns and her crew at battle stations. This was suspicious behavior. Witnesses at Barron’s court martial testified they should have “induced Commodore Barron to have prepared his ship for action.”³¹⁴

Barron did not send his men to quarters, however, and let the *Leopard* to come alongside. *Leopard*’s commander, Captain Salusbury Pierce Humphreys, demanded Barron allow his ship to be searched for British deserters. When Barron refused, Humphreys threatened to fire into the *Chesapeake* and fired a warning shot across her bow.³¹⁵ When that did not produce the required effect, Humphreys fired three broadsides into the American frigate. Three sailors were killed, and eighteen, including Barron, were wounded.³¹⁶ The *Chesapeake*, totally unprepared for action, fired only once in reply; Barron was forced to surrender, and allowed the British to retrieve the four men.³¹⁷ After the *Leopard* sailed back to Lynnhaven Bay, Barron’s crew performed emergency repairs on their ship and limped home to Hampton Roads.

The American population was enraged. William H. Cabell, Governor of Virginia, wrote Jefferson to inform him of what happened and request assistance. “Indignant as the Executive of Virginia feel on this occasion,” he wrote, “It is certainly a Subject to which...their limited powers do not extend.”³¹⁸ Jefferson responded Congress would have to decide whether to declare war or not but, “We may however exercise the powers entrusted to us for preventing

³¹³ U.S. Navy, *Proceedings*, 18.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹⁵ Spencer C. Tucker and Frank T. Reuter, *Injured Honor: The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair, June 22, 1807* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 9.

³¹⁶ Toll, *Six Frigates*, 297.

³¹⁷ Tucker and Reuter, *Injured Honor*, 16.

³¹⁸ William H. Cabell, “To Thomas Jefferson from William H. Cabell, 25 June 1807,” in *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-5813>.

future insults within our harbours.”³¹⁹ With the cooperation of Governor Cabell, the Virginia militia was activated, and the sixteen gunboats (several still under construction) in the vicinity of Hampton Roads and Norfolk were ordered manned and readied for service under the command of Captain Stephen Decatur.³²⁰ Jefferson directed “all armed vessels bearing commissions under the Government of Great Britain now within the harbors or waters of the United States” to leave American territorial waters immediately, and further ordered American citizens to not provide provisions or equipment for British warships.³²¹ On the diplomatic front, Jefferson dispatched a formal complaint to Great Britain via ship.³²²

Jefferson firmly believed in separation of powers. He understood that while the president was empowered to take short-term actions Congress was responsible for approving defense appropriations and declaring war. Congress was in recess. Due to the “great and weighty matters” under consideration, Jefferson called Congress back for a special session to “consult and determine on such measures as in their wisdom may be deemed meet for the welfare of the United States.”³²³ Jefferson believed the *Leopard-Chesapeake* affair demonstrated the need for more gunboats and harbor fortifications, but was unsure if Congress would approve further appropriations. After Congress’s rejection of his last request for gunboats, Jefferson was concerned “it would not be respectful in me even to suggest it again.” He hoped, however, if

³¹⁹ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to William H. Cabell, 29 June 1807,” in *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-5836>.

³²⁰ Tucker and Reuter, *Injured Honor*, 110.

³²¹ The President of the United States, *July 2, 1807: Proclamation in Response to the Chesapeake Affair*, The University of Virginia Miller Center, Accessed November 22, 2019, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-2-1807-proclamation-response-chesapeake-affair>.

³²² Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to John Armstrong, Jr., 17 July 1807,” in *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-5979>.

³²³ U.S. Congress, “A Proclamation by the President of the United States of America,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 9.

Congress did indeed provide funds the gunboats could be built, and harbor fortifications constructed or improved during the winter.³²⁴

Jefferson presented his view of the situation that faced the United States and what he thought should be done in his October 27 Annual Message to Congress. Jefferson warned, “The love of peace, so much cherished in the bosoms of our citizens...may not ensure our continuance in the quiet pursuits of industry,” and suggested after Great Britain’s continued attacks Congress should prepare for conflict.³²⁵ The President reported the money for harbor fortifications previously appropriated and gunboats had been concentrated in New York, New Orleans, Charleston, and the Chesapeake Bay, locations judged more “immediately in danger;” other harbors were left “to the provisions of the present session.”³²⁶ Jefferson asked Congress to consider two questions with regard to gunboats; first, whether more gunboats should be built, and second, if the gunboats should be crewed by “the seamen of the United States...formed into a special militia,” or by the standing, land-based militia of the area.³²⁷

Both houses of Congress responded urgently to Jefferson’s requests. In the Senate, New York Republican Samuel L. Mitchill and a committee consisting of three other Republicans (Samuel Smith of Maryland, John Milledge from Georgia, and Joseph Anderson of Kentucky) and Federalist John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts considered “the defence of our seaport towns and harbors, and the further provisions to be made for their security.”³²⁸ Meanwhile, the House of Representatives assigned prominent North Carolina Republican Thomas Blount with

³²⁴ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Smith, 30 July 1807,” in *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-6069>.

³²⁵ U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, October 27: President’s Annual Message,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 27 October, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 15.

³²⁶ *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 27 October, 1807, 17.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ U.S. Congress, “Wednesday, October 28,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 28 October, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 19.

Republicans John Chandler of Massachusetts, Virginian William A. Burwell, Samuel Riker from New York, George M. Troup of Georgia, and James Witherell of Vermont, and Maryland Federalist Charles Goldsborough to examine, “Aggressions committed within our ports and waters by foreign armed vessels, [and] the violations of our jurisdiction” and to report “the measures necessary” to prevent them in the future.³²⁹

Despite significant support in Congress for Jefferson’s requests following the attack upon the *Chesapeake*, House Republicans did not universally support naval appropriations. Some questioned whether the materials in storage which Jefferson mentioned were earmarked exclusively for gunboat construction, or whether they could be used to build ships-of-the-line. Others, like Virginia Republican John Randolph, questioned whether the United States should have a navy at all, especially when the service “had proved only a conductor of dishonor to the nation” during the most recent attack³³⁰ Nonetheless, most were quick to praise Jefferson’s decision to lay aside building materials and other military stores in the wake of the *Chesapeake* incident. Maryland representative and Republican John Montgomery argued Jefferson was prudent to prepare, and if the diplomatic situation between Great Britain and the United States resolved peacefully without the need for additional gunboats, “The material would still be on hand for the use of the Navy.”³³¹ According to Montgomery, the eventual use of the stored wood was less important than the need for Congress to act with firm resolution; he reminded his colleagues funding the Navy for the next year was the first defensive measure before Congress

³²⁹ U.S. Congress, “Thursday, October 29: Reference of the Message,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 29 October, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 795.

³³⁰ U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, November 10: Appropriations for the Navy,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 10 November, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 834.

³³¹ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 10 November, 1807, 832.

since the *Leopard* attacked the *Chesapeake*, and warned, “If we give this measure a quibbling, quirkling, or reluctant affirmative, the people will be disappointed in their hopes.”³³²

On November 17, Congressman Blount stood to report his committee’s resolution regarding the attack on the *Chesapeake*. Blount stated his committee believed the incident an insult “of which there is scarcely to be found a parallel in the history of civilized nations.”³³³ Blount argued British indiscretions against American ships demonstrated the Royal Navy’s disdain for American law and were grounds for military retaliation. Finally, after he asked for the House’s continued patience as his committee considered how best to respond, Blount submitted a resolution which condemned the *Leopard’s* attack. The resolution called the attack on the *Chesapeake* as well as the British squadron’s refusal to leave the American coastline after ordered to do so by the President, “A flagrant violation of the jurisdiction of the United States.”³³⁴

On November 24 Blount stood with his committee’s conclusions. After extended discussion and consideration, the committee determined land-based artillery emplacements and fortifications supplemented by gunboats were the most effective means of coastal defense available to the United States.³³⁵ Essentially, Blount’s committee proposed to enact Jefferson’s multi-part coastal defense strategy, rather than follow previous precedent and approve only harbor fortifications or gunboats. Blount proposed two resolutions; first, Congress allow the President to build enough harbor fortifications and gunboats to “afford effectual protection to our ports and harbors.”³³⁶ Second, an appropriation to build another lot of gunboats and

³³² *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 10 November, 1807, 834.

³³³ U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, November 17: Frigate *Chesapeake*,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 17 November, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 922.

³³⁴ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 17 November, 1807, 923.

³³⁵ U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, November 24: British Aggressions,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 24 November, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 956.

³³⁶ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 24 November, 1807, 956.

Congressional approval for the President to “arm, equip, man, fit, and employ” them in defense of American harbors.³³⁷ On November 30, Blount presented letters from Secretary of the Navy Smith which suggested one hundred eighty-eight additional gunboats be built, which Smith projected could be constructed within four months of an appropriation.³³⁸ Additionally, Blount reported the Jefferson administration sought \$300,000 if the United States remained at peace or \$750,000 if war was declared to “complete the fortifications already established and to erect others.”³³⁹

New York representative Josiah Masters argued the amount of money requested was inadequate to defend American harbors. In a fiery speech from the floor, Masters suggested an appropriation of \$1,500,000 for fortifications, over the objections of Massachusetts Republican Orchard Cook who wanted more information about what defenses were needed.³⁴⁰ Masters thought even his proposal “too small to fortify, efficiently, our extended seacoast.”³⁴¹ He further argued the whole policy of defensive fortifications and gunboats “ought to be abandoned;” while he believed gunboats to be a good secondary defense, he called for of larger ships-of-the-line, a position he thought other Republicans might find “heretical.”³⁴² In response, Republican John Smilie of Pennsylvania argued while the House could never appropriate enough money for harbor defense to satisfy Masters, he supported calls to defend New York and noted while

³³⁷ *Annals of Congress*, H of R, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 24 November, 1807, 957.

³³⁸ Robert Smith, “Honorable Thomas Blount, Chairman, etc,” in “Naval Affairs No. 65: Condition of the Naval Force, and an Increase of Gunboats.” *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, Vol. 1*, Walter Lowrie and Walter S. Franklin, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 169.

³³⁹ U.S. Congress, “Monday, November 30: Fortifications and Gunboats,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 30 November, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 986.

³⁴⁰ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 30 November, 1807, 992.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 993.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 994.

Congress may contain diverse opinions on how much to spend, “there was not a man in the House who was not willing to prepare for defence.”³⁴³

Blount and Masters ultimately withdrew their suggestions for appropriation amounts and left blanks pending further debate. While debate over Blount’s resolutions shared similarities with previous gunboat and harbor fortification debates, especially from northern Republicans, representatives seemed united by the need to act after the *Chesapeake* attack. Unlike previous debates, representatives differed on how much to appropriate, rather than if appropriations should be made. When the House voted on Blount’s resolutions, they passed with overwhelming support; the first resolution was passed “without division,” and the second with ninety-three votes in favor.³⁴⁴ Blount was accordingly ordered to present, “A bill or bills...pursuant to the said resolutions.”³⁴⁵

Blount worked quickly and returned on December 1 with “An act for fortifying the ports and harbors of the United States, and for building gunboats.” The Act echoed his previous resolutions; the first section directed Federal money be appropriated, “To cause the fortifications heretofore built or commenced, to be repaired or completed, and such others to be erected as well, with the assistance of gunboats, [to] afford effectual protection to our ports and harbours.”³⁴⁶ The second provided money to build and operate additional gunboats.³⁴⁷ After two readings, Blount’s bill was sent to the House for consideration, and scheduled for debate on December 7.

³⁴³ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 30 November, 1807, 995.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1001.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, “H.R. 10,” in *Bills and Resolutions of the House and Senate*, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 1807, 10.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

In the Senate, Senator Mitchill pushed forward relentlessly. On November 16 he informed his colleagues he did not intend to “dispute the empire of the high seas” by the construction of a first-rate fleet, but merely to defend American harbors and ports.³⁴⁸ However, he also stated he rejected the Jeffersonian belief American neutrality would prevent Great Britain from perpetrating further attacks on American shipping or territories. He reminded the Senate of, “The invasion of Zealand, the capitulation of Copenhagen, and the capture of the Danish fleet” which proved Great Britain did not respect the “moderation, prudence, and forbearance” of neutral powers.³⁴⁹ Only four days later, Mitchill produced a bill to empower the President to build and “equip, arm, man, fit out, and employ” another contingent of gunboats for harbor defense, and for “such other purposes...as the public service may require.”³⁵⁰ Mitchell pushed his bill through the Senate quickly. After a second reading on November 25, the Senate debated the bill’s merits December 2 and 3.³⁵¹ The bill passed the Senate on December 3, was named “An act to appropriate money for the construction of an additional number of gunboats,” and was sent to the House of Representatives.³⁵²

During previous gunboat debates, gunboat legislation typically started in the House and was sent to the Senate for consideration. During the Tenth Congress, Senator Mitchill’s gunboat appropriation bill and Congressman Blount’s bill arrived in the House for consideration at virtually the same time. The House decided to debate the merits of both bills at the same time;

³⁴⁸ U.S. Congress, “Monday, November 16: National Defence,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 16 November, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 28.

³⁴⁹ *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 16 November, 1807, 28.

³⁵⁰ U.S. Congress, “Friday, November 20,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 20 November, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 33.

³⁵¹ U.S. Congress, “Wednesday, December 2,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 2 December, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 44.

³⁵² U.S. Congress, “Thursday, December 3,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 3 December, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 45. The *Annals of Congress* do not record the Senate debate on Mitchell’s bill.

while most members of the House agreed further defensive measures were needed, debate crystalized between pro-gunboat representatives and representatives who wished defense by other means, especially ships-of-the line. Both sides included Republicans.

A small but vocal minority of Republican representatives proposed to build warships or fortifications. They echoed the arguments of strongly pro-naval Federalists such as William Milnor of Pennsylvania, who moved the number of gunboats to be built reduced from one hundred eighty-eight to one hundred, and the surplus money used to construct “a few frigates... in addition to those now in our possession.”³⁵³ Milnor’s amendment was defeated with only twenty-one votes in favor, but New York Republican Josiah Masters also stated he would rather construct warships or fortifications opposite New York than build the full number of gunboats.³⁵⁴ Republicans Daniel Durrell and Francis Gardner, both of New Hampshire, agreed; “As many gunboats should be employed as was sufficient for defence in those waters where they might be useful,” Gardner argued, yet “[I do] not think they would be efficient in the Northern and Eastern ports of the United States.”³⁵⁵ While Durrell stated he was not opposed to gunboats, he also feared they were unable to protect American harbors. Both suggested the funds be allocated for other means of defense, in Durrell’s opinion, “Ships of war of some magnitude.”³⁵⁶

His merchant constituents likely in mind, Republican representative from Massachusetts Orchard Cook criticized the gunboat bill because it did not protect American commercial shipping. He argued Congress did not value commerce, and stated his fellow representatives, “Wished the people of the United States were in the isolated situation of the Chinese, mere

³⁵³ U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, December 8: Fortifications and Gunboats,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 8 December, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 1066.

³⁵⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 8 December, 1807, 1082.

³⁵⁵ U.S. Congress, “Wednesday, December 9: Fortifications and Gunboats,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 9 December, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 1086.

³⁵⁶ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 9 December, 1807, 1084.

receivers of trade.”³⁵⁷ In reference to Masters, Durrell, and Gardner’s proposals, Cook asked why Congress would prevent Northeastern states from defending their harbors and commerce with warships and instead force them to adopt gunboats. Republican James Holland of North Carolina immediately took Cook to task. Holland argued Cook had “mistaken the object of gunboats” as, “They were not intended for protection of our commerce at sea, but for the protection of our ports and harbors.”³⁵⁸

Pro-gunboat advocates argued gunboats should be funded and were a valuable part of the American coastal defense strategy because they were cheaper and easier to construct than frigates and ships-of-the-line. Blount stated one hundred eighty-eight additional gunboats, at a projected cost of \$852,500, would make the number of American gunboats in service two hundred and fifty-seven as requested by Smith and Jefferson. He rejected Milnor’s assertion he was pandering to Jefferson’s interest in gunboats by suggesting an appropriation for their construction. Rather, Blount argued his committee was informed “this number [of gunboats] would be necessary” for the “effectual protection” of the American coast.³⁵⁹

Republican William A. Burwell of Virginia, “Thought a sufficient number should at once be authorized,” and reminded his colleagues that many gunboats carrying an equivalent amount of artillery could be built for the cost of one frigate.³⁶⁰ Gunboat advocates reminded their colleagues of the prior tactical success of gunboats in various navies around the world. Burwell noted the recent use of gunboats against the British Navy by France, Spain, and the Netherlands, and reported the gunboats had enjoyed tremendous success especially when used in concert with

³⁵⁷ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 9 December, 1807, 1097.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1098.

³⁵⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 8 December, 1807, 1072.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1067.

shore artillery.³⁶¹ Jacob Crowninshield, Republican from Massachusetts, reminded his colleagues the U.S. Navy used gunboats during operations against Tripoli, and found them very effective in shallow, coastal waters. Crowninshield was so confident in gunboats, he “believed that they could not at this time adopt a better mode of defence than that proposed by the bill.”³⁶²

John Smilie, Republican from Pennsylvania, historically not a friend of defense appropriations or the Navy, nonetheless threw his support behind the gunboat bill. Like Jefferson, Smilie feared building warships to defend American commerce abroad would draw the United States into foreign wars; “He hoped,” he announced, “It never would be said that they ought to defend themselves beyond their own shores.”³⁶³ Gunboats were acceptable, however, because they were confined to coastal waters and harbors, and were strictly defensive measures. Further, Smilie said gunboats could attack when they had tactical advantage and withdraw into shallow water if faced by overwhelming force. While he confessed he was not a naval tactician, he believed that since the President and the Secretary of the Navy had requested gunboats after consideration of all the means at their disposal it was inappropriate for him to “pursue any opinion of his own in contradiction to this, when he had no evidence on which to ground that opinion.”³⁶⁴

After two weeks of debate the anti-gunboat faction proved no match for the pressure to do something to ensure the security of the American coast; Virginia Republican Thomas Newton, Jr. thought even the amount of debate on the topic excessive. “When our affairs were thus situated,” he asked, “Ought they not to make a better use of their time and the public money,

³⁶¹ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 8 December, 1807, 1072.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 1069.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1073.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

than in debating on the details of a bill?”³⁶⁵ “An Act to Appropriate Money for Providing an Additional Number of Gunboats,” amended to appropriate \$852,500 for one hundred eighty-eight gunboats, was read in the House a third time on December 10, and passed with overwhelming support (one hundred eleven in favor, only nineteen opposed) on December 12.³⁶⁶ With gunboats provided for, Blount moved to strike the second nearly identical section from his own bill, which was amended to appropriate one million dollars for harbor fortifications.³⁶⁷ “An Act for Fortifying the Ports and Harbors of the United States, and For Building Gun-Boats” subsequently passed the House and Senate, and became effective January 8, 1808.³⁶⁸

The Tenth Congress passed the last gunboat appropriation during Jefferson’s administration. In Jefferson’s final State of the Union message, delivered on November 8, 1808, Jefferson announced the War Department’s progress on fortifications around major cities “as seemed to be called for by the situation of the several places, their relative importance, and the scale of expense indicated by the amount of the appropriation.”³⁶⁹ Jefferson also reported, while he was authorized to build one hundred eighty-eight additional gunboats, only one hundred and three had been completed which, “With those before possessed, are sufficient for the harbors and waters most exposed.”³⁷⁰ His words were likely infuriating for Congressmen Masters, Durrell, Gardner, and Cook, who had advocated for fewer gunboats.

³⁶⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 8 December, 1807, 1074.

³⁶⁶ U.S. Congress, “An Act to Appropriate Money for Providing an Additional Number of Gunboats,” in *United States Statutes At Large, Vol. VIII*, Richard Peters, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1867), 451.

³⁶⁷ U.S. Congress, “Wednesday, December 16: Defence of Ports and Harbors,” in *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 10th Congress, 1st Session, 16 December, 1807 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 1024.

³⁶⁸ U.S. Congress, “An Act for Fortifying the Ports and Harbors of the United States, and For Building Gun-Boats,” in *United States Statutes At Large, Vol. VIII*, Richard Peters, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1867), 453.

³⁶⁹ U.S. Congress, “Tuesday, November 8: President’s Annual Message,” in *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Congress, 2nd Session, 8 November, 1808 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1851), 13.

³⁷⁰ *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 10th Cong., 2nd Sess., 8 November, 1808, 13.

The Tenth Congress's gunboat appropriation represented a dramatic departure from the earlier appropriation debates in the Ninth Congress. Several key differences are obvious. First, the Tenth Congress demonstrates the dramatic political unification national emergencies create. Gunboats were so unpopular during the Ninth Congress's second session no money was appropriated for further construction. In contrast, the Tenth Congress appropriated \$825,500 for an additional one hundred eighty-eight boats less than a year later. The appropriation made in December 1808 was more than twice as large as the combined gunboat appropriations made by the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Congresses.

Second, the gunboat appropriation of the Tenth Congress showed northern Republican's influence had declined, or at least that northern Republicans were unable to compete with the outrage caused by HMS *Leopard's* attack. During previous congresses, northern Republicans successfully blocked gunboat appropriations and provided steadily increasing sums of money for harbor fortifications. In 1807-1808, despite the efforts of Masters, Durrell, Gardner, and Cook, only nineteen congressmen voted against building additional gunboats, which allowed the gunboat appropriation to pass with overwhelming House support.

Congress proved more unified than the public. The gunboat debate raged before the public in print, and both sides published competing pamphlets and articles. William Duane, in his 1807 essay *Politics for American Farmers*, argued against seagoing warships and wrote, "A military naval force has been productive only of disaster to France, Holland, and Spain...and what has it produced for England? Let its debts, its poor-houses, its prisons, and its declension from civil liberty, declare it."³⁷¹ He appealed to Republicans to remember their children; "Are

³⁷¹ William Duane, *Politics for American Farmers; Being a Series of Tracts, Exhibiting the Blessings of Free Government, as it is Administered in the United States, Compared with the Boasted Stupendous Fabric of British Monarchy* (Philadelphia: R.C. Weightman, 1807), 17.

you *farmers* ready to send your sons on board the destructive den of *disease, crimes, immorality,* and *human debasement,* called a man of war? O! God forbid!” (emphasis original).³⁷²

Others defended the Jefferson’s administration from Federalist ship owners from New England, who charged the Republicans with apathy toward commerce. In an 1808 pamphlet titled *An Address to the People of New England*, a writer who adopted the pen name “Algernon Sidney” argued Jefferson’s gunboats proved his commitment to the merchants. While some “objected that the gunboat system is not in aid of the commercial interest,” he believed instead the gunboats were “increased for the double purpose of driving from our coasts and harbors those licensed piccaroons, who have been principally instrumental in harassing and plundering our commerce, and to protect our ports and harbors.”³⁷³ “Sidney” noted the Jefferson administration spent more on naval defense than the Washington and Adams Administrations combined. “[Out] of every thousand dollars expended,” he wrote, “Four hundred and forty eight...for the navy and commerce.”³⁷⁴

In contrast, naval advocates were unimpressed. The lack of warships left American commerce unprotected, and some suggested a respectable force of warships could be built for the same cost as the gunboat fleet. An anonymous writer from South Carolina wrote in 1807 that gunboats were a waste of scarce federal money in a pamphlet titled *The Go-Between: Or Two Edged Sword*. With a hint of amused sarcasm he wrote the gunboats, which he called “The last waste of public money,” reminded him “of a school of mullets attempting to repulse a school of

³⁷² Duane, *Politics for American Farmers*, 20.

³⁷³ Algernon Sidney, *An Address to the People of New England* (Washington City: Dinmore and Cooper, 1808), 35.

³⁷⁴ Sidney, *An Address*, 36.

sharks.”³⁷⁵ He added by his estimation, “The expense of building and supporting the boats...for ten years, would completely fortify New-York.”³⁷⁶

After the *Chesapeake* was attacked, anti-gunboat literature escalated in intensity and was not confined to prose. Thomas Green Fessenden’s derisive 1809 book *Pills, Poetical, Political, and Philosophical* ridiculed Jefferson’s gunboats in verse:

They hang our vessels by the nape,
But let the wicked crew escape!!
Our private property abusing,
Sends gun boats into cornfields cruising³⁷⁷
Where doubtless every one of those
Will “do more harm” than fifty crows.
I’d sooner, in a field of mine,
Turn loose a herd of rampant swine,
Possess’d of devils, many a score,
Like those we read about of yore,
Than one of these amphibious creatures,
Feeble, yet noxious as mosquitos.³⁷⁸

Fessenden renewed his attack in a footnote, and bitinglly added, “We would not insinuate that a gun boat well manned and her single great gun loaded with mustard seed shot...would not be competent to cope with all the mosquitos in the Jerseys.” Despite his joking manner, Fessenden’s doubts about the defensive capabilities of the gunboats were very real. He concluded gunboats would “be tolerable *auxiliaries*, but would be wretched *principals*, either for defensive or offensive operations” (emphasis original).³⁷⁹ Others opposed gunboats with even harsher language than Fessenden. In a stirring defense of New England commerce titled A

³⁷⁵ Anonymous, *The Go-Between, or Two Edged Sword: Being an Impartial Address to the Citizens of the United States, as Regards Their True and General Interest, Welfare, and Security* (New York: 1807), 22

³⁷⁶ Anonymous, *The Go-Between*, 24.

³⁷⁸ Thomas Green Fessenden, *Pills, Poetical, Political, and Philosophical. Prescribed for the Purpose of Purging the Publick of Piddling Philosophers, of Puny Poetasters, of Paltry Politicians, and Petty Partisans* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1809), 8. Fessenden refers to a frequently ridiculed incident in which Gunboat #1 broke its mooring line during a storm and drifted into a farmer’s field, where she remained until she was able to be returned to the water.

³⁷⁹ Fessenden, *Pills, Poetical, Political, and Philosophical*, 8.

Discourse, Delivered Before the Lieutenant Governor, David Osgood proclaimed in 1809, “The gunboat policy...is so despicable and puerile that, were *Buffon* still alive, he might bring it as another proof of the ‘dwarfish nature of every American production.’”³⁸⁰

Virginia planter and “Father of the Constitution” James Madison was elected President following the end of Jefferson’s second term. In many ways, Madison’s election represented a “stay-the-course strategy.”³⁸¹ Madison did not share Jefferson’s enthusiasm for gunboats, however. Madison biographer Drew McCoy argued that while Madison and Jefferson were both true believers in the Republican process, Madison distrusted, “The disruptive and unsettling effects of immediate popular influence...because in America, as elsewhere, the large body of the people were not always or even ordinarily guided by enlightened vision.”³⁸² McCoy attributed Madison’s belief the underinformed public were not always right to his experience as a state legislator. In contrast, Jefferson’s belief in participatory democracy above all was due to his time spent in France, where he observed a powerful regime, “That magnified the evils of monarchical despotism.”³⁸³ In short, Madison proved far less susceptible to the influence of prominent Republican antinavalists like Macon, Randolph, and Smilie.

Even though Jefferson was no longer in office, commentators continued to critique the gunboat plan. In 1810 another anonymous writer called “A Farmer,” this time from New Jersey, wrote, “The gunboats, like air-balloons, are of too flimsy and fragile a nature for men of sense to

³⁸⁰ David Osgood, *A Discourse, Delivered Before the Lieutenant-Governor, the Council, and the Two Houses Composing the Legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, May 31, 1809* (Boston: Russell and Cutler, 1809), 27. *Buffon* was Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, a French naturalist who theorized that North American animals were smaller and less impressive than their European counterparts.

³⁸¹ Ronald Utt, *Ships of Oak, Guns of Iron: The War of 1812 and the Forging of the American Navy* (Washington, D.C: Regnery History, 2012), 16.

³⁸² Drew R. McCoy, *The Last of the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 50.

³⁸³ McCoy, *The Last of the Fathers*, 50.

trust their carcasses in.”³⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Massachusetts lawyer and Federalist John Lowell Jr. blasted Jefferson and Madison in *The New-England Patriot* for decommissioning several frigates even as they “stirred up a quarrel” with England. He blustered Republican ignorance and pride was responsible for, “The inefficient system of gun boat defence,” and argued the program, “In point of expense, vastly exceeded that of the regular and honorable system which was abolished to make way for it.”³⁸⁵

Nonetheless while Madison did not build more gunboats, he did not build additional warships either. Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, historians of the Jefferson and Madison administrations, noted, “Madison was less committed to the fifty-foot gunboats than Jefferson had been,” but he did not seek “an economically sound, militarily effective naval strategy” during the first half of his presidency.³⁸⁶ The United States and Great Britain drifted closer to war, pushed by continued British attacks on the American commercial fleet and impressment of American sailors. Madison was increasingly attacked by both Federalists and members of his own party who believed “reliance on the expensive, lightly armed gunboats...made no sense at all.”³⁸⁷

When war came in June 1812, the fleet of gunboats that Jefferson and his Republicans had such faith in proved disappointing. Only sixty-two gunboats were in service, and many others required extensive repairs before being fit to fight. Pro-navy advocates were dismayed. In a July 4, 1812 speech titled *An Oration, Pronounced at Hardwick, July 4th, 1812*, Festus Foster pessimistically claimed, “Mr. Jefferson’s accession to the presidency formed a new era in

³⁸⁴ A Farmer, *A Letter, Containing Some Candid Observations of Mankind, and the Republican Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* (Morristown: Henry P. Russell, 1810), 23.

³⁸⁵ John Lowell, *The New-England Patriot: Being a Candid Comparison of the Principles and Conduct of the Washington and Jefferson Administrations* (Boston: Russell and Cutler, 1810), 11.

³⁸⁶ Burstein and Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson*, 482.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

our political history” in which, “Our new philosophers considered a navy worse than useless.”³⁸⁸ Foster sarcastically continued, “The gunboat system...left Congress nothing to fear from an invasion. European nations smiled at our folly and seized our defenseless commerce.”³⁸⁹ U.S. strategy called for the gunboats to prevent British incursion into coastal waters. Tucker wrote gunboats successfully prevented British warships from entering some harbors but noted, “The Royal Navy was able to enter most coastal areas at will, especially the Chesapeake Bay.”³⁹⁰ Ultimately, it was the lack of coherent defense in the Chesapeake which allowed the British to attack and burn Washington, D.C.

Gunboat historian Spencer C. Tucker admitted gunboat performance during the War of 1812 was generally frustrating. He suggested, however, “It must be remembered that [the gunboats] in service were not usually employed as intended, [and] they provided valuable service in transporting men, ordnance, and supplies...In addition, gunboats served as hospital vessels, lighters, pilot vessels, places of confinement, and storeships.”³⁹¹ In contrast, naval historian Charles W. Goldsborough was less forgiving. He wrote, “The services rendered by the gun boats were so inconsiderable...those who had in the first instance zealously advocated them, yielded by degrees to the force of the arguments that were urged against them.”³⁹²

James Madison was one such individual, and the experience of the War of 1812 changed his mind about Jefferson’s gunboats. Consequentially Madison’s administration pursued policy in a cooperative Congress to phase the gunboats out of service. On March 20, 1812, “An Act Concerning the Naval Establishment” was passed by the Twelfth Congress and Madison was,

³⁸⁸ Festus Foster, *An Oration, Pronounced at Hardwick, July 4th, 1812, Being the Thirty-Sixth Anniversary of American Independence* (Brookfield: E. Merriam and Co., 1812), 9.

³⁸⁹ Foster, *An Oration*, 9.

³⁹⁰ Tucker, *The Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy*, 104.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁹² Charles W. Goldsborough, *The United States Naval Chronicle, Vol. I* (Washington, D.C.: James Wilson, 1824), 329

“Hereby authorized and empowered to cause to be immediately repaired, equipped and put into actual service, the frigates *Chesapeake*, *Constellation* and *Adams*.”³⁹³ The U.S. Navy was appropriated \$212,000 per year for the purchase of enough timber to rebuild the frigates *Philadelphia*, *General Greene*, *New York*, and *Boston*.³⁹⁴ Finally, Congress directed all gunboats then in service to be decommissioned and distributed to at risk harbors for emergency use, “As soon as it shall be deemed compatible with the good of the public service.”³⁹⁵

William Jones, appointed Secretary of the Navy in 1813, assisted Madison’s efforts. A seaman and merchant from Philadelphia, Jones set out to reform the U.S. Navy. Jones was “a man who despised gunboats,” and promptly decommissioned half of the fleet in accordance with the previous year’s legislation.³⁹⁶ Immediately following the end of the War of 1812 and the disappointing performance of the gunboats, Congress passed “An Act to Repeal Certain Acts Concerning the Flotilla Service, and for Other Purposes” on February 27, 1815. Significantly, Goldsborough noted, “The last act of Congress to be found upon this subject” provided for the selling and discharge of all gunboats from U.S. Navy service.³⁹⁷ Madison was permitted, “To cause to be sold...such and so many of the gunboats belonging to the United States, as in his judgement may no longer be necessary to be retained for the public service.”³⁹⁸ By the end of 1815, Goldsborough recorded only a few in service as transports.

³⁹³ U.S. Congress, “An Act Concerning the Naval Establishment,” in *United States Statutes At Large, Vol. VIII*, Richard Peters, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1867), 453.

³⁹⁴ U.S. Congress, “*An Act Concerning the Naval Establishment*,” 453.

³⁹⁵ U.S. Congress, “*An Act Concerning the Naval Establishment*,” 453.

³⁹⁶ Burstein and Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson*, 522.

³⁹⁷ Goldsborough, *The United States Naval Chronicle*, 329.

³⁹⁸ U.S. Congress, “An Act to Repeal Certain Acts Concerning the Flotilla Service, and for Other Purposes,” in *United States Statutes At Large, Vol. VIII*, Richard Peters, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1867), 218.

Conclusion

The Gunboat Debate in Review

Jefferson did not invent gunboats. Gunboats were used with great success by both sides during the American Revolution, especially in lake and riverine environments. Many other countries used gunboats with great success, especially the Dutch, who used flotillas of gunboats against British frigates during “The Gunboat War” between 1807-1814. While gunboats were phased out of service during Madison’s administration, other gunboats would see action in American service during later wars. Both the Confederate Navy and the U.S. Navy used small, relatively lightly armed vessels called gunboats during the American Civil War, and “The Brown Water Navy” operated on the jungle rivers of Vietnam.

The Jefferson administration was unique, however, because gunboats were made the foundation of the United States’ coastal defense system, rather than as auxiliary vessels on rivers or in coastal environments. Historians have grappled with Jefferson’s interest in gunboats since the end of his administration. Many early historians, especially those with Federalist sympathies like Henry Adams, James Fenimore Cooper, and the Sprouts accused Jefferson of perpetrating an unrealistic naval strategy upon the United States, and argued the gunboat system of defense was “unsuited” to the country’s coastal environment and personality of the American people. Others, like Roosevelt and Mahan suggested Jefferson would not construct warships to defend the country or its maritime commerce because he was a pacifist who placed his loyalty to peace ahead of country. In their eyes, Jefferson was responsible for the United States’ humiliation by the British during the War of 1812.

The Jeffersonian experiment with gunboats illustrates several key points. In contrast to Roosevelt *et. al.*, more recent historians including Symonds, Smith, and Tucker showed Jefferson's program was more prudent than thought in the past, especially in light of the cost of seagoing warships and the political situation in the United States at the time.

This thesis illustrates that Jefferson's gunboat program was the product of political, economic, and international constraints. While Jefferson was the leader of the Republican party at the time and took a leading role in establishing policy, he could not disregard the desires of his fellow Republicans. More conservative Republicans with anti-naval tendencies, including Nathaniel Macon, Albert Gallatin, and John Randolph expressed their expectation that Jefferson would reduce naval spending during his administration. Jefferson was committed to reducing the size of the Federal debt and lowering or eliminating taxes, and had Jefferson ignored the desires of his fellow Republicans and started an expensive warship construction program, he would have lost the support of his party and Congress.

The international political situation of the day also influenced the gunboat program. Great Britain was the prominent naval power of the day; any large-scale naval construction program would be interpreted as a threat to British naval supremacy. Jefferson was aware of the preemptive British attack on Copenhagen in 1801 after Britain's naval superiority in the Baltic Sea was challenged by an alliance of northern countries. In light of the domestic and international political considerations of the day, Jefferson could not have constructed a European-style navy of sea-going battleships without compromising the trust of the Republican party, infringing on his own guiding principles, bankrupting the U.S. government, or invoking the wrath of the most powerful navy on earth; in short, in Jefferson's circumstances, gunboats were his only naval option.

Third, the gunboat program shows the Republican party during the Jeffersonian era was not as anti-navy as traditionally depicted. Jefferson established policy, but Congress was responsible for its funding and implementation. Few larger warships were constructed during Jefferson's administration, but the Republicans of the Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Congresses passed three separate laws which appropriated in total \$1,205,500 for gunboat construction. American shipwrights built nearly one hundred eighty gunboats between 1802 and 1808. With the exception of the March 1807 gunboat appropriation bill, which failed in the Senate, all passed with strong Republican support. These are hardly the actions of committed antinavalists.

Fourth, while some historians have depicted Jefferson's Republicans as southern planters committed to agriculture and contemptuous of commerce, the gunboat debates were dominated by northern Republicans, especially from Massachusetts, New York, and Maryland. The role of Republicans from Maryland cannot be overstated, as Marylanders drafted most of the gunboat legislation and navigated it through Congress. Many northern Republicans, and not a few southerners as well, expressed their desire to protect maritime commerce and argued commercial shipping and trade was an important source of revenue. The Northeastern Republican contingent was so pro-navy and pro-commerce, many seem more closely aligned with Congressional Federalists than traditional Republicans.

Finally, the large gunboat appropriation made by Republicans after the *Chesapeake-Leopard* affair demonstrated the unifying effect of national emergencies. Congressional Republicans granted twice as much money for gunboat construction as all previous appropriations combined and authorized one hundred and eight-eight additional gunboats, three times as many as were owned by the U.S. Navy at the time.

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