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The Tales of Terrorism

It is a maxim of the Barbary States, that 'The Christians who would be on good terms with them must fight well or pay well.' --William Eaton, U.S. Naval Agent to the Barbary States

Violence carried out against innocent and unsuspecting civilians as was the case on September 11th, is designed to create fear among the masses. It is called terrorism, and it is not a new form of warfare. It is quite ancient, and so is its employment by Islamic fundamentalists, who for centuries, have bombed, hijacked, kidnapped, murdered and extorted for the furthering of their religion and the glory of their god *Allah*.

Known in times past as "Barbary pirates," Islamic terrorists made the world of old tremble at the thought of being captured on the high seas and killed or sold to the slave-traders of Timbuktu. The name "Barbary," is thought to be a variation of the term "barbaros" (barbarian) which Greeks at one time used to describe anyone who did not speak their language.

Similar to the al Qaeda, Hezbollah, or the PLO, some of the *Mohammeden* (Muslim) terrorists operated from sea-port fortresses throughout the Ottoman Empire - but principally along the coasts of North Africa on the Mediterranean Sea (nicknamed the Barbary Coast). The so-called Barbary States, consisting of Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, and to some extent, Turkey, preyed for centuries on merchant vessels in the Mediterranean and small villages along the eastern Atlantic as far north as Denmark.

Initially, the Barbary pirates claimed to have religious reasons for their wars—it was their duty as Mohammedans to make war on the Christians. But, they also found war to be quite profitable. Handsome revenues from looting, coupled with the tributes from many timid nations, made war as much a business as a cause. Not to mention that local officials knew perfectly well that without war, there would be shortages of necessary goods among their subjects—who kept them in power. And, equally important, without war, the world would soon cease to fear them.

Europeans and Americans knew that fear. They had read many first-hand accounts of those who had been captured and imprisoned for years by *Mohammedan* warlords.

Cervantes, who later wrote Don Quixote, was once captured by Barbary pirates more than a generation before colonists landed at Roanoke in 1587, and so was Defoe, the author of the popular fiction hero, Robinson Crusoe. In his work, The Glory of Goodness, American Founder-Preacher Cotton Mather called Barbary servitude "the most horrible *Capitivity* in the world." He described the "Hellish Moors" who held Americans in bondage as "worse than Egyptian Task masters." ¹

During the War for Independence, the Barbary powers regularly attacked undefended American merchant ships, looting the cargo and imprisoning "Christian" seamen in retaliation for what had been done to them by the "Christians" of previous centuries.

Eventually, President Washington was forced to send envoys to negotiate treaties with the Barbary states to ensure “protection” of American commercial ships in the Mediterranean. Protection was assured for a few hundred thousand dollars and a frigate or two.

Later, President Adams also negotiated with the Barbary states in the mistaken belief that more comprehensive treaties would bring about a better understanding and cooperation between the worlds of Islam and Christianity. In 1797, the United States signed a treaty with the government of Tripoli in which each country officially recognized the religion of the other in an attempt to prevent further escalation of a “Holy War” between Christians and Muslims.

William Eaton, Consul to Tunis at the time, was not impressed and wrote to Secretary of State Timothy Pickering apprising him of why the Muslims were such dedicated foes. He said, *Taught by revelation that war with the Christians will guarantee the salvation of their souls, and finding so great secular advantages in the observance of this religious duty [keeping captured cargoes], their inducements to desperate fighting are very powerful.*²

Eaton was right. On May 14, 1801, the bashaw of Tripoli, declared war on the United States - demanding a greater price for peace than what the Adams treaty had called for. Newly elected President Jefferson didn't think checkbook diplomacy was working, so he dispatched America's tiny fleet of ships to blockade several Barbary ports.

The “war” was accomplishing little until 1803 when the flagship *Philadelphia*, America's pride and joy, struck an uncharted reef a few miles from Tripoli and became disabled. Within an hour, the Tripolitans set upon the ship, capturing the entire crew of 307 sailors. For their release, the local bashaw demanded \$1.69 million in war indemnities—equal to one-fifth of the U.S. economy at the time. This event propelled the country into a great national crisis.

While concerned that other Muslim nations might be drawn into the conflict, Jefferson had no alternative but to attack the enemy aggressively. During the next year and a half, Commodore Edward Preble launched ceaseless cannonades against Tripoli, Stephen Decatur set aflame the captured Philadelphia, and William Eaton invaded Derna with a force of only nine marines and several hundred Bedouin mercenaries.

When Tripoli surrendered in 1805, America claimed victory in its first war following the Revolution. However, in return for undisputed bragging rights, the U.S. quietly agreed to pay the local bashaw a face-saving \$60,000 in war reparations. Still, America's decisive military action left an impression on the Barbary regencies. Few U.S. vessels were molested again—until recently.

According to modern historians, the survival and expansion of militant Islam in the 20th century came as a surprise. That it could reach our shores and so easily wound our twin icons of power and wealth is a shock—certainly. But, as the great William Gladstone, in resisting terrorism, once said, “The resources of civilisation are not yet exhausted.”

As Christians, might we better say, “The resources of our God are never exhausted!”

Rick Forcier

Executive Director

¹ Baepler, Paul, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 1999, The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, pg. 1

² Barton, David, *Original Intent*, 1997, WallBuilder Press, Aledo, TX, pg. 129

Other resources: Whipple, A.B.C., *To The Shores Of Tripoli*, 1991, and C.S. Forester, *Barbary Pirates*, 1953