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The Koran: Thomas Jefferson's Library Edition (Annotated)

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-Annotated with new introduction for the Jefferson Library Edition. Among the 6,500 books sold to Congress by Jefferson in 1815 to replace the Congressional Library that had been destroyed when the British burned the Capitol during the War of 1812 was a translation of the Koran by George Sales. Sales' translation included more than one hundred pages of notes written from a Christian perspective. Including advice on how Muslims might be converted. These are preserved within this text. There is some debate about whether he purchased his copy of the Koran in law school in order to follow references found in his textbooks; or if he purchased his copy of the Koran later in order to research the faith of the jihadists of his day-the Barbary pirates. He very well may have used his Koran for both purposes. Jefferson cataloged the books within his library by subject and included the Koran with other legal texts. But he also confronted Islamic extremists often during his storied life.

While Thomas Jefferson was serving as the U.S. Ambassador to France the BETSEY a merchant brig was captured On 11 October 1784, by Moroccan corsairs. After Spain's foreign minister, José Moñino y Redondo negotiated the release of the captured ship and crew, Spain advised the United States to follow their course of action and pay tribute to the Berber Muslims to prevent further attacks. Months after the BETSEY was captured, two additional American ships were seized and their crew of twenty-one men was enslaved by Algerian corsairs. A schooner Maria, commanded by Captain Isaac Stevens, was captured off Cape Saint Vincent, Portugal, on July 24, 1785 and a week later, on July 30, 1785 the Dauphin, commanded by Captain Richard O'Brien, was captured off Cadiz, Spain. This time Spain was unwilling to negotiate on America's behalf.

Jefferson, in 1786, along with John Adams, the U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain met with Tripoli's Ambassador to Great Britain Sidi Haji Abdul Rahman Adja. Thomas Jefferson reported the conversation to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, John Jay: "We took the liberty to make some inquiries concerning the Grounds of their pretensions to make war upon a Nation who had done them no Injury, and observed that we considered all mankind as our Friends who had done us no wrong, nor had given us any provocation. THE AMBASSADOR ANSWERED US THAT IT WAS FOUNDED ON THE LAWS OF THEIR PROPHET, THAT IT WAS WRITTEN IN THEIR KORAN, THAT ALL NATIONS WHO SHOULD NOT HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THEIR AUTHORITY WERE SINNERS, THAT IT WAS THEIR RIGHT AND DUTY TO MAKE WAR UPON THEM WHEREVER THEY COULD BE FOUND, AND TO MAKE SLAVES OF ALL THEY COULD TAKE AS PRISONERS, AND THAT EVERY MUSLIM WHO SHOULD BE SLAIN IN BATTLE WAS SURE TO GO TO PARADISE. Thomas Jefferson decided to send representatives to Morocco and Algeria to try to negotiate treaties and the secure the freedom of the captured sailors. Each of the four Berber Muslim states demanded $60,000. The envoys however were only given a budget of $40,000. Diplomatic negotiations to reach an amount for tribute or for the ransom of the captured sailors bogged down.

In 1795, Algeria came to an agreement that resulted in the release of the 115 American sailors they held, at a cost of over $1 million. The U.S. paid Algiers the ransom, and agreed to pay up to $1 million per year for the safe passage of American ships. A $1 million payment in ransom and tribute to these Islamic states in 1800 would have amounted to approximately 10% of the U.S. government's annual revenues.

In 1801, when Jefferson was president, Tripoli demanded a massive payment from the United States, along with an increased annual tribute, in order to continue securing safe passage for American ships through the Mediterranean. Jefferson refused the demands, and instead of sending more money, he sent naval warships carrying the newly created U.S. Marine Corps. This is where the line "to the shores of Tripoli" in the Marine Corps hymn comes from.

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