

**Francis D. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. xiii + 302pp.**

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What an authoritative and convincing review of the foreign policy of arguably America's most important founding father! *Emperor of Liberty* demonstrates that Thomas Jefferson's lifelong approach to foreign affairs defies categorization. Francis Cogliano, a Jefferson specialist at the University of Edinburgh, avoids the realist-idealist dichotomy that not only characterizes debate about the third U.S. president but much of the historiography on U.S. foreign relations in general. He argues that 'although Jefferson was guided by a clear ideological vision for the American republic, he was pragmatic about the means he employed to protect the republic and advance its strategic interests' (10). Jefferson's goals of territorial expansion and free trade are unremitting here, and the sometimes contradictory, enigmatic figure comes off as more intelligible for it.

Cogliano carefully measures his approach. On the one hand, by avoiding an overly detailed, comprehensive account, he efficiently presents his case to both casual readers and scholars. On the other, by surveying important episodes in Jefferson's entire career, not just his presidency, he grounds the most consequential moments with greater range. A decision to confront piracy in the Mediterranean, for instance, seems more enlightened coming from a seasoned statesman who has already faced similar threats to American shipping than from an untested president. For more than half the book, the reader weaves chronologically through Jefferson's apprenticeship as governor of Virginia, minister to France, secretary of state, and vice president before reaching Jefferson at the fulcrum.

We begin with his calamitous term as Virginian governor, when the British invaded in 1780 and 1781. Disaster resulted from a lack of experience but also from Virginia's 1776 constitution. Reflecting fears of monarchy, it decentralized power and hamstrung the governor's authority even in times of crisis. Governor Jefferson shared concerns about despotism. Yet, he justified stretching constitutional authority during a security emergency, especially by making military decisions without consulting his council or before it was quorate, as the state constitution

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required. Jefferson believed that his actions upheld rather than imperilled Virginia's experiment with republican government. 'The first duty of the executive was to protect the republic, regardless of constitutional strictures, which themselves might be flawed,' writes Cogliano (40).

Afterwards, Jefferson dove more directly into foreign policy. As minister to France, he first stood up to the Barbary pirates. In 1785, after Algerians seized American ships in the Mediterranean, he supported the use of naval force as the proper response. Neither diplomacy nor money could solve the issues in the long run or earn respect like a good fight. As secretary of state, Jefferson sought to benefit in the crisis over Nootka Sound, a patchwork of inlets on Vancouver Island, where British vessels had begun to defy Spanish territorial claims. He wanted to exploit Spanish vulnerability to enhance the U.S. presence on the Mississippi, which he considered vital. Once again, war loomed but never materialized, as Spain accepted the British occupation in a series of conventions in the early 1790s.

In the partisan atmosphere of that decade, Jefferson's foreign policy views often put him at the centre of the political storm. Nothing stirred passions more than the French Revolution: 'Because Jefferson believed that the fates of liberty in France and the United States were intertwined he likened the forces of counterrevolution in Europe to those (his Federalist adversaries) in the United States. As such, he was willing to countenance the excesses of the Revolution rather than endanger the fate of liberty at home' (96). Moving closer to Britain meant moving away from France, and in the wrong direction. Predictably, Jefferson abhorred the 1794 Jay Treaty. It liberalized trade with the British Empire and averted war, but the British offered few concessions to American shipping. Barely achieving the two-thirds majority necessary, Senate ratification was secret, as the treaty's supporters expected it to be unpopular. They were right. It electrified the Republicans to organize as an opposition party with their first platform item.

Prioritizing liberty or security also aligned the camps. After the 1797 debacle remembered as the X Y Z affair, Jefferson worried that Federalists overstated the threat from France. They threatened liberty at home by passing the Alien and Sedition Acts, which took aim at the opposition press and, by extension, freedom of speech. As vice president to Federalist John Adams, he could only approach the crisis with moderation, cautioning against extremism and disunion. He hoped most Americans would realize such threats to liberty and nullify unconstitutional laws. They could further safeguard their liberty by electing him president in the next contest.

Once inaugurated, President Jefferson contested Barbary demands for tribute. Paying was never an option for one who believed that previous treaties with the Barbary States would not permanently protect American commerce. After Tripoli declared war on the United States for Jefferson's refusal to pay, he made preparations for war without approval from Congress, not then in session. War had

been foisted upon the republic, which needed a forceful and timely defence. Cogliano compares such flexing of executive muscle to Governor Jefferson's actions in 1780 and 1781. He ties such forcefulness to Jefferson's commitment to an agrarian republic, which 'rested on the assumption that Americans must trade freely throughout the world' (171).

The Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson's signal success as president, doubled the size of the United States for a mere \$15 million. The connection to Jefferson's plans for an 'empire of liberty' is obvious in this case, and Cogliano, finding consistency in Jefferson's thinking, links it to his earlier efforts at expanding self-government to the territories, like the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Indeed, he traces it to the Declaration of Independence, which had outlined 'Jefferson's vision for an expansive, commercial American republic' (200). Beyond emphasizing Jefferson's ability to exploit such great fortune, though, Cogliano's treatment of the purchase offers little that is fresh. He also forgoes how Jefferson reconciled it with his constructionist views of the Constitution, which says nothing about purchasing land. Readers are left to draw their own inferences about Jefferson bending authority from other episodes.

No episode or policy looms larger in Jefferson's second term than the disastrous Embargo Act of 1807. Jefferson had hoped that the British and the French, both responsible for kidnapping thousands of American sailors in attempts to deprive the other access to U.S. trade, would have little choice but to make concessions at the negotiating table. Instead, both sides, locked in a death struggle, failed to notice a policy that only succeeded in wrecking the economies of America's ports. Cogliano agrees that the embargo was a failure but not one created 'out of excessive idealism, nor out of a misplaced faith in the potency of economic suasion,' as normally alleged, 'but because he had few options' (215). He asserts that the embargo's 'chief accomplishment' was buying merchant ships and navy frigates time to come home as a 'crucial antecedent to a war' (239). This, however, credits Jefferson with a dubious level of foresight.

Despite a couple of minor irritants, *Emperor of Liberty* fulfils its major promise. It makes sense of Jefferson's seemingly unpredictable actions not only by linking them to his ideology, steady to the end, but by contextualizing them with changing circumstances and his ability to exploit opportunities big and small. Readers will undoubtedly notice the irony in the book's title, but Cogliano never uses it to jibe Jefferson as a hypocrite. Empire building of a sort and liberty did grow together by adding self-governing states to the union. 'This was a specific plan for American expansion,' Cogliano reminds us, 'not an idealized vision of what might be' (246). Clearly, the author admires Jefferson as architect of practical foreign policy as much as visionary thinker. Readers will too.