HOSTILITIES BY MEXICO.

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

RELATIVE

To an invasion and commencement of hostilities by Mexico.

MAY 11, 1846.

Read, and referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union.

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

The existing state of the relations between the United States and Mexico renders it proper that I should bring the subject to the consideration of Congress. In my message at the commencement of your present session, the state of these relations, the causes which led to the suspension of diplomatic intercourse between the two countries in March, 1845, and the long-continued and unredressed wrongs and injuries committed by the Mexican government on citizens of the United States, in their persons and property, were briefly set forth.

As the facts and opinions which were then laid before you were carefully considered, I cannot better express my present convictions of the condition of affairs up to that time, than by referring you to that communication.

The strong desire to establish peace with Mexico on liberal and honorable terms, and the readiness of this government to regulate and adjust our boundary, and other causes of difference with that power, on such fair and equitable principles as would lead to permanent relations of the most friendly nature, induced me, in September last, to seek the reopening of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Every measure adopted on our part had for its object the furtherance of these desired results. In communicating to Congress a succinct statement of the injuries which we had suffered from Mexico, and which have been accumulating during a period of more than twenty years, every expression that could tend to inflame the people of Mexico, or defeat or delay a pacific result, was carefully avoided. An envoy of the United States repaired to Mexico, with full powers to adjust every existing difference. But
though present on the Mexican soil, by agreement between the two
governments, invested with full powers, and bearing evidence of
the most friendly dispositions, his mission has been unavailing. The
Mexican government not only refused to receive him, or listen to
his propositions, but, after a long continued series of menaces, have
at last invaded our territory, and shed the blood of our fellow-citi-
zens on our own soil.

It now becomes my duty to state more in detail the origin, pro-
gress, and failure of that mission. In pursuance of the instructions
given in September last, an inquiry was made, on the thirteenth of
October, 1845, in the most friendly terms, through our consul in
Mexico, of the minister for foreign affairs, whether the Mexican
government "would receive an envoy from the United States in-
trusted with full powers to adjust all the questions in dispute be-
tween the two governments;" with the assurance that "should the
answer be in the affirmative, such an envoy would be immediately
despatched to Mexico." The Mexican minister, on the fifteenth of
October, gave an affirmative answer to this inquiry, requesting at
the same time, that our naval force at Vera Cruz might be with-
drawn, lest its continued presence might assume the appearance of
menace and coercion pending the negotiations. This force was
immediately withdrawn. On the 10th of November, 1845, Mr. John
Slidell, of Louisiana, was commissioned by me as envoy extraor-
dinary and minister plenipotentiary of the United States to Mexico,
and was entrusted with full powers to adjust both the questions of
the Texas boundary and of indemnification to our citizens. The
redress of the wrongs of our citizens naturally and inseparably
blended itself with the question of boundary. The settlement of
the one question, in any correct view of the subject, involves that
of the other. I could not, for a moment, entertain the idea that the
claims of our much injured and long suffering citizens, many of
which had existed for more than twenty years, should be postponed
or separated from the settlement of the boundary question.

Mr. Slidell arrived at Vera Cruz on the 30th of November, and
was courteously received by the authorities of that city. But the
government of General Herrera was then tottering to its fall. The
revolutionary party had seized upon the Texas question to effect or
hasten its overthrow. Its determination to restore friendly relations
with the United States, and to receive our minister, to negotiate for
the settlement of this question, was violently assailed, and was
made the great theme of denunciation against it. The government
of General Herrera, there is good reason to believe, was sincerely
desirous to receive our minister; but it yielded to the storm raised
by its enemies, and on the 21st of December refused to accredit Mr.
Slidell upon the most frivolous pretexts. These are so fully and
ably exposed in the note of Mr. Slidell, of the 24th of December
last, to the Mexican minister of foreign relations, herewith trans-
mitted, that I deem it unnecessary to enter into further detail on
this portion of the subject.

Five days after the date of Mr. Slidell's note, General Herrera
yielded the government to General Paredes, without a struggle, and
on the 30th of December resigned the presidency. This revolution 
was accomplished solely by the army, the people having taken little 
part in the contest; and thus the supreme power in Mexico passed 
into the hands of a military leader.

Determined to leave no effort untried to effect an amicable adjust-
ment with Mexico, I directed Mr. Slidell to present his credentials 
to the government of General Paredes, and ask to be officially 
received by him. There would have been less ground for taking 
this step had General Paredes come into power by regular constitut-
ional succession. In that event his administration would have been 
considered but a mere constitutional continuance of the government 
of General Herrera, and the refusal of the latter to receive our 
minister would have been deemed conclusive, unless an intimation 
had been given by General Paredes of his desire to reverse the de-
cision of his predecessor. But the government of General Paredes 
owes its existence to a military revolution, by which the subsisting 
constitutional authorities had been subverted. The form of govern-
ment was entirely changed, as well as all the high functionaries by 
whom it was administered.

Under these circumstances, Mr. Slidell, in obedience to my di-
rection, addressed a note to the Mexican minister of foreign rela-
tions, under date of the 1st of March last, asking to be received by 
that government in the diplomatic character to which he had been 
appointed. This minister, in his reply under date of the 12th of 
March, reiterated the arguments of his predecessor, and, in terms 
that may be considered as giving just grounds of offence to the 
government and people of the United States, denied the application 
of Mr. Slidell. Nothing, therefore, remained for our envoy but to 
demand his passports, and return to his own country.

Thus the government of Mexico, though solemnly pledged by 
official acts in October last to receive and accredit an American 
envoy, violated their plighted faith, and refused the offer of a 
peaceful adjustment of our difficulties. Not only was the offer re-
jected, but the indignity of its rejection was enhanced by the mani-
fest breach of faith in refusing to admit the envoy, who came be-
cause they had bound themselves to receive him. Nor can it be 
said that the offer was fruitless from the want of opportunity of 
discussing it—our envoy was present on their own soil. Nor can 
it be ascribed to a want of sufficient powers—our envoy had full 
powers to adjust every question of difference. Nor was there room 
for complaint that our propositions for settlement were unreason-
able—permission was not even given our envoy to make any pro-
position whatever. Nor can it be objected that we, on our part, 
would not listen to any reasonable terms of their suggestion—the 
Mexican government refused all negotiation, and have made no 
proposition of any kind.

In my message at the commencement of the present session, I 
informed you that, upon the earnest appeal both of the congress 
and convention of Texas, I had ordered an efficient military force 
to take a position "between the Nueces and the Del Norte." This 
had become necessary, to meet a threatened invasion of Texas by
the Mexican forces, for which extensive military preparations had been made. The invasion was threatened solely because Texas had determined, in accordance with a solemn resolution of the Congress of the United States, to annex herself to our Union; and, under these circumstances, it was plainly our duty to extend our protection over her citizens and soil.

This force was concentrated at Corpus Christi, and remained there until after I had received such information from Mexico as rendered it probable, if not certain, that the Mexican government would refuse to receive our envoy.

Meantime Texas, by the final action of our Congress, had become an integral part of our Union. The Congress of Texas, by its act of December 19, 1836, had declared the Rio del Norte to be the boundary of that republic. Its jurisdiction had been extended and exercised beyond the Nueces. The country between that river and the Del Norte had been represented in the congress and in the convention of Texas; had thus taken part in the act of annexation itself; and is now included within one of our congressional districts. Our own Congress had, moreover, with great unanimity, by the act approved December 31, 1845, recognized the country beyond the Nueces as a part of our territory, by including it within our own revenue system; and a revenue officer, to reside within that district, has been appointed, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. It became, therefore, of urgent necessity to provide for the defence of that portion of our country. Accordingly, on the 13th of January last, instructions were issued to the general in command of these troops to occupy the left bank of the Del Norte. This river, which is the southwestern boundary of the State of Texas, is an exposed frontier; from this quarter invasion was threatened; upon it, and in its immediate vicinity, in the judgment of high military experience, are the proper stations for the protecting forces of the government. In addition to this important consideration, several others occurred to induce this movement. Among these are the facilities afforded by the ports at Brazos Santiago and the mouth of the Del Norte, for the reception of supplies by sea; the stronger and more healthful military positions; the convenience for obtaining a ready and a more abundant supply of provisions, water, fuel, and forage; and the advantages which are afforded by the Del Norte in forwarding supplies to such posts as may be established in the interior and upon the Indian frontier.

The movement of the troops to the Del Norte was made by the commanding general, under positive instructions to abstain from all aggressive acts towards Mexico or Mexican citizens, and to regard the relations between that republic and the United States as peaceful, unless she should declare war, or commit acts of hostility indicative of a state of war. He was specially directed to protect private property, and respect personal rights.

The army moved from Corpus Christi on the eleventh of March, and on the twenty-eighth of that month arrived on the left bank of the Del Norte, opposite to Matamoros, where it encamped on a commanding position, which has since been strengthened by the
erection of field works. A depot has also been established at Point Isabel, near the Brazos Santiago, thirty miles in rear of the encampment. The selection of his position was necessarily confided to the judgment of the general in command.

The Mexican forces at Matamoras assumed a belligerent attitude, and, on the twelfth of April, General Ampudia, then in command, notified General Taylor to break up his camp within twenty-four hours, and to retire beyond the Nueces river, and, in the event of his failure to comply with these demands, announced that arms, and arms alone, must decide the question. But no open act of hostility was committed until the twenty-fourth of April. On that day, General Arista, who had succeeded to the command of the Mexican forces, communicated to General Taylor that “he considered hostilities commenced, and should prosecute them.” A party of dragoons, of sixty-three men and officers, were on the same day despatched from the American camp up the Rio del Norte, on its left bank, to ascertain whether the Mexican troops had crossed, or were preparing to cross, the river; “became engaged with a large body of these troops, and, after a short affair, in which some sixteen were killed and wounded, appear to have been surrounded and compelled to surrender.”

The grievous wrongs perpetrated by Mexico upon our citizens throughout a long period of years remain unredressed; and solemn treaties, pledging her public faith for this redress, have been disregarded. A government either unable or unwilling to enforce the execution of such treaties, fails to perform one of its plainest duties.

Our commerce with Mexico has been almost annihilated. It was formerly highly beneficial to both nations; but our merchants have been deterred from prosecuting it by the system of outrage and extortion which the Mexican authorities have pursued against them, whilst their appeals through their own government for indemnity have been made in vain. Our forbearance has gone to such an extreme as to be mistaken in its character. Had we acted with vigor in repelling the insults and redressing the injuries inflicted by Mexico at the commencement, we should doubtless have escaped all the difficulties in which we are now involved.

Instead of this, however, we have been exerting our best efforts to propitiate her good will. Upon the pretext that Texas, a nation as independent as herself, thought proper to unite its destinies with our own, she has affected to believe that we have severed her rightful territory, and in official proclamations and manifestoes has repeatedly threatened to make war upon us, for the purpose of reconquering Texas. In the meantime, we have tried every effort at reconciliation. The cup of forbearance had been exhausted, even before the recent information from the frontier of the Del Norte; but now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon the American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war.

As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it,
exists by the act of Mexico herself, we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country.

Anticipating the possibility of a crisis like that which has arrived, instructions were given in August last, "as a precautionary measure" against invasion, or threatened invasion, authorizing General Taylor, if the emergency required, to accept volunteers, not from Texas only, but from the States of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky; and corresponding letters were addressed to the respective governors of those States. These instructions were repeated; and, in January last, soon after the incorporation of "Texas into our union of States," General Taylor was further "authorized by the President to make a requisition upon the executive of that State for such of its militia force as may be needed to repel invasion, or to secure the country against apprehended invasion." On the second day of March he was again reminded, "in the event of the approach of any considerable Mexican force, promptly and efficiently to use the authority with which he was clothed to call to him such auxiliary force as he might need." War actually existing, and our territory having been invaded, General Taylor, pursuant to authority vested in him by my direction, has called on the governor of Texas for four regiments of State troops—two to be mounted, and two to serve on foot; and on the governor of Louisiana for four regiments of infantry, to be sent to him as soon as practicable.

In further vindication of our rights, and defence of our territory, I invoke the prompt action of Congress to recognize the existence of the war, and to place at the disposition of the Executive the means of prosecuting the war with vigor, and thus hastening the restoration of peace. To this end I recommend that authority should be given to call into the public service a large body of volunteers, to serve for not less than six or twelve months, unless sooner discharged. A volunteer force is, beyond question, more efficient than any other description of citizen soldiers; and it is not to be doubted that a number far beyond that required would readily rush to the field upon the call of their country. I further recommend that a liberal provision be made for sustaining our entire military force and furnishing it with supplies and munitions of war.

The most energetic and prompt measures, and the immediate appearance in arms of a large and overpowering force, are recommended to Congress as the most certain and efficient means of bringing the existing collision with Mexico to a speedy and successful termination.

In making these recommendations, I deem it proper to declare that it is my anxious desire not only to terminate hostilities speedily, but to bring all matters in dispute between this government and Mexico to an early and amicable adjustment; and, in this view, I shall be prepared to renew negotiations whenever Mexico shall be ready to receive propositions, or to make propositions of her own.

I transmit herewith a copy of the correspondence between our
envoy to Mexico and the Mexican minister for foreign affairs; and so much of the correspondence between that envoy and the Secretary of State, and between the Secretary of War and the general in command on the Del Norte, as is necessary to a full understanding of the subject.

WASHINGTON, May 11, 1846.

JAMES K. POLK.