

In regard to my own opinion upon this subject, which the President has been pleased to desire, it is altogether probable that the possibility of other difficulties from other quarters in Europe may have its influence in dictating the policy of the extensive preparations in progress in all parts of the kingdom; and, with unabated confidence in the frankness and straight-forwardness of Lord Aberdeen, and without meaning to distrust in the slightest degree the sincerity of his disclaimers in our recent conversation, I do not think it ought to be assumed by any one that warlike preparations upon such a scale as that upon which they are undeniably making here, could not have even an indirect reference to the possible contingency of a rupture with us. And at the same time it is perfectly obvious that they are in a great degree, and especially so far as they consist of an augmentation in the number of steam vessels, and of the naval marine generally, precisely of the character to be the most appropriate and the most useful in a war with our country. I am not prepared to say, nor do I deem it material to decide, how far we have a right to expect an explicit disclaimer of the character and purposes of the warlike preparations now making by Great Britain under the circumstances. They may be the dictate of various motives of policy, and the result of many causes; and, without attempting to assign to each its particular influence, I am by no means prepared to admit that the apprehension of difficulties with the United States had no share in them; and it is very clear that if a rupture with the United States should grow out of our present difficulties, this country will be as fully and effectually prepared for it at all points, and for all possible purposes, as if that, and that alone, had been the object of all her warlike preparations. She will be in a situation to act and strike as promptly and signally as she could have been with her energies exclusively directed to that end; and I feel it my duty to add, that not to expect, in case a rupture becomes unavoidable, that this Government, thus in complete armor, will promptly and vigorously exert her utmost power to inflict the utmost possible injury upon our country and all its interests, would not be doing justice to such a crisis.

I think it ought to be expected, indeed from all I learn I cannot doubt, that, in case of hostilities, the aim of this Government will be to strike its heaviest blow at the commencement, in the expectation of being thereby enabled to shorten the duration of the war.

I have the honor to be, &c.

The Honorable James Buchanan,
Secretary of State, Washington.

LOUIS McLANE.

MR. PAKENHAM TO MR. BUCHANAN.

Washington, December 27, 1845.

An attentive consideration of the present state of affairs, with reference to the Oregon question, has determined the British Government to instruct the undersigned, Her Britannic Majesty's Envoy extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, again to represent in pressing terms to the Government of the United States the expediency of referring the whole question of an equitable division of that territory to the arbitration of some friendly Sovereign or State.

Her Majesty's Government deeply regret the failure of all their efforts to effect a friendly settlement of the conflicting claims by direct negotiation between the two Governments.

They are still persuaded that great advantages would have resulted to both parties from such a mode of settlement, had it been practicable, but there are difficulties now in the way in that course of proceeding which it might be tedious to remove, while the importance of an early settlement seems to become at each moment more urgent.

Under these circumstances, Her Majesty's Government think that a resort to arbitration is the most prudent, and, perhaps, the only feasible step which could be taken, and the best calculated to allay the existing effervescence of popular feeling which might otherwise greatly embarrass the efforts of both Governments to preserve a friendly understanding between the two countries.

The Government of the United States will see, in the proposal which the undersigned is thus instructed to make, a proof of the confidence of the British Government in the justice of their own claim. They will also see in it a proof of the readiness of the British Government to incur the risk of a great sacrifice for the preservation of peace and of their friendly relations with the United States. It is made in a spirit of moderation and fairness of which the world will judge.

The British Government confidently hope that the Government of the United States will not reject a proposal made with such a friendly intention, and for a purpose so holy.

There is nothing in it, they are convinced, not perfectly compatible with the strictest regard for the honor and just interests of both parties, particularly when it is considered of what small value to either is the portion of territory which in reality forms the subject of controversy, compared with the importance of preserving a state of peace and good will between two such nations.

The undersigned takes advantage of this opportunity to renew to the Hon. James Buchanan the assurance of his high consideration.

R. PAKENHAM.

The Hon. James Buchanan, &c.

MR. BUCHANAN TO MR. PAKENHAM.

Department of State,
Washington, January 3, 1846.

The undersigned, Secretary of State of the United States, has the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the note of Mr. Pakenham, Her Britannic Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, dated the 27th ultimo, by which, under instructions from his Government, he proposes to the Government of the United States "the expediency of referring the whole question of an equitable division of that (the Oregon) territory to the arbitration of some friendly Sovereign or State."

The undersigned has submitted this note to the President, who, after having bestowed upon it that respectful consideration so eminently due to any proposition emanating from the British Government, has instructed him to give it the following answer:—

The British Government do not propose to refer to arbitration the question of the title to the Oregon territory, claimed by the two Powers, respectively. It is a proposition to refer to a friendly Sovereign or State, merely the partition or "equitable division" of that territory between the parties. It assumes the fact that the title of Great Britain to a portion of the territory is valid, and thus takes for granted the very question in dispute. Under this proposition, the very terms of the submission would contain an express acknowledgment of the right of Great Britain to a portion of the territory, and would necessarily preclude the United States from claiming the whole before the arbitrator. This, too, in the face of the note of the undersigned to Mr. Pakenham, of the 30th August last, by which the President had asserted, in the most solemn form, the title of the United States to the whole territory. Even if there were not other conclusive reasons for declining the proposition, this alone would be deemed sufficient by the President.

The President heartily concurs with the British Government in their regret that all attempts to settle the Oregon question by negotiation have hitherto failed. He cannot, however, concur with that Government in the opinion that a resort to arbitration, and especially on the terms proposed, would be followed by happier consequences. On the contrary, he believes that any attempt to refer this question to a third Power, would only involve it in new difficulties.

In declining this proposition, the President refers to the sentiment expressed in the note of the undersigned of the 30th August last, to which allusion has already been made, that he "cherishes the hope that this long-pending controversy may yet be finally adjusted in such a manner as not to disturb the peace, or interrupt the harmony now so happily subsisting between the two nations."

The undersigned avails himself of this occasion to renew to Mr. Pakenham assurances of his distinguished consideration.

JAMES BUCHANAN.

Right Hon. Richard Pakenham, &c. &c. &c.

MR. PAKENHAM TO MR. BUCHANAN.

Washington, January 6, 1846.

The undersigned, Her Britannic Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, has had the honor to receive the note of the Secretary of State of the United States dated the 3d instant, in answer to that of the undersigned dated 27th ultimo, containing a proposal for referring the question of an equitable partition of the Oregon territory to the arbitration of some friendly Sovereign or State.

The undersigned will take an early opportunity to transmit this communication to Her Majesty's Government.

The undersigned has the honor to renew to Mr. Buchanan the assurance of his distinguished consideration.

R. PAKENHAM.

To the Hon. James Buchanan, &c. &c. &c.

MR. PAKENHAM TO MR. BUCHANAN.

Washington, January 16, 1846.

With an anxious desire to contribute, by every means in his power, to a satisfactory conclusion of the question pending between the two Governments respecting Oregon, the undersigned, Her Britannic Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, has reflected on the contents of the note addressed to him on the 3d instant, by the Secretary of State of the United States, in answer to that which the undersigned had the honour to address to him on the 27th of last month.

The note of the undersigned proposed to the Government of the United States that the whole question of an equitable partition of the Oregon territory should be referred to the arbitration of some friendly sovereign or state.

In answer, the Secretary of State informed the undersigned that his proposition could not be accepted. That it did not propose to refer to arbitration the question of the title to the Oregon Territory claimed by the two Powers respectively. That in proposing to refer to a friendly sovereign or state merely the partition or equitable division of the territory between the parties, it assumes the fact that the title of Great Britain to a portion of the territory is valid, and thus takes for granted the very question in dispute; that, under this proposition, the very terms of the submission would contain an express acknowledgment of the right of Great Britain to a portion of the territory, and would necessarily preclude the United States