

12-9-1879

## Protection of the Rio Grande Frontier

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

DECEMBER 9, 1879.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. MAXEY, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill S. 53.]

*The Committee on Military Affairs, to which was referred Senate bill 53, making appropriation for the erection of suitable posts for the protection of the Rio Grande frontier, respectfully submits the following report: ¶¶*

A bill (S. 414) having in view the same object was reported favorably from this committee on the 11th day of December, 1877, and passed the Senate, without division on the 31st of January, 1878, and was sent to the House the same day, but no final action was taken by that body during the Forty-fifth Congress.

The great national importance of adequate protection to the Rio Grande border, fronting Mexico, by sufficient military force and additional posts, was brought to the attention of Congress by the President in his annual message of December 3, 1877. The committee makes the following extract from said message:

The revolution which recently occurred in Mexico was followed by the accession of the successful party to power and the installation of its chief, General Porfirio Diaz, in the Presidential office. It has been the custom of the United States, when such changes of government have heretofore occurred in Mexico, to recognize and enter into official relations with the *de facto* government as soon as it should appear to have the approval of the Mexican people, and should manifest a disposition to adhere to the obligations of treaties and international friendship. In the present case such official recognition has been deferred by the occurrences on the Rio Grande border, the records of which have been already communicated to each house of Congress, in answer to their respective resolutions of inquiry. Assurances have been received that the authorities at the seat of the Mexican Government have both the disposition and the power to prevent and punish such unlawful invasions and depredations. It is earnestly to be hoped that events may prove these assurances to be well founded. The best interests of both countries require the maintenance of peace upon the border, and the development of commerce between the two republics. \* \* \* \* \*

While I do not anticipate an interruption of friendly relations with Mexico, yet I cannot but look with some solicitude upon a continuance of border disorders as exposing the two countries to initiations of popular feeling and mischances of action which are naturally unfavorable to complete amity. Firmly determined that nothing shall be wanting on my part to promote a good understanding between the two nations, I yet must ask the attention of Congress to the actual occurrences on the border, that the lives and property of our citizens may be adequately protected and peace preserved. \* \* \* \* \*

Disturbances along the Rio Grande, in Texas, to which I have already referred have rendered necessary the constant employment of a military force in that vicinity. A full report of all recent military operations in that quarter has been transmitted to

the House of Representatives in answer to a resolution of that body, and it will, therefore, not be necessary to enter into details. I regret to say that these lawless incursions into our territory by armed bands from the Mexican side of the line, for the purpose of robbery, have been of frequent occurrence, and in spite of the most vigilant efforts of the commander of our forces the marauders have generally succeeded in escaping into Mexico with their plunder. In May last, I gave orders for the exercise of the utmost vigilance on the part of our troops for the suppression of these raids and the punishment of the guilty parties, as well as the recapture of property stolen by them. General Ord, commanding in Texas, was directed to invite the co-operation of the Mexican authorities in efforts to this end, and to assure them that I was anxious to avoid giving the least offense to Mexico. At the same time he was directed to give notice of my determination to put an end to the invasion of our territory by lawless bands, intent upon the plunder of our peaceful citizens, even if the effectual punishment of the outlaws should make the crossing of the border by our troops in their pursuit necessary. It is believed that this policy has had the effect to check somewhat these depredations, and that with a considerable increase of our force upon that frontier, and the establishment of several additional military posts along the Rio Grande, so as more effectually to guard that extensive border, peace may be preserved and the lives and property of our citizens in Texas fully protected.

The Secretary of War under date December 1, 1877, in a letter addressed to the chairman of this committee, says:

In my opinion the preservation of peace and order along the boundary between this country and Mexico is a matter of sufficient importance to justify a considerable expenditure of money. Not only is it important to protect the people of the great and rapidly growing State of Texas from depredation, but it is also vastly important that every cause of difficulty between this country and Mexico should be removed, to the end that friendly relations may continue.

It is not necessary that "defensive works," in the technical sense of these terms, should be erected along the Rio Grande, but the proposition to add a number of additional small military posts along that frontier is, as it seems to me, worthy of very favorable consideration by Congress. Raids into Texas from the Mexican side of the line are generally made by small parties for purposes of plunder only.

If our posts were increased so as to be within forty or fifty miles of each other, on the line from Fort Brown to Fort Duncan, a small garrison of infantry at each post, with small bodies of cavalry to patrol the intervening distances, might, I think, protect the people of Texas from these raids.

This would require three or four additional posts on that line.

General Sherman, commanding the Army, under date March 31, 1879, says:

I certainly will favor any proposition to build suitable posts along the Rio Grande frontier, because it forms a national boundary and is likely to be permanent. \* \* \* It may be well to build a new post between Ringgold Barracks and McIntosh, and another between McIntosh and Duncan. Should more be needed, I should prefer small block-houses connected with the larger posts by the telegraph, which would give prompt notice of the coming of any raiding party. It surely is to the national interest that the property on that frontier be made so safe that men would be encouraged to settle up all the lands, and thus form communities strong enough to guard their own interests. You may always count on me to favor any plan which will accomplish this result. Now is a good time, because matters on that frontier are exceptionally quiet and satisfactory.

General E. O. C. Ord, commanding Department of Texas, under date March 15, 1879, says:

As to the needs of my department, I stated to the Military and Appropriation Committees of the House of Representatives that since I had reduced the number of posts in this department I had been re-enforced with twenty companies, and had sent out three, and that having quartered one of the seventeen additional I had now sixteen companies without quarters; that at lowest estimates it would take an average of \$13,000 to quarter each of these companies; that I wanted to build three new posts; could get along with, perhaps, two; this to cover advancing line of frontier settlements; that in past four years I had received scarcely any money to quarter my troops.

You can say that in the last four years the frontier of the State within which it is safe for families to settle has advanced from one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles toward the Staked Plains and the Rio Grande, and a new line of posts along certain parts of this new frontier, and to protect it from reservation Indians on the north and from Apaches from Mexico, on the south, is necessary.

The statement is made clearly by General Ord, in the above extract, that he has sixteen companies without quarters.

Surely common prudence demands that these troops should not be thus exposed unnecessarily to the inclemencies of the weather.

General Sherman, in another portion of the same letter from which the extract herein is taken, and which is addressed to Mr. Maxey, of the committee, says:

I assure you that I have no intention to reduce the military strength a particle in Texas; on the contrary, the changes contemplated there will rather increase the force, by putting *full* regiments in place of such as have been there ten years and are reduced in strength.

It is manifest to every intelligent man, whether he has military education and experience or not, that wisdom and sound policy demand that peace should be preserved along the Rio Grande border; that the people along that frontier should be protected from incursions of Mexican banditti and savage Indians, which have so long cursed the border and a few years ago well-nigh depopulated it.

The wise policy of affording all the protection in the power of the government, with its limited military force, which has been pursued for a few years past, had manifested itself in greater peace and quiet there than had been enjoyed for many years before, and a conclusive evidence of its wisdom is the fact stated by General Ord, that within the last four years the frontier within which it is safe for families to settle has advanced from one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles towards the Staked Plains and the Rio Grande.

General Sherman, appreciating the wisdom of this policy, gives the distinct assurance that he will not diminish but rather increase the force. General Ord states that he has sixteen companies without quarters, and that at lowest estimates it will take an average of \$13,000 to quarter each of these companies. A simple calculation shows that the sum of \$208,000 at the lowest estimate is necessary to quarter these companies.

The statement of facts given is the strongest argument.

For many years past, as shown by the reports of the State Department, by the messages of the President, by investigations under the authority of the House of Representatives, and by the report forwarded by the State Department to the Senate during the third session of the Forty-fourth Congress, in compliance with its resolution, it is abundantly and conclusively established that murder, robbery, and arson have been carried on along that border with a high hand by Mexican and Indian raiders.

It is hoped and believed there is a change for the better. The committee has reason to believe that the Mexican authorities are manifesting a greater disposition than they have heretofore exhibited to do what they can on their side of the line to prevent these lawless incursions into our territory, and that they are not only willing but anxious that the authorities of this government shall keep such protecting military force on our frontier as will, with their aid, prevent raiding on our territory in the future.

Adequate protection of the frontier is the best security for peace.

It will encourage settlements, so that in a few years the strength of the settlements will itself go far toward effectually and permanently stopping these raids.

Besides, raids, and of consequence bad blood and collisions, once effectually checked, commerce along the border between the two countries will spring up, and commerce itself is a handmaid of peace.

In addition to the foregoing recommendations, I make the following extract from a letter from the honorable Secretary of War to H. B. Banning, chairman of the House Committee on Military Affairs:

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
Washington City, February 19, 1879.

SIR: In reply to your favor of yesterday, I have the honor to inclose a report of the General of the Army upon the subject of the establishment of additional military posts in the vicinity of the Rio Grande border.

I am of opinion that at least four additional military posts along the line of the Rio Grande should be constructed, and recommend the appropriation of \$200,000 for that purpose.

General Ord estimates that at least that sum will be required, and I concur with him in that opinion.

\* \* \* \* \*  
Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

GEO. W. McCRARY,  
*Secretary of War.*

Hon. H. B. BANNING,  
*Chairman Committee Military Affairs, House of Representatives.*

Thus, in the judgment of the committee, the bill proposed is, from the standpoint of protection, peace, and commerce, a wise and economic measure.

Attention is also invited to the urgent renewal of his recommendation for this appropriation made by General Ord in his annual report to the General of the Army, October 1, 1879, page 93 of the report of the General of the Army to the Secretary of War.

Wherefore the committee reports back Senate bill 53, with such amendments as may be deemed prudent for the better protection of the government, which amendments are shown by the bill as reported; and as amended recommend that the bill do pass.

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